

**Individuality and  
(dis)identification in young  
women's friendship groups at  
school**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

**Kathryn Morris-Roberts**

Department of Geography  
University of Sheffield

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Ultimately, however, the responsibility for what follows is mine ...

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## Thesis Summary

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This thesis concerns itself with young women's (aged 14/15) discourses and practices of friendship at Hilltop, a large urban comprehensive school in the North of England. Young women's experiences of friendship are central to this thesis. This is reflected in the 'feminist research praxis' adopted, and the use of the following participatory research methods: multi-locational participant observation (curriculum classrooms, PSHE classroom, registration, corridors, dining hall, staff room, local 'hang out' areas), self-directed photography, and semi-structured group and individual interviews with young women. The use of participatory research methods when working *with* young women at school raises a number of ethical and moral dilemmas for the feminist researcher. These are discussed in-depth in chapter two, specifically in relation to a feminist 'politics of intervention'.

Discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) are central to understanding young women's complex and often contradictory constructions of friendship which serve to reproduce heterosexual and classed femininities. In all three empirical chapters relations of power are masked through practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997). Through the use of three case-studies chapter three focuses on young women's discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification. Young women's responses to 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998) in the 'sexuality education' classroom are discussed in chapter four. Finally, chapter five considers 'alternative' young women's discourses of 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000) and spatial practices of (dis)identification. The material encountered in this thesis suggests that it is heterosexuality as masculinity and the 'male-in-the-head' (Holland *et al*, 1998) that benefits from the cultural suppression of young women's friendship through discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification.

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## Introduction

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“We’re all completely different people, aren’t we ...?”

Rachel

“I hate not being an individual, it really bugs me ... we’ve all got our own individualism”

Ani

“We’re all friends here”

Abi

It may appear strange to begin a thesis which is about young women’s friendship groups with a collection of quotations that appear to discredit collectivism and promote individuality; especially when initial observations of young women at Hilltop school identified spatially cohesive all-girl friendship groups across multiple locations (classrooms, corridors, dining room, local ‘hang out’ areas). In an attempt to avoid the production of ‘irresponsible knowledge’ (Skeggs, 1997) this thesis explores the apparent disjuncture between young women’s discourses of individuality and their collective practices of friendship. Young women’s desire to produce themselves as individual is central to an understanding of the complexity of their friendship construction. It is through practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997), both between and within friendship groups, that young women produce subtle forms of exclusion. It is only by understanding the complexity of their friendship constructions that traditional forms of exclusion, along the lines of gender, class, ‘race’/ethnicity and (hetero)sexuality, become apparent. The concept of (dis)identification, therefore, ties this thesis together and is a central tenet to all three empirical chapters (chapters three, four and five).

Empirical research for this thesis was carried out with young people, and specifically young women, who attended year ten (aged 14/15) at Hilltop secondary school in the North of England, during the academic school year 1999-2000. The use of participatory research methods was central to my commitment to ‘feminist research praxis’, as was working *with* young women in an attempt to create ethical and reciprocal research relationships. The qualitative

methods used for research were multi-locational participant observation (curriculum classrooms, PSHE classroom, school corridors, dining room, 'playground', staff room, local hang out areas at lunch, i.e. local area and park), a self-directed photography project with young women, in-depth semi-structured interviews with young women's friendship groups, individual interviews with young women and some individual interviews with educational and health professionals.

### *Background and developing research*

My desire *to do* 'feminist research praxis' (Lather, 1991; WGSG, 1997) and my commitment to research which takes seriously the everyday experiences of young women led me to doctoral research which comprises this thesis. My thesis did not, however, take a straightforward path; rather it morphed through a number of guises before it reached this final form. My initial ideas developed out of my Masters dissertation (Morris-Roberts, 1998) which used discourse analysis to consider British media representations of 'girl gangs'. Therefore, originally I planned to do ethnographic research with girls who were (mis)represented in the British press as 'girl gangs'. I was to consider their friendship construction and the extent to which the representations of their behaviour on the street transferred into practice. However, I decided for a number of reasons that this was not practical and did not make the most of my interests and pedagogic experiences.

My own research interests did not occur in an ideological vacuum and were shaped by developing theoretical debates in Human Geography, the wider Social Sciences, as well as on-going youth, education and health policy. These debates are explored in much greater depth in chapter one *Situated Research: young women, friendships, femininities and heterosexualities at school*. Through academic reading and a developing awareness of education and health policy I became interested in constructions of gender and (hetero)sexuality in school and the way in which these affect and are affected by socio-spatial relationships at school. Furthermore, young people's access to 'sex education', the increasing number of young people having underage (heterosexual) sex, the rise in sexually

transmitted infections, as well as teenage pregnancies and the continuing arguments concerning Section 28 keeps the experiences of young people central to media and policy debate. The refocus of my thesis took into account current academic, media and policy debates concerning young people, as well as my desire to research young women's everyday experiences, rather than the sensational aspects of youth culture.

I have also worked as a teaching assistant in secondary school contexts, both as a volunteer in the British education system and as a foreign language assistant in Germany. I decided therefore, to use my prior knowledge and experience of educational establishments to my advantage. Initial literature reviews suggested that studies of friendship and gender relations remained located in the school and had not explored the boundaries between home, school, street and playground. Thus, I decided that I would use the school as a starting point to explore how young women's friendships changed over these multi-spatialities. However, the successful development of this project hinged on gaining access to a school with a spatially confined catchment area, so that I could follow young women, so to speak, from space to space. As discussed in chapter two (see 2.2.) access to a secondary school to do participatory research proved very difficult and Hilltop, the school I eventually gained access to, drew its pupil population from all over the city.

The research aims and questions were developed over time and in conjunction with the development of my theoretical perspectives, as well as practical limitations of access and ethical considerations explored in greater depth in chapter two. Conducting research at Hilltop school, described in greater depth below, led my research down paths not at first envisaged, specifically in relation to PSHE and 'sexuality education' explored in chapter four. Furthermore, I also came to understand the school, and other locations, as sites of porosity (Holloway and Valentine, 2000c). This research explores the way in which multiple spatialities during the school day impact, and are impacted on, by young women's constructions of friendship. In light of the discussion above, the research questions and aims for this project are outlined next, before I give a brief background to Hilltop school.

### *Research Aims and Questions*

#### **To contribute to the development of social theory in relation to young women's (aged 14/15) everyday experiences of school and friendship:**

- To explore young women's gender identities during the school day. How do the multiple locations (curriculum classrooms/PSHE classroom, playground, dining hall, school corridors, local hang out areas at lunch) that young women inhabit during the school day affect their constructions of femininity and friendship? Are young women creating new/alternative spaces to explore their identities?
- How do young women construct their friendship group at school? Do young women construct their friendships on a shared social identification (gender, class, 'race', sexuality, age, religion, (dis)ability) or a shared activity (drugs, fashion, music)? What role do exclusionary and inclusionary practices play in the construction of young women's friendship groups?
- How do young women's discourses of friendship transfer into practice? Are there complexities and contradictions between their discourses and practices of friendship?

#### **To consider contemporary constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality:**

- Do young women (re)enforce normative performances of femininity and (hetero)sexuality? How is this affected by the different positioning of young women in multiple subjectivities?
- What role do constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality play between and within friendship groups at school?
- How do school spaces affect performances of gender and (hetero)sexuality?
- How does peer group pressure affect young women's behaviour? Does this create conformity or allow for the expression of alternative femininities?

#### **To consider the role the school plays in the reproduction of 'compulsory heterosexuality'**

- What formal provision does the school have for 'sexuality education'?
- Specifically, how do young people respond to the provision of 'sexuality education' in the space of the classroom?
- How does the space of the PSHE classroom affect young people's responses to 'sexuality education'?
- Are normative constructions of femininity, masculinity and (hetero)sexuality reproduced in these spaces? Is there room for the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality' to be contested?

**To further develop participatory research methods when working with young people:**

- How does a 'feminist research praxis' transfer into practice when using participatory research methods with young people in school?
- Specifically, is there a role for a feminist 'politics of intervention'?
- What are the specific ethical considerations when working between and within young women's friendship groups at school?

**To contribute to public policy debates in the sphere of female 'youth' and to formulate a wider understanding of multiple subjectivities, specifically constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality:**

- Through the provision of detailed empirical material on the construction of young women's friendship groups at school can this research contribute to the activities of a range of organisations including: government, quasi-government agencies and local authorities who are involved in working with young people or who are broadly concerned with policies and initiatives in relation to youth, education and health?
- Is it possible, by exploring constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality as articulated by young women, that this research will inform relevant agencies of the need to question normative constructions of femininity and heterosexuality and to explore alternative femininities?

*Hilltop School*

Hilltop is an oversubscribed mixed comprehensive school (Ofsted) with one thousand and forty-eight pupils enrolled during the academic year 1999-2000, including three hundred and eighty young people who are over sixteen and attend the sixth-form. The school is located on two sites, approximately one and a half miles apart. Lower school accommodates years seven to nine (aged 11-13) and upper school houses years ten and eleven, as well as the sixth-form (aged 14-18). Unlike many secondary schools in the UK Hilltop takes pupils from nearly every ward in the city (29) and pupils join year seven from over thirty different junior schools<sup>1</sup>. The school reflects the socio-economic spread of the city:

Three quarters of the pupils are white and of the many ethnic minorities, pupils from the Indian sub-continent are the largest group, representing 7.4 per cent of the school's total. There are significant numbers of pupils of Chinese, Middle-Eastern, African-Caribbean and mixed race origin in the school. About one in

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<sup>1</sup> Most secondary schools in the UK take their pupils from a limited catchment area around the site of the school. If this were the case pupils attending Hilltop would come from mainly owner occupied housing and white middle-class backgrounds.

seven pupils has a first language other than English. The full range of ability is represented and fewer than one per cent of pupils have statements of special education needs, a figure below local and national averages. Each of the successive recent intake years display slightly different characteristics in terms of social composition, prior attainment and ability. Pupils come from a mixture of types of housing; many are from owner occupied houses and a significant number live in rented and council properties. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average in national terms but lower than the local average. The area immediately surrounding lower school is privileged but the many other areas from which pupils come reflect the socio-economic polarity of (the city). About 20 per cent come from the ten least favoured wards of the city.

Ofsted

The Ofsted report and the Hilltop prospectus emphasise the 'truly comprehensive' nature of the school in terms of socio-economic background. This is both a product of its wide catchment area and a building block to the caring attitude reflected in the schools' mission statement (discussed below). There are approximately one hundred and ten full and part time teachers at Hilltop. In addition, there are over thirty support staff, including administrative and learning support workers for young people with special educational needs and ethnic minority support staff. The ethnic diversity of the school is not reflected in the teaching or governing body. There are five staff from ethnic minority backgrounds, three 'Asian', one Chinese and one African-Caribbean; four of whom in addition to their teaching are responsible for ethnic minority support. Hilltop, unlike the majority of the schools in the UK, does not require its pupils to wear school uniform: "students are advised that smart, casual dress is preferred and that extremes of fashion are unsuitable" (Hilltop Prospectus, 2000). Hilltop is an academically successful school. This is reflected in the achievement figures for 1999 where the overall pass rate for GCSE's was 98.7%, 56.5% achieved pass grades at A\*-C and 17.6% received A\* or A grades, resulting in 99.1% of pupils achieving a pass at GCSE level.

We aspire to create at Hilltop School the excitement of a learning community in which each individual strives for excellence and is enabled to achieve personal achievement

Hilltop, Statement of Aspiration, 2000

As reflected in the above statement of aspiration the ethos of the school is based on caring and the school's commitment to education which is *broad, balanced* and *relevant*. Through which the school aims to "offer a fulfilling education so that every young woman and young man who leaves our School has reached

their individual potential and is ready and equipped to play an active part in the next stage of their life” (Hilltop Prospectus, 2000).

### *Thesis Outline*

This thesis comprises five main chapters. Chapter one contextualises my research in contemporary academic debate and discusses in detail some of the concepts which are integral to this thesis, notably ‘epistemological fallacy’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997); ‘distinctive individuality’ (Muggleton, 2000), ‘The Male-in-the-Head’ (Holland *et al.*, 1998) and ‘(dis)identification’ (Skeggs, 1997). I draw from and contribute to a number of interdisciplinary debates: new social geographies of childhood and youth; feminist critiques of youth culture and girls’ studies; critical education theory; and constructions of gender and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ in schoolgirl friendships. The second chapter *Feminist Research Praxis: working with young women in school and the politics of ‘in-betweenness’* has two aims. Firstly, to outline in-depth the way in which this research was conducted and carried out in practice. Secondly, to further enhance the debates concerning ethical research praxis with young people and discuss the specificities of the doing of my research via some empirical examples. Chapters three, four and five are concerned with the empirical material of my research. Chapter three *Young women’s friendship groups and practices of (dis)identification* uses four case-studies of different young women’s friendship groups to introduce how they use practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) to construct their friendships through discourses of individuality. Chapter Four, *Young people’s responses to ‘sexuality education’ at Hilltop: the missing discourse of female sexuality*, looks specifically at the space of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) classroom and an eight week course on ‘sexuality education’. Here, I look at the ways in which the material used and the stylised masculinist responses engender normative performances of heterosexual femininity which on the surface appear to question the school as a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ but in reality (re)produce masculinity as heterosexuality (Holland *et al.*, 1998) and limit the expression of female desire. The final empirical chapter *‘Alternative’ femininities, ‘distinctive individuality’ and spatial practices of (dis)identification* draws some of these debates together by using the experiences of a group of

'alternative' girls who are involved in similar practices of (dis)identification as the young women in chapter three. This chapter shows how the 'alternative' girls use spatial practices of (dis)identification to distance and disassociate themselves from mainstream performances of schoolgirl femininity. This chapter further develops ideas discussed in chapter four concerning 'compulsory heterosexuality' and the way in which discourses of individuality hide power relations both between and within friendship groups at Hilltop school. I finish this thesis with a summary which draws together theoretical debate and empirical material explored in this thesis. I also discuss my contributions to academic and policy debate, as well as positing directions for future research. In conclusion I argue that young women's discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification are central to understanding their complex and often contradictory constructions of friendship at school. Furthermore, it is through this complexity that the girls' investments in heterosexual and classed femininity become apparent and power relations both between and within friendship groups are partially exposed. I contend ultimately that it is heterosexuality as masculinity and the 'male-in-the-head' (Holland *et al*, 1998) that benefits from the cultural suppression of young women's friendship groups at school.

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## **Chapter One. Situated Research: young women, friendships, femininities and heterosexualities at school**

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The value of individual contributions to academic knowledge relies on the fancy that, somewhere there is a sum total

Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 10

Perhaps it is neither productive nor sensible to begin a 'literature review' with a quote that seeks to dissolve the notion that research can be actively situated within an existing and fixed body of academic knowledge. However, this review does not seek to demonstrate my "significant and original contribution to the sum total of knowledge", which Game and Metcalfe (1996: 9) eloquently point out is impossible. Rather this chapter attempts something a little less grand. This review seeks to situate my research in a number of interconnected interdisciplinary fields from which my research draws and to which my writing seeks to contribute. Nevertheless, whilst this chapter seeks to stress the location of my research and explore my contributions to knowledge I am not 'outside the project' (Chouinard and Grant, 1996; WGSG, 1997), and acknowledge at this early stage that I too contribute, shape and benefit from it. The material reviewed here draws from and contributes to a number of disciplinary fields; Geography, Critical Education, Women's/Gender Studies, Queer studies, Sociology, Psychology, Cultural Studies and Anthropology. Since my research is based in the UK, the review draws mainly from literature published in the 'West' and from research conducted in the UK, USA, Australia and Europe.

This chapter comprises four sections which highlight the main bodies of research that influence this thesis: geographies of childhood and youth (1.1.); feminist critiques of youth culture and girls' studies (1.2.); gender and 'compulsory heterosexuality' (1.3.); and finally teenage girls' friendship groups at school (1.4.). The first part of this chapter (1.1.) gives a brief overview of the study of children and young people in Geography, drawing in particular on the sociology of childhood literature and highlights the spatial and metaphorical site of teenagers as 'in-between' (Sibley, 1995). I further investigate a growing body of

literature on the individualization of youth (Beck, 1992) which remains relatively unexplored within UK and US research. I then move to consider the study of young women, both within the wider Social Sciences and Geography (1.2.). Thirdly, the literature on gender and 'compulsory heterosexuality' is reviewed (1.3.). This section looks in particular at critical education theory and the input this body of research has had on understanding the coterminous construction of gender and (hetero)sexuality in schooling and young people's identities. In this section the paucity of empirical research on 'sexuality education' and young people's responses to formal provision of such education is highlighted. This section also emphasises the complexity of understanding young people's constructions of gender and heterosexuality through the use of two studies which form a theoretical underpinning to my thesis: the '*Male-in-the-Head*' (Holland *et al*, 1998) and '*Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*' (Skeggs, 1997). The final section of this chapter (1.4.) looks specifically at the site of the school as a research area and specifically the place of young women's friendship groups in school research. Through this review I also discuss the key concepts which are influential in the main body of my thesis: 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997); 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000); 'The Male-in-the-Head' (Holland *et al*, 1998); and '(dis)identification' (Skeggs, 1997). I finish this review with a summary (1.5.).

### *1.1. Sites of 'in-betweenness': 'teen' geographies and new social geographies of childhood and youth*

The 'cultural turn' (Jackson, 1989) and the incorporation of feminist, post-modern, postcolonial and very recently queer theory into the traditionally masculinist discipline of Geography (Rose, 1993) has set about mapping alternative uses and definitions of space and place. By questioning notions of difference, particularly to date in the areas of gender (Massey, 1994; WGS, 1984; 1997), 'race' (Jackson, 1989; 1998) and to some extent sexuality (Bell and Valentine, 1995), geographers have asked how these identities shape and transform space over time and how these multiple identities are shaped by space, place and time. However, only recently have geographers turned to question age

as an important site for geographical inquiry (Katz and Monk, 1993), and the study of children and youth within the discipline has remained relatively absent.

Over the past decade however, there has been a burgeoning of the literature on geographies of childhood and youth from both a theoretical and empirical perspective, which has led Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine (2000b) to suggest that research in children's geographies is reaching a critical mass. Geographers concerned with the study of childhood and youth have organised sessions at the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers' (RGS-IBG) annual conferences since 1998 and at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) conference in New York, most recently with a session entitled *Taking off the Kid Gloves: Young People's Geographies on Impact* (2001). The developing interest in young people has seen the setting up of a Limited Life Working Party for the Study of Children, Young People and Families as part of the RGS-IBG.

As there are a number of comprehensive reviews of the literature in this field (Aitken, 2001; Holloway and Valentine, 2000b; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1998), my aim here is not to rehearse their well made overviews and arguments which chart the development of the sub-discipline, different theoretical and empirical ways of doing research with children and young people, and the difference that space and place make to the study of children and young people. I do, however, in the remainder of this part of the chapter want to discuss three parts of the literature that influence my research. Firstly, I give a brief overview of the sociology of childhood studies and new social studies of childhood literature. Secondly, I consider the relative paucity of teenagers in the literature. Finally, I sketch the main debates in the individualization-of-youth literature.

### *Sociology of childhood and new social studies of childhood*

Apparent at the recent (2001) AAG conference in New York was the two-fold split that Holloway and Valentine (2000) identify in work on children's geographies from the early 1970's. They argue that:

on the one hand, some researchers continue to draw on and inform psychological interest in children's spatial cognition and mapping abilities (e.g. Blades *et al*, 1998; Blaut, 1991, 1997; Matthews, 1987, 1995a; Sowden *et al*, 1996; Stea, Elquea and Blaut, 1997) ... On the other hand, a largely different group of researchers draw on sociological interest in children as social actors in furthering Bunge's commitment to give children, as minority, a voice in the adultist world.

Holloway and Valentine, 2000c: 8

My research and interest in young people is firmly embedded in the second approach to the study of children and young people which Holloway and Valentine go on to examine through a discussion of the importance of place, everyday spaces and spatial discourses of children's lives (see also Holloway and Valentine, 2000c). Through this new approach children and young people are very much human beings rather than human becomings in the making (James, 1993; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; James and Prout, 1990); their everyday experiences as children and young people are prioritised and taken seriously, as are their experiences of exclusion and inclusion along multiple axes of power and difference, age, gender, disability, 'race' and ethnicity (James, 1993; James and Prout, 1990). There is an attempt to avoid studies which research children and young people from an 'adultist' perspective.

The new interdisciplinary social studies approach to childhood (Holloway and Valentine, 2000c) takes issue with the way in which studies of 'childhood' until recently have followed a psychological child development approach. Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) aim in their edited collection to emphasise the socially constructed nature of 'childhoods', to highlight the fluidity of age, the importance of studying children independently from adults, and to recognise that children too have agency. However, whilst this edited collection on 'childhoods' is an important landmark in the new social studies of childhood because it recognises the diversity of children's experiences and that age is cut across by other identity constructs such as gender, class, 'race' and ethnicity, sexuality is not mentioned as a viable and important influence on children's and young people's lives. Furthermore, until the past five years there has been a dearth of empirical research which has taken these ideas forward to work *with* children and young people in a variety of spatial contexts (see Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Holloway and Valentine (2000c: 779) usefully identify three areas in which new social studies of childhood could

benefit from thinking about spatiality; firstly, by linking the global and the local through a progressive sense of place; secondly, through an understanding of how children's lives are "made and re-made through the sites of everyday life"; and finally the importance of spatial discourses in the making of socio-spatial practices and the meanings of childhood. My research adds empirically to studies which theoretically discuss the social construction of childhood by focusing on young women's everyday experiences of gender and sexuality, an area of research often overlooked in children's studies. Moreover, by working with young women I attempt to make intelligible how their discourses and practices of friendship constitute, and are constituted by, the everyday socio-spatial relations across school spaces. I now go on to discuss this literature with particular reference to 'teenagers'.

#### *Geographies of young people 'in-between'*

The new social studies of childhood literature outlined above developed out of a critique of the biological construction of age which defines and categorises children and young people into age specific boundaries and behaviour. Within these categories of 'childhood' and 'youth' there exists a multiplicity of experience to which crude characterisations of biological age do not give justice; they are slippery concepts. In the introduction to *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Culture* Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998: 4) identify that in the 'West' the category of 'youth' has been in use since the early eighteenth century, originally a product of the middle-classes it has been used to provide a discernible gap between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. Traditional conceptualisations of 'youth' suggest that the period of 'adolescence' should be seen as a "...breathing space between the golden age of 'innocent' childhood and the realities of 'adulthood'" (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1998:4). However, as they go on to suggest, these definitions presume that people can be categorised in accordance with age specific definitions, which are fraught with complications as they rely on fixed homogenous ideas of not only 'youth' but also the periods which lie either side of it: 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. Such fixed conceptualisations do not recognise the constructed nature of these

definitions, their historical complexities, their differences over time and space, their variation in context and the potential for resistance.

Researching children and young people is further complicated by the use of interchangeable definitions over culturally specific spatial contexts and temporalities. From the outset it is important to recognise the plethora of words used in a commonsensical manner to refer to young people, examples of which are 'child', 'teenager', 'adolescent', 'youth', to name only those used in a formal context. Furthermore, 'youth' is used more frequently in the UK, as is 'teenager', whilst the term 'adolescence', which has more biological overtones, is the preferred expression in the North American context. Moreover, I highlight below the gendered nature of these definitions. Throughout this thesis therefore I use a variety of definitions because of the fluidity of the concept in the literature. However, I prefer the term young people, young men, or young women, because I feel that these expressions signify the differences across definitions without appearing pejorative as 'youth', 'teenager' and 'adolescent' are often used.

By referring to only a few academic texts in the 'West' it is possible to see the complications and contradictions with allotting a specific age to the category 'youth'. Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998: 5) suggest that the common age definition for 'youth' in the 'West' is between 16 and 25 years of age, Wulff (1995a: 6) states 13 and 19 and a recent special edition of the journal *Signs* on 'Feminism and Youth Culture' suggests that the period of youth can be anywhere between the age of 13 and 30 (Bhavnani, Twine and Kent, 1998). These age brackets do not, however, correspond with 'western' legal definitions, by which I mean the legal minimum age to be able to drink, smoke, get married, or be tried for an offence in a juvenile/adult court etc., and all of which vary over time and space. In addition, youth groups and organisations for young people in the UK and the research site vary in age range, thus, further emphasising this contested terrain.

Valentine (2000: 257) specifically argues that children and young people have been categorised as homogenous groupings whose identities are not of their own making. Rather their identities have been mapped onto them by adults, they are defined by what they are not, i.e. adults who are "...sexual, responsible, competent, strong, decision making agents". As Allison James (1986: 156)

identifies, adolescents are defined through boundaries of exclusion, they maintain their own sites of inclusion through what they are not. Furthermore, when young people act in a manner that is defined as being outside the remit of their role, they are labelled as deviant and problematic, angels or devils (Valentine, 1996).

David Sibley in his seminal text *Geographies of Exclusion* (1995) further adds to this discussion through his description of 'adolescence' as a fuzzy boundary. Young people are already inherently problematic because their biological age locates them as within a zone of ambiguity. 'Adolescents' are neither 'adult' nor 'child' and as Sibley (1995: 33) suggests "for the individual or group socialized into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable [as it is in the 'West']", the liminal zone is a source of anxiety". It is this intolerance of ambiguity (Sibley, 1995: xiii following Shils, 1954) which further marginalises the study of young people labelled as 'in-between' from studies of childhood and youth. As James (1986: 10) suggests "for those classified as 'adolescent' the very formlessness of the category which contains them is problematic: neither child nor adult the adolescent is lost in between, belonging nowhere, being no one". Matthews, Limb and Taylor (2000: 64-65) further the metaphor by using Bhabha's concept of (in)between spaces when conducting research with young people about their use of the 'street' as 'thirdspace'. They argue that:

young people on the street can be likened to groups (in)between, 'neither One nor the Other, but something else besides, in-between' (Bhabha, 1994: 224): that is, set between the freedom and autonomy of adulthood and the constraints and dependency of infancy, neither adult nor child, 'angel nor devil', situated in imagined communities (located in thirdspace).

Theoretically, therefore, in comparison to a decade ago, there is a wealth of literature which takes the lives of young people seriously. However, there remains, with a few notable exceptions, a dearth of research that considers how young people experience their 'in-betweenness'<sup>1</sup>, particularly between the ages of 12 and 16 (but see Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith, 1998; Skelton, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Tucker, 2002). It is as if their metaphorical stage of in-betweenness and their potential location in sites of in-betweenness (re)enforce their marginal position and places them beyond study: there appears a theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'in-betweenness' is further expanded in chapter two (2.4.) when I discuss the politics and ethics of conducting research with young women in the school context.

commitment to researching young people, but this often fails to transfer into practice. However, I recognise that conducting research with young people is often methodologically and ethically intense, and for the reasons discussed in the following chapter this makes empirical research with young people, especially within educational settings, challenging. Nevertheless, there remains and continues to grow in wider society a deep concern with the changing nature of children and young people, particularly those labelled as ‘in-between’. This is identified in the individualization of youth literature that is reviewed below.

### *Individualization of youth*

A body of literature is emerging which suggests that a serious change is occurring in the biographies of young people making their lives increasingly complex and contradictory (Adam, *et al*, 2000; Beck, 1992; Chrisholm, *et al*, 1990; Fornäs and Bolin, 1995; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Holstein-Beck, 1995; Hurrelman and Engel, 1989). At the centre of the growing sense of young people’s disillusionment is the ‘West’s’ preoccupation with “the daily struggle for a life of your own” (Beck, 2001: 164). Ulrich Beck argues that:

the ethic of the individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of individual identity, is the central character of our time

(Beck, 2001: 165)

There is an increased pressure on young people in the ‘West’ to succeed in a world in which their lives are becoming increasingly complex and fraught with change and risk (Zinnecker, 1990). According to Hurrelman (1989) there is an individualisation of youth, or to use Zinnecker’s phrase the ‘Simultaneous Acceleration and Deceleration of ‘Life-time’’. Time in education is increasing, unemployment levels are rising and further pressure is being put on ‘youth’ to acquire and consume cultural capital and lifestyles. Access to paid employment slows but at the same time young people have contact with adult behaviours/activities at an earlier age. Thus, young people are increasingly financially dependent upon adults for a longer period of time but at the same time demand independence. There is, therefore, a further blurring of the boundaries

between 'youth' and 'adulthood', further (re)enforcing the inadequacy of biological age categories.

This literature has been criticised on a number of counts. Firstly, Zinnecker (1990: 18) notes that the majority of this research has been at the theoretical level and has failed to engage with young people and their lifeworlds in practice. Secondly, until recently this research has been paid little attention in the UK and the USA because of a language barrier – most of the literature comes from Germany and Scandinavian countries (Holloway and Valentine, 2000c); and finally by generalising it is said to hide a multiplicity of complexity in the reality of young people's lives in the 'West' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). In their book *Young People and Social Change: Individualization and risk in late modernity*, Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997) take issue with the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens for creating what they term an 'epistemological fallacy'. Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 109) suggest that:

... life in late modernity revolves around an epistemological fallacy. The paradox of late modernity is that although the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people's experiences and life chances. Over the last two decades a number of changes have occurred which have helped to obscure these continuities, promoting individual responsibilities and weakening collectivist traditions.

This 'epistemological fallacy' masks relations of power and material reality. A further criticism, also highlighted by Furlong and Cartmel, but previously explored by Sabina Holstein-Beck (1995), is that this literature fails to engage with the realities, consistencies, changes and contradictions of young women's lives. Thesis chapter three uses the concept of 'epistemological fallacy' to consider the tensions that are prevalent between young women's discourses of individuality and their expressions and practices of collective friendship.

Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001) have recently taken up this argument to suggest that discourses of individuality and neo-liberalism are too idealistic in their understanding of contemporary women's lives. They argue that whilst Ulrich Beck (1992) may be able to read changing economic situations with accuracy, he fails to comprehend that "the production of girls and women as subjects is far more complex and problematic" (Walkerdine, Lucey

and Melody, 2001: 3). Their book, *Growing up Girls: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class* (2001: 19), argues convincingly that:

While new discursive, economic and social organisations intervene – in the form of new individualism, globalism and the transformed labour market – old practices of subjectivity continue to exist yet are transformed materially and discursively. Class is still written across the bodies and minds of young women, but it produces signs whose names can only ever be whispered and which can more easily be read as evidence of personal failure and pathology than social inequality and oppression.

To date, research with young people has failed to connect with their changing circumstances in light of the theoretical literature on the individualization of youth. To understand the lived realities of rampant individualism and reflexive modernisation researchers need to engage with the nuanced lives of lived subjects, to identify the complexities and contradictions which these meanings bring to their lives and further understand how such discourses and practices of individuality serve to mask power relations and the possibility of collective political engagement. Through chapters three, four and five I discuss the everyday complexities and contradictions which are part and parcel of, and give meaning to, young women's everyday experiences of school and friendship. In all three chapters, class, although never uttered as important in the girls' lives by the young women or their teachers, appears important in its inability to be named. It is through subtle practices of (dis)identification in relation to femininity and (hetero)sexuality that class retains its significance. It was the young women's discourses of individuality when talking about their everyday experiences of friendship that alerted me to the multiple contradictions that serve to mask their lived realities of friendship and school.

In his book *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* David Muggleton (2000) provides a useful discussion of 'distinctive individuality' (see in particular chapter four *Distinctive Individuality and Subcultural Affiliation*). Muggleton argues that young men and women make sense of their shared collective identities through 'distinctive individuality'. He suggests in his study that young men and women distance themselves from 'Others', who they argue are involved in collective practices of sameness. But at the same time they also distance themselves from affiliation with a shared subcultural style within their group. This is what Muggleton (2000: 66) is referring to when he states that:

this relation between individual distinction and group conformity must be understood, not only within groups, but also in terms of comparisons across groups. Although empirically interrelated, these dimensions can be separated analytically. A within-group distinction is a comparison of the individual to their peer group. An across-group distinction is a judgement by a group's members of their unconventionality in relation to other groups.

Both of these forms of distinction (across-group and within-group) are used within groups to produce themselves as involved in a process of 'distinctive individuality', where members can have an individual look within the group: "it is the diversity of this group that enables it to accommodate a range of looks and tastes, allowing each member to maintain a sense of simultaneous similarity and difference" (ibid. 67). This piece of subcultural research conducted predominantly in Brighton (southern-England) in the mid 1990s, actually looks therefore at how theories of individualization in late modernity are experienced empirically through matters of taste and style. However, whilst this research is theoretically insightful it fails to engage with the everyday way in which these discourses of individuality engage with power relations across multiple sites of difference. By this I mean that the research fails to both ask who has access to this term 'distinctive individuality' and explore whether it is equally open to men and women of different classes, 'races', ethnicities and sexualities. Furthermore, the research fails to ask the question if such a discourse, which is what it appears to be, actually transfers into practice. In chapters three and five of my thesis I show through attempts to produce a discourse of 'distinctive individuality' young women are involved in a dual process of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997 – see below).

I now turn to look specifically at geographies of girlhood and feminist approaches to youth cultural studies.

### *1.2. Geographies of girlhood and feminist approaches to youth cultural studies*

It has been well documented from a feminist perspective that seminal research by scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham failed to engage with the realities of young women's lives in their haste to study youth, delinquency and subculture (see Amit-Talai and Wulff, 1995; McRobbie, 1991; 2000; McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Skelton, 2000; Valentine, Skelton and

Chambers, 1998). 'Youth' has been constructed as inherently masculinist. Studies have either totally ignored women, marginalised them or considered them only in terms of their 'femininity', which itself is constructed as unproblematically (hetero)sexual and white. A glance at the Oxford English Dictionaries fourth definition of 'youth' shows the bias towards 'youth' as male: 'a young person, especially male' (Pearsall and Trumble, 1996: 1679). Furthermore, in her introduction to *Youth Cultures: a cross cultural perspective* Helena Wulff (1995a: 4) reviews the criticisms which have been aimed at the CCCS. These include: an over-reliance on Marxist class analysis (thus de-emphasising other identity constructs, such as gender, 'race' and sexuality); an overemphasis on deviancy studies rather than acknowledgements of cultural heterogeneity; and a lack of ethnographic and empirical studies (and thereby relying heavily on theoretical analysis).

In their influential paper '*Girls and Subcultures*' Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1975:113) criticise the male CCCS researchers for their sensationalist attitude towards male 'youth' culture, where 'youth's' resistance and deviancy seems to be celebrated and to some extent legitimised. Through these criticisms McRobbie and Garber provide a seminal text for a feminist (re)reading of youth subcultural theory. They highlight the relative failure of male CCCS researchers to recognise the role of girls in youth subculture and the importance of gender:

Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural grouping...when girls do appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women...or else they are fleetingly and marginally presented

McRobbie and Garber, 1975: 112

At the time researchers at the 'Birmingham School' concentrated on sensational, often violent subcultures where the involvement of women/girls was perhaps not immediately obvious. This is not to make an excuse for the researchers, rather to give them the benefit of the doubt, which time allows. However, other feminist researchers, such as Heidensohn (1989: 55), do not allow male researchers such hindsight, and prefer rather to see their "collusion with the subjects" as an overt patriarchal act that results, according to Carrington (1993), in the exclusion of women/girls. If girls exist at all in youth subculture literature, I suggest that they

are seen as 'conceptual appendages', acting as girlfriends or as organisers; they have not existed in their own right.

After giving what would seem a comprehensive feminist critique of the masculinist work conducted by the CCCS, McRobbie and Garber (1975) go on to look at girls' roles in youth subculture, which they describe as 'bedroom culture'. They locate girls in the private sphere and in the 'safe space' of their bedrooms and domestic life, where they suggest that "...if we wanted to know about teenage femininity or about female youth culture, this is where we might begin" (McRobbie, 1991: xvii). Girls, according to McRobbie and Garber (1975: 119), have their own subculture, separate from the 'traditional' masculinist violent subcultures studied by male academics, that of the 'teenybopper culture'. As Brake (1985: 164) has identified, McRobbie "...is correct in stating that it is family and domestic life which is missing from subcultural studies...". However, by failing to explore alternative femininities outside the 'private' sphere I contend that feminist researchers avoid responsibility for (re)thinking the academic debate and the role of young women and gender in youth subculture. Feminist researchers firstly critique the ways in which women and gender roles are ignored in the 'traditional' masculinist 'profession' of subcultures and then proceed to exemplify the place of girls as located in the private sphere. Such suggestions only serve to strengthen the 'culture of femininity' which has been developed by feminist researchers to explore the leisure forms of girls. Here "boys are thought to occupy the public world for their leisure and subcultural activities, while girls are thought to resort to the private sanctuary of the bedroom..." (Carrington, 1993: 102).

By concentrating on the 'teenybopper' culture as the primary female subculture, McRobbie and Garber inadvertently (re)enforce, and ascribe to, Cartesian hegemonic constructions of masculine and feminine behavioural traits. At no time did the male CCCS researchers question that their research played into ascribed masculine and feminine dichotomies. They therefore legitimised the peripheralisation of women/girls from youth subculture. In addition, the female researchers, whilst questioning the masculinist nature of youth subcultures, also imposed gender stereotypes onto young women, relegating them to the private sphere. McRobbie and Garber (1975) highlight the role of women/girls in the

mod, biker and hippie culture, but their reflections merely reproduce the place of women/girls as peripheral to a masculine form of youth subculture. They do not explore the reasons behind the subordinate position of women in these subcultures or try to identify the reasons behind this and challenge the frameworks in which they worked. Their mistakes however were later recognised:

Despite the longevity of subcultures...there were certain quite straightforward questions which for some reason were never asked even during the heyday of subcultural theory in the late 1970's...In my own earlier work so much effort was put into attempting to problematize the marginalized experience of girls in youth culture that it never occurred to me to explore what exactly they were doing on a day-to-day basis

McRobbie, 1994: 160

Rather than trying to 'add in' women to a masculinist discipline feminists need to "...rethink and deconstruct existing frameworks, challenging what has gone before" (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1990b: 8).

Nevertheless, feminist critiques of subcultural theory continue to prove a catalyst for change and studies of girls proliferate in size and complexity, as is witnessed by the number and breadth of research papers at the recent international *New Girl Order: the future of feminist inquiry* conference (2001). Here and explicated through publications elsewhere girls' studies expands to consider the multiplicity of spaces that girls use as well as their complex and changing social identities. Girl research now enters the realms of: new technologies (Garrison, 2000; Leonard, 1998, Valentine, Holloway and Bingham, 1999); school spaces (Blackman, 1995; 1998; Fielding, 2000; Griffin, 1985; Hey, 1997; Hyams, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Walkerdine, 1990); the playground (Thorne, 1993); rural areas and new towns (Liepins, 2001; Skelton, 2000; Tucker, 2002); homelessness (Ruddick, 1996a; 1998); the workplace (Bowlby *et al*, 1998); the 'gang' (Campbell, 1984; Chesney-Lind, 1993; Laidler and Hunt, 2001; Venkatesh, 1998); historical perspectives on girlhood (Gagen, 2000); urban landscapes of the city and the street (Breitbart, 1998; Liepins, 2001; Matthews *et al*, 2000; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000; Watt and Stenson, 1998); and research continues to deconstruct the spaces of the home (McNamee, 1998) and the bedroom (Lloyd, 2001). Furthermore recent research also considers young women's consumption patterns, their use of music and fashion (Blackman, 1995; 1998;

Dwyer, 1998; Leblanc, 1999; Malbon, 1998; Wald, 1998; Wall, 1999); and teenage magazines (Finders, 1996; Frazer, 1997; Gonick, 1997; McRobbie, 1991) in their making and shaping of identities. Other research looks specifically at young women's constructions of their social identities, the complexities of 'race'/ethnicities (Dwyer, 1998; Mirza, 1992; Shain, 1996); class (Griffin, 1985; Walkerdine, 1990; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001); sexualities and (dis)abilities (Butler, 1998; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, forthcoming); interlocking concepts of difference (Ruddick, 1996b) and the production of new femininities (Laurie, *et al*, 1999).

I review some of these studies in more depth in the remainder of this chapter. I now turn to consider a body of literature from critical education studies and sociology which influences my research in two ways: firstly, it aims to understand the interplay of young people's multiple identities and relations of power, with specific emphasis on masculinities, sexualities and femininities; and secondly this body of work influences my research because it aims to question the school as a space of 'compulsory heterosexuality' not only through understanding young people's informal relations in the school but also through the formal curriculum. In the following section I also pick out and explain two key concepts which prove useful in my research: the 'male-in-the-head' (Holland *et al*, 1998) and (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997).

### *1.3. Masculinities, femininities and sexualities – the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'*

Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998: 17) suggest that apart from a few autobiographical essays by lesbians, researchers did not consider women/girls who do not fit into the 'distinctive' elements of female youth cultures at all in earlier work. However, there is evidence that in disciplines such as criminology and writing on women and crime that when young women do reject 'hyper-femininity' and take part in activities which have traditionally been embraced by men, they are considered 'doubly-deviant' (Lloyd, 1995). As Wilson (1978 in Brake, 1985: 172) states "girls seem, when involved in delinquent subcultures, to be in rebellion against their traditional role". Girls are judged and consequently

rejected twice, first as delinquent and then as 'sluts' (Brake, 1985: 173). Women/girls who attempt to reject their gender roles by becoming involved in behaviour deemed unfit for women, i.e. masculinised form of youth subculture (usually on the street), are characterised as sexually promiscuous. This is seen as a rejection of their femininity (Griffin, 1985; 1993). Hudson (1984) adds that 'adults' judge young women, not only by their age but also by their 'femininity'. Hudson (1984: 51) suggests that images of appropriate 'adolescent' and 'feminine' behaviour are imposed upon these young women by 'adult' stipulations of what constitutes appropriate behaviour rather than young women's own opinions. Hudson (1984: 51) points out that 'girls' cannot choose between either an adolescent or a femininity discourse, because they are involved in both. However, Hudson's research suggests that the 'girls' 'master discourse' is 'femininity'. She found that 'girls' in her research aspired towards 'femininity' and wanted to leave behind their 'adolescence', because of fear of being seen as 'childish'. Hence, suggesting that the period of 'adolescence' is experienced as problematic and a time which requires escape. There is a dearth of material concerning young people's experiences of adolescence from *their* perspectives (James, 1986).

Feminist research concerned with the identities of young women since the 1980s has become increasingly complex. Researchers are concerned with not only how age and gender affect young women's lives, lived experiences and identities, but also how their age and gender works in a complex interplay with other identities such as 'race'/ethnicity, class, (hetero)sexuality and disability. Furthermore, geographical interest in young women adds intricacy by asking how young women's identities change over time and space. One body of literature which has taken this area of research forward is critical education theory and in particular research conducted by Debbie Epstein, Richard Johnson and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill on the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. In the remainder of this section I explore, through a number of discrete sub-sections, the key concepts which are useful in my thesis: masculinities, (hetero)sexualities and femininities; sex(uality) education; the male-in-the-head; and finally identity as (dis)identification.

### *Schooling Masculinities, (hetero)sexualities and femininities?*

A number of chapters and articles provide an in-depth exploration of the literature on sexuality and schooling (Epstein, 1994; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1996a, 1996c). Therefore I am only going to pick out the main points relevant here. Epstein and Johnson (see in particular part two of *Schooling Sexualities*) provide a useful starting point to review the literature. They argue (1998: 2):

... schooling is associated with sexuality in particularly rich and complicated ways. These connections work at two levels, themselves interconnected. The first level corresponds to the school itself. As places of everyday-life activity as well as public or state institutions, schools are sites where sexual and other identities are developed, practiced and actively produced. Pupils, but also teachers and to a lesser extent other participants (parents, usually mothers and other carers for example), are 'schooled' there, as gendered and sexual beings. Sexual and other social identities, as possible ways of living, are produced in relation to the other cultural repertoires and institutional conditions of schooling. School-based identity production is never final, nor can it encompass the whole of (even sexual) life – but it can have lasting, ramifying consequences in individual lives none the less.

This body of research argues that sexuality is implicated in all areas of school life, through social relations with teachers and peers and also through formal curriculum provision and state education policy (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). Nevertheless, within this same body of literature it is understood that whilst sexuality in schools is pervasive its significance is frequently denied through official educational discourses. Schools therefore, even though this is often ignored, are central to the social identities of young people, individually and collectively; this identity work “always occurs under socially given conditions which include structures of power and social relations ...” (116). Epstein and Johnson (1998: 116) argue, as do other critical education theorists, that “identity is always ‘performed’ in the sense that we produce ourselves through what we do/tell ourselves/think ... Identity solidifies through action in the world in collaboration or tension with others and established social rituals”. These researchers suggest that feminist theory has enabled contemporary research on young people’s identities to move beyond simple sex role theory to complex understandings of sex/gender identity formation (Mac an Ghaill, 1996b). As Mac an Ghaill suggests “schooling processes can be seen to form gendered identities, marking out ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ styles of being (Butler, 1993)”.

One of the dominant themes in this literature is the way in which schools and social relations within schools actually (re)enforce the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'<sup>2</sup>. In an earlier work Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson (1994: 198) problematise the way in which heterosexuality is the silent term "...which is encoded in language, in institutional practices, and the encounters of everyday life". They suggest, as do the other chapters within the book *Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education* (Epstein, 1994), that heterosexism discriminates by failing to recognise difference. This not only excludes young lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and/or those questioning their sexuality, but also allows heterosexism and homophobia to continue unchallenged. Such practices are (re)enforced through state legislation in the UK, which inhibits - although contrary to popular belief - does not ban teachers from talking openly about lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships in school. Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 contributes to an environment of intimidation concerning lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the secondary school context. However, the Act which was brought in under the Thatcher government, does not ban teachers from talking about LGB issues, rather the terminology suggests that homosexuality should not be 'promoted'. Furthermore, since 1986 local education authorities have not been directly responsible for sex education in schools (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). This further adds to the confusion because in reality the Act does not actually relate to secondary schools in the UK, but to local education authorities (for an in-depth discussion of the ramifications of Section 28 in the UK see Epstein, 2000; Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford, 2002; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Sanders and Spraggs, 1989; Stonewall, 2000).

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'compulsory heterosexuality' was coined by Adrienne Rich (1993 [1980]) in her much discussed and at times controversial article *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Rich used the term to challenge the presumption that women are biologically attracted to men and to ask whether heterosexuality is a choice for women or a social and political imposition. Through the use of feminist literature Rich argues that lesbian existence and bonds between women are silenced. She calls for feminists to examine compulsory heterosexuality as an institution which affects the everyday lives of all women whatever their position on the lesbian continuum. Since then the term has become widely used in explorations of gender and heterosexuality across the social sciences, notably in Butler's (1990) 'heterosexual matrix'. In this thesis I use 'compulsory heterosexuality' as it has been used in critical education literature. Here it is used to explore the multiple ways in which schools socialise children and young people into heterosexual masculinity and femininity through everyday practices and sanctions for deviations from the norm (Epstein and Johnson, 1998).

From an early age children (aged 3-11) are already implicated in constructing themselves as boys and girls through a discourse of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Epstein, 1996). The key matrix to understanding gender is thus through the presumption of heterosexuality (Epstein, 1996: 2). Epstein shows how girls construct themselves as "heterosexually feminized beings" (1996: 3), thus naturalising heterosexuality through a series of games, playing at being brides, kiss chase and skipping games. Furthermore, these young boys and girls also (re)enforce 'compulsory heterosexuality' and legitimate the exclusion of alternative sexualities from the school context by silencing teachers', as well as pupils' (homo)sexuality (Epstein, 1996: 16). It is not the silencing of sexual practice per se which (re)enforces school culture as unproblematically heterosexual - although this may be part of the exclusion - but rather the way in which educational spaces allow only limited performances and discourses of masculinities, femininities and sexualities to flourish. Chapter four looks specifically at the space of the Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) to further enhance these debates. Hilltop provides a comprehensive and sustained PSHE programme which attempts to incorporate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. Nevertheless, chapter four shows how even within a relatively progressive educational space, 'compulsory heterosexuality' is sustained through pupils' traditional gendered and sexualised discourses and practices of identity.

Building on the influential work reviewed above a number of researchers have studied young men's performances of masculinity in the school context, within both formal educational spaces (classroom) and informal peer group cultures (Epstein, 1997; Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1996; Kehily and Nayak, 1996; Mac an Ghail, 1994; 1996c; Nayak and Kehily, 1996; 1997; Nilan 2000). These studies emphasise that "schools act as masculinity-making devices" (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1996: 59) developing, contesting and making real masculinity (Mac an Ghail, 1996a). In short, school is a site where men are made (Mac an Ghail, 1994), through a continuous process of becoming. Empirical research has expanded in this area and provided numerous examples of the way in which dominant performances of 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998) serve to dominate peer group interaction in school through name-calling, stories and humour (Kehily and Nayak, 1997). Such performances

serve to peripheralise and silence performances of alternative masculinities (Mac an Ghail, 1995). Furthermore, Debbie Epstein (1997: 106), following Nayak and Kehily (1997), suggests that “homophobia both polices and constructs heterosexual masculinities in school, has implications for the school lives of those boys/young men who resist conventional masculine identities as well as for girls/young women”. Epstein adds (1997: 106), following Butler (1993), that it is impossible to understand gender relations outside of the context of compulsory heterosexuality, or that “sexism in schools needs to be understood through the lens of heterosexism”. Performances of heterosexual laddism therefore, not only peripheralise young men who do not conform to dominant performances and discourses of heterosexual masculinity, but also serve to further exclude young women through the inseparability of misogyny and homophobia.

Empirical research to date has failed to consider the everyday implications that the pressure on young men to conform to heterosexual and heterosexist masculinity has for young women. Research which explores the multiple dimensions of masculinities has furthered feminist theory but it consistently fails to consider femininities in light of this burgeoning field of work. Young women have been acknowledged in passing because they, as well as non-conforming young men, bear the brunt of heterosexist banter in the classroom and playground (Hanson, 1991), but young men appear the focus of the majority of these studies because their performances in the classroom are most likely to be more visible and potentially disruptive. In chapter four therefore, I focus specifically on young women’s responses to the ‘sexuality education’ classroom, and their reactions to young men’s discursive and bodily performances of ‘heterosexual laddism’. I now move to consider another part of this literature which looks at masculinities, femininities and sexuality in the context of sex(uality) education in school.

### *Sex(uality) education*

For a number of decades feminist research has highlighted the inadequacy of sex education in schools (Jackson, 1999; Melia, 1989; West, 1999). If provision exists at all ‘discussions’ are based around biological heterosexual sex and bodily

functions which (re)inscribe masculinity as active and femininity as passive (Holland *et al*, 1998). To date, little space within the formal curriculum has been given to young people to explore their questions, ambivalences and desires concerning sexualities. Whilst according to Giddens (1992) levels of intimacy in late modernity are being transformed, there seems to be little formal acknowledgement within educational policies that this is the case. Research has shown, however, that sexuality is often at the forefront of young people's minds (Epstein, 1996; Epstein and Johnson, 1994; 1998; Wood, 1984) and, as outlined above, integral to identities in the (re)making. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies and levels of HIV infection in young people is causing national concern in the UK (*DfEE, 2000; Department of Health, 2001; Home Office, 2000*), which serves to put the provision of sex education onto the educational and health agenda. However, this does not occur in an ideological vacuum and the role of government and schools in the provision of sex education to 'children' under 16 remains a questionable topic for politicians and media reports (see Epstein and Johnson, 1998).

Critical researchers argue that sexual health provision should be of far wider reach than biological aspects of sex education to date have allowed (see Haywood, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Mac an Ghail, 1996b; Thomson, 1994). Provision should not only make available information to combat infections, disease and unwanted pregnancy between heterosexual partnerships but challenge the centrality of the heterosexual discourse within this provision, making space for gay, lesbian and bisexual desire and relationships and above all challenge the heterosexual presumption (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). Peter Redman (1994: 130) argues that 'sexuality education' should incorporate:

... relationships, cultural beliefs, stereotypes, power relations, sexual identities and so on, as well as sexual activity itself – in short, the wider social and moral context in which sexual activity takes place as opposed to a narrow focus on sex and reproduction

'Sexuality education' therefore does not mean a mere inclusion of sexual dissidents, but a new agenda which according to Redman (1994: 147), should address four factors: sexual diversity; relations of power; the construction of sexuality in schooling processes; and pupils' sexual cultures. Chapter four

discusses in greater depth the benefits of an holistic approach to sex(uality) and relationships education and expands the limited discussion here.

Whilst there has been much theoretical research on the inadequacies of sex education and calls for a wider approach to 'sexuality education' in the UK, there has been little research which looks empirically at how young men and women respond to formal provision of sex education - although see Measor *et al*, 1996 for a notable exception. Jane Kenway and Sue Willis (1998: xii) observe in the Australian context that there have been decades of feminists talking about gender reform in schools and developing gender reform policies. Little is actually known however, about how these policies are implemented or responded to in praxis at the grassroots level by schools, teachers, young people and their parents and carers.

Moreover, there is little empirical research which looks at young people's responses to 'sexuality education'. As discussed above there is an increasing body of research which looks at young people's constructions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality within their peer cultures, but little that considers how this is affected by or affects the implementation of formal curriculum provision in this area. For a notable exception see *Schooling & Sexualities: teaching for a positive sexuality* (1996) by Louise Laskey and Catherine Beavis. This edited collection by researchers at the Deakin Centre for Education and Change in Australia considers how Australian schools attempt to put into practice 'sexuality education' and how teachers and pupils deal with the material used. The collection also provides practical hints for the classroom in terms of material (Gourlay, 1996; Hinson, 1996; Van der Ven, 1996) and the role of the teacher when discussing desire (Harrison, Hillier and Walsh, 1996). This collection is both practical and theoretical, articles deal with challenging the sexual construction of schooling (Butler, 1996; Denborough, 1996), and dealing with the multiple complexities of ethnicity and sexuality in the classroom (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996). There are obvious reasons why in the UK research such as this from the Australian context may be rare: it is only of late that sex and relationship education has come onto the mainstream educational agenda in the UK and therefore schools do not have the gender reform policies that appear possible in the Australian context (Kenway and Willis, 1998; Laskey and Beavis,

1996); and/or any school which may be actively doing 'sexuality education' in the UK is likely to distance themselves from research interest for fear of adverse or unwanted publicity and attention because of the political instability concerning this issue and the confusion over the applicability of Section 28. The incorporation of lesbian, gay and bisexual issues onto the educational agenda remains steeped in complexity and misleading policy documents. The most recent sex and relationship education guidance document (see *DfEE*, 2000) acknowledges that the needs of all young people should be met in sex and relationship education (para.1.30), whatever their developing sexuality, and that this provision should be sensitive to the needs of young people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual or pupils questioning their sexuality. However, the document also makes clear that there should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation (para. 1.31). Nevertheless, whilst the paper does encourage sex and relationships education to discuss values and discrimination, it retains a focus on raising awareness concerning biological reproduction and implicit in this is the naturalisation and preference for heterosexuality. One has to ask, therefore, whether the policy document itself promotes sexual orientation? Theoretically heterosexuality may be understood as socially constructed but in policy terms it remains the unspoken and underpinning feature of sexual orientation promotion. There remains therefore a lack of empirical research which considers the everyday realities of 'sexuality education' provision.

Research on 'sexuality education' argues that within sex education policies and classrooms there remains a missing discourse of female desire (Fine, 1988; Holland *et al*, 1998; Renew, 1996). Michelle Fine (1988: 76) powerfully argues that in sex education curricula and many public school classrooms:

... one finds an unacknowledged social ambivalence about female sexuality which ideologically separates the female sexual agent, or subject, from her counterpart, the female sexual victim. The adolescent woman of the 1980's is constructed as the latter. Educated as the potential victim of male sexuality, she represents no subject in her own right. Young women continue to be taught to fear and defend in isolation from exploring desire, and in this context there is little possibility of their developing a critique of gender or sexual arrangements.

Whilst Fine's research is now a little dated Janet Holland and her colleagues (1998) in a compelling account of an in-depth investigation of young people, power and heterosexuality concur with Fine's earlier arguments. Discussion of

female pleasure remains rare and there remains an absence of safe spaces where such issues are open for debate.

Janet Holland *et al* (1998) go further in their book, *The Male in the Head: young people, heterosexuality and power*, to problematise and expose the social and political nature of heterosexuality in young people's lives. Through their study of Women, Risk and AIDS Project (WRAP) and Men, Risk and AIDS Project (MRAP) young people's uncertainties concerning risk and safety are explored. The researchers argue convincingly that heterosexuality and dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity are so normalised that young women often collude with male power, thus reinforcing the normative construction of heterosexuality and the subordinate position of femininity. Thus, they argue "gender is constituted unequally within heterosexuality" (171). The 'male-in-the-head' signals (171):

... the asymmetry, institutionalisation and regulatory power of heterosexual relations. If the 'male-in-the-head' regulates the expectations meanings and practices of both men and women, then femininity can be understood as a product of masculinity and of the heterosexual contract.

Heterosexuality is, in short, male dominated. According to this study young women (re)enforce the power position of men, through their own pursuit of femininity (1998: 55). Women are not expected to be in control of their sexuality, and by transgressing the notion that women should love and men have sex (Holland *et al*, 1998: 89) women risk jeopardising their femininity and in turn their respectability (Skeggs, 1997). Furthermore, women themselves police other women. For example, women in the study indicate that the carrying of condoms by other women suggests sexual experience and disreputable unfeminine behaviour (1998: 33). This leads to the labelling of some women as 'slags' and 'tarts' (Griffin, 1985). Other research has shown that in order to avoid such name-calling young women have to work hard to maintain the boundary between sexually attractive and overtly sexualised (Cain, 1989; Griffin, 1985; Holland *et al*, 1998; Skeggs, 1997).

Nevertheless there is, according to the study of *The Male in the Head*, evidence of new masculinities and femininities. However, such evidence is tempered with a note of caution:

We have listened to new stories of heterosexuality, yet they have been created from traditional materials. It may be true that the 'natural' bond between sex, reproduction and marriage has been shattered by contraception, feminism and consumer culture, but the discourses that tell the 'truths' of masculine and feminine sexual identities continue to exert powerful effects. The gendered languages of heterosexuality still place young people within identities and commitments that can contain their resistance. It is clear that young people are adapting a range of masculinities and femininities, aspiring to create both new and more familiar kinds of relationships, but this diversity is contained within the rules of a particular game

Holland *et al*, 1998: 104/105

The rules of this particular game are cut across by different identity positions. The extent to which young women are allowed to transgress traditional constructions of femininity and heterosexuality, thus inhabiting and performing alternative femininities will depend on their investment in respectability (Skeggs, 1997). If young women are heavily reliant on their respectability to maintain a small amount of power, for example the young white working class women of Skeggs' (1997) study (outlined below), it will be very difficult to resist being controlled by, and exerting power over, other women through the discourses of femininity and heterosexuality. However, young women who are perhaps less invested in their femininity and thus heterosexuality may be able to find a way to resist these constructions, see for example the young middle class women in Valerie Hey's (1997) study or the *New Wave Girls* in Shane Blackman's (1995; 1998) ethnography of style, sexuality and schooling. Rejecting hegemonic constructions of femininity does not necessarily mean empowerment, as Holland *et al* (1998: 130) suggest. In fact, for some women embracing their femininity is an empowering process (Skeggs, 1997).

### *Identity as (dis)identification*

In her book *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (1997) Beverley Skeggs shows through an eleven-year longitudinal study how a group of 83 young white working class women in the North West of England are positioned by, and articulate their identities through, their formations of class, gender and (hetero)sexuality. Whilst this ethnographic study does not focus specifically on 'adolescent' young women it highlights the complexity of the identity constructs by which women are positioned. Skeggs (1997) argues that

these women do not see themselves as being classed, rather they articulate their selves through a process of becoming respectable. Further, she argues that this process is relational - they construct themselves through what they are not, similarly to the construction of 'youth' in opposition to 'adults'. Skeggs shows that these women do not produce themselves within individualistic narratives, rather their "subjectivity is dialogic" (1997: 162), they are produced as specific kinds of working-class women within public discourses. This allows Skeggs to criticise theories of subjectivity and show that these women have more investment in 'fitting in' (1997: 163) than thinking about their individualism. However, their investment in femininity is continuously cut across by different identity constructs, as Skeggs (1997: 98) states "[b]eing, becoming, practising and doing femininity are very different things for women of different classes, races, ages and nations".

Skeggs suggests that young working-class women in her study are heavily invested in their femininity, particularly in relation to their appearance and conduct (1997: 102). Their process of becoming respectable is played out through their investment in femininity across different sites and situations (1997: 115). The working-class women of Skeggs' study recognise that they are judged as not being feminine enough by middle class women and that they risk being labelled as 'tarty'. Nevertheless they place heavy investment in their femininity for themselves in order to make themselves respectable.

Furthermore, Skeggs highlights the way that constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality are inherently implicated in the lives of working-class women, emphasising the way in which femininity cannot be understood without looking at formations of heterosexuality. As Epstein (1995: 58) suggests following Butler (1990):

That is to say, the concept of genderedness becomes meaningless in the absence of heterosexuality as an institution which is compulsory and which is enforced both through rewards for 'appropriate' gendered and heterosexual behaviours and through punishments for deviations from the conventional 'norm'.

Skeggs (1997: 135) emphasises that for these women "[h]eterosexuality consolidates respectability", however, the women only recognise themselves as heterosexual through their disidentifications with lesbianism and other overtly sexualised identities, or those that have been constructed as such, i.e. the

sexuality of working-class women. In fact, these women try to avoid being seen as sexual because this negates their respectability. However, these women were able to challenge "... the positioning of themselves as sexual by making gender power plays, which were put into effect through their sexualizing of situations through the occupation of masculine subject positions" (136). However, their resistance was limited because of their investments in caring subjectivities. For the women in Skeggs' study constructions of femininity, heterosexuality and class weave together in a complex striving for respectability. In Skeggs' (1997: 13) study therefore, "(dis)identifications from/with and (dis)simulation of these social and subject positions are the means by which identities come to appear as coherent". The practice of (dis)identification is a means by which these women avoid being fixed into one-dimensional subject positions which label and judge them as specific kinds of working-class women.

The final section of this review focuses on the site of the school as space for the construction and contestation of teenage girls' friendship groups.

#### *1.4. The space of the school and teenage girls' friendship groups*

[Y]our own life is completely dependent on institutions. In the place of binding traditions, institutional guidelines appear on the scene to organise your own life. The qualitative difference between traditional and modern life-stories is not, as many assume, that in older corporate and agrarian societies various suffocating controls and guidelines restricted the individual's say in his or her own life to a minimum, whereas today hardly any such restrictions are left. It is, in the bureaucratic and institutional world jungle of modernity that life is securely bound into networks of guidelines and regulations. The crucial difference is that modern guidelines actually compel the self-organisation and self-thematisation of people's biographies.

Beck, 2001: 166

School and educational establishments are sites which impact enormously on the lives of young people and, as Ulrich Beck suggests above, institutions are of insurmountable importance in the continual creation of people's life trajectories and biographies. The significance of this has already been discussed above in light of the critical education literature on sexuality and schooling. Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997: 11) argue that young people are having to face many more risks at school in late modernity which they are increasingly being expected to face as individuals rather than as part of a collective (for an in-depth

discussion see chapter two in Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, *Change and Continuity in Education*). Education in Britain, they argue, is involved in a dual process of standardization and diversification. Furthermore, the increasing marketisation of education creates an illusion of choice which “masks the continued entrenchment of traditional forms of inequality” (ibid.11), along lines of class, gender and ‘race’.

The school has been an important site of research for many years primarily in the disciplinary fields of education and sociology. Moreover, in the past couple of decades the school has become the locus of research for critical educational theorists who are concerned with inequalities in education in terms of gender (Blair and Holland, 1995; Cameron, 1998/1999; Clark and Millard, 1998; Haywood and Mac and Ghail, 1994; Mac an Ghail, 1996c; Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 1998; Paechter, 1998), class (Walkerdine, 1990), ‘race’/ethnicities (Dwyer, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1995) and more recently sexualities (cf. Epstein; Johnson; Mac an Ghail). Until recently school-based research has paid scant attention to the spatial dimensions of social interaction in school and embodied practices within educational settings (Gordon and Lahelma, 1996). Research has instead used educational establishments to consider young people’s identities without considering how the multiple spatialities within that location (re)shape and (re)define identity performances. The aim throughout this thesis therefore, is to consider the construction and spatiality of young women’s friendship in light of these debates.

The school and wider educational establishments remain, with a few notable exceptions, an under researched space of learning in Geography and have been studied primarily by Historical Geographers (see Fielding, 2000 for an overview and Gagen, 2000). Nevertheless, compulsory schooling is an important site for the socialization of young people and the shaping of their identities through the formal and informal curriculum (James, 1993). As Elizabeth Gagen (2000: 213) states:

educational establishments, loosely defined, represent the spaces through which societies expect children to be socialised toward adult norms ... Learning environments then, are often the spaces through which children become aware of, and begin reproducing, social identities that circulate through broader social space.

Furthermore a dynamic relationship exists whereby “physical space provides a context for school practices, but also shapes and is shaped by such practices (Gordon and Lahelma, 1996: 303). Shaun Fielding (2000: 231) in his exploration of the primary school classroom suggests that “... the school, its beliefs and practices was a ‘hotbed’ of moral geographies – of moral codes about how and where children ought to learn and behave ...”. Fielding’s study makes a significant contribution to educational research because he understands the site of the school as a contested space, one which shapes and is shaped by children’s geographies and a space which (re)produces identities, rather than a mere location for the passive activity of learning. Moreover, Fielding sees children’s bodies and the spatiality of the classroom in a complex web of interconnections which make, break and often come into conflict with the moral codes of the school. Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma (1996) explain this by considering spatiality and embodiment in schools through the use of metaphorical narratives used by pupils. They explain that ‘School is Like an Ant’s Nest’ with three layers: (1) the official school, (2) the informal school and (3) the physical school:

When we approach an ants’ nest we see a great deal of hustle and bustle, we see a living, undifferentiated mass moving to and fro. When we look closer, we begin to see more organised activity; we see paths that are followed, and we see movement with more direction. We see ant soldiers looking after order. We see corridors and corners. We look for peace and quiet and see guarded nooks. We also see co-operation and caring for others. We see closeness and overlapping of spaces. We notice neural embodiment; where are the differences – where is gender? We know somewhere in the depths of the nest lies the queen

Gordon and Lahelma, 1996: 305

Gordon and Lahelma (1996: 309) conclude by arguing that the queen is an absent presence. She casts a watchful eye over her workers from points of reference fixed elsewhere in order to produce “pressures to uniformity and tendencies to differentiation in schools”. Through their article they argue that these metaphors and practices of embodiment and spatiality in school are gendered, and that in fact “the ‘queen’ is, after all, a ‘he’”. Perhaps this is also a metaphor which could be likened to Janet Holland *et al’s* (1998) ‘male-in-the-head’ description of masculinity as heterosexuality.

Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine (2000c: 773-774, following James, *et al*, 1998) sum up the contribution which a renewed interest in the spatiality of the school could make to the study of children, in the following way:

On the one hand thinking through the interconnecting geographies which shape the social space of the school emphasises the importance of wider sets of ideas embedded within British society which act as reservoirs of resources both informing, and rendering intelligible, staff and pupil behaviour within the school. On the other, thinking through the multiple geographies within the school where different cultures dominate in different times and space reminds us that children are not only subjects to control by adults within the school, they also resist this control and form strategic alliances with adults to resist domination by other children.

Their insistence that the school should be seen as a site of porosity is one I find compelling and the reason this research project focuses on the spatialities within one research school. Holloway and Valentine (2000c: 779) argue that schools (and homes) “need to be thought of not as bounded spaces, but as porous ones produced through their webs of connections with wider societies which inform social-spatial practices within those spaces”. To date the porosity of the school space has not been considered in critical education literature and an awareness of the spatiality of the school proves useful when trying to understand young people’s performances of gender and (hetero)sexuality.

### *Teenage girls’ friendship groups at school*

There has been a recent interdisciplinary concern with the study of girls’ friendships, in particular the study of teenage girls at school in the UK and the US (Finders, 1997; Griffin, 1985; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; Hyams, 2000; James, 1986; Lees, 1986, 1993; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 1998; Way, 1996; Wulff, 1995b); an interest in friendship at the primary stage of schooling, and in pre-adolescent young people is also burgeoning (Adler and Adler, 1998; Deegan, 1996; George and Browne, 2000; James, 1993; Thorne, 1993).

The importance, diversity and formation of teenage girls’ friendships are explored in a number of seminal sociological studies (Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; Lees, 1993). Vivienne Griffiths (1995) and Valerie Hey (1997) in particular emphasise the dearth of ethnographic work which focuses on the social relations in girls’ friendship groups. Both of these texts provide in-depth discussions concerning the paucity of research on young women’s friendships and argue that girls’ friendships have often been considered secondary to heterosexual relations (see also Raymond, 1986).

Valerie Hey (1997: 10) highlights the propensity of previous studies to take a social psychology approach to the study of friendship, which relies heavily on the 'development' approach. This serves to silence social relations, add gender to a long list of other important variables and essentialise notions of masculinity and femininity, thus (re)enforcing gender relations to the public and private sphere, where girls' friendships are often ignored, seen as private, intimate and secondary to heterosexual relations. Furthermore, Griffiths (1995: 2) suggests that relationships between women are often constructed as negative, i.e. bitchy or giggly or silly. In contrast, both of these studies (Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997) show that young women's friendships are anything but trivial. By prioritising young women's accounts, these in-depth ethnographic studies expose the complex and often contradictory nature of the formation of girls' friendships. As Hey (1996:19) suggests "...girls are located in economies of friendship as sites of power and powerlessness".

In *The Company She Keeps: An ethnography of girls' friendship* Valerie Hey (1997) explores the formation of girls' friendship along lines of class and gender. She also shows and emphasises the point explored above by Beverley Skeggs (1997), that working class girls have a great investment in their femininity and heterosexuality and this plays an important role in the construction of these young women's femininities and consequently friendships. These identity constructs form processes of inclusion and exclusion in the young women's friendship groups. Friendship formation is relational; friendships are formed through the process of not belonging, as Hey (1997: 84) suggests:

Their own friendship culture provided meanings about the right way to be through positioning the ideal friend as white, non-boffin, and not 'slaggy'. Their investment in that position was at the expense of other girls' social and discursive exclusions.

Thus, exclusions in friendship groups mark out a group decision regarding who belongs and who does not (also see Paechter, 1998). However, Griffiths (1995) shows that these processes of belonging change over time and space in the school, especially when the young women are involved in classes that are streamed by ability. Thus, friendship groups are contextually contingent, they change over time and space. Yet to date, studies of friendship and gender relations in adolescence have remained firmly located in the school as a physical

location, rather than considering the spatiality of the school (see previous section) and the effect this has on practices of inclusion and exclusion through the use of multiple sites of engagement during the school day, i.e. classroom contexts, playground, lunchtime hang out areas, corridors and so on.

Some studies explore gender relations in the playground (Blatchford, 1998; Thorne, 1993). Blatchford (1998) sees social relations between pupils in the playground as separate from those in the classroom. However, this is a false separation, as the majority of the time pupils spend in school is in the classroom with the same people that they spend their breaks with, therefore, there will be overlap between multiple sites. In fact, Valerie Hey (1997) and Sandra Spickard Prettyman (1998) show through their interest in the secret notes passed between girls, often in class, that there is, indeed, a blurring of the boundaries between work and 'play'. In addition, social relations in the classroom, that is inter-pupil relations and relations between staff and pupils, are very important as this is one site where pupils learn and contest social relations (Gordon and Lahelma, 1996).

Therefore, further research, including my own, needs to consider how spatial practices of friendship vary across multiple school spaces and whether these spatial and temporal practices affect inter-group and intra-group friendship relations. As I have explored above the literature to date suggests that inclusionary and exclusionary practices in teenage girls' friendship groups appear to be based on social constructs, such as gender, class, 'race' and (hetero)sexuality. However, this research fails to consider the role of music, style and fashion (Blackman, 1998; Wall, 1999) in the construction of friendship. Moreover, what impact does the increasing pressure to act individually rather than as part of a collective have on the practice and discursive construction of teenage girls' friendship groups? This is worth consideration, especially in light of Skeggs' research participants who were more concerned with defining their identity through 'fitting in', rather than acting individually. The social-spatial relations of teenage girls' friendship groups will be discussed in more depth below through the discussion of gender and 'compulsory heterosexuality' – where I use Hey and Blackman's discussion of 'compulsory heterosexuality' to further illuminate ways in which young women (re)construct their alliances of

friendship. Chapters three and five deal specifically with these debates in relation to my empirical research.

One of the substantial chapters in Vivienne Griffiths' study of *Adolescent Girls and Their Friends* concerns itself with 'transitions from girlfriends to boyfriends'. Griffiths (1995) documents the way in which female friendship in many studies has been seen as a stop gap before moving on to the more important sphere of adult heterosexual relationships. In fact, many studies have explored the pressure placed on young women by society, families, boys and peer groups to get a boyfriend, thus affirming a young woman's femininity and heterosexuality (Griffin, 1985). Griffiths (1995: 155) shows that young women are able to subvert the 'ages and stages' model of heterosexuality through support from their friendship group. In fact, she shows that whilst boyfriends often come and go, girlfriends are constant. Female friends are "sounding boards" (Brannen *et al*, 1994: 440 in Holland *et al*, 1998: 67), that is they are there to confide in, talk to, and bounce off information, experience and potential coping strategies.

Valerie Hey (1997) showed that rejecting, or at least not fully embracing compulsory heterosexuality, was an option for one group of elite upper middle class academic girls in her study. In an increasingly heterosexual environment (on entry to sixth form) Hey shows that these young women manage to create alternative femininities only through exercising power over and attempting to control working-class girls (Hey, 1997: 119). Thus, emphasising the role of the male in the head (Holland *et al*, 1998), rather than self-regulating their own femininity and heterosexuality, these upper middle-class girls secure their own position by regulating the femininity and heterosexuality of those they deem to be less powerful, - the working-class girls. However, the power exerted by the girls over other girls does not mean that they are immune from being controlled by other young women, boys or teachers. This emphasises the place of power as a complex web of relations which are constantly in flux and contradictory.

Shane Blackman (1998) in *The School: 'Poxy Cupid': an ethnographic and feminist account of a resistant female youth culture: the new wave girls* explores the formation of an all female group of highly achieving academic girls who perform a resistant youth culture inside a secondary school. These girls explore

alternative ways of performing their femininities, thus challenging dominant forms of masculinity as powerful and subverting hegemonic constructions of femininity. Blackman (1995; 1998) suggests that the New Wave Girls are counter hegemonic and are exploring a means of feminist resistance. Whilst I am impressed by their resistance, I wonder whether these young women are finding a powerful place in their school at the expense of policing other girls and exercising power over less powerful femininities. Other studies (Faderman, 1981; Raymond, 1986; Skeggs, 1997) demonstrate that by rejecting displays of heterosexuality and embracing close all-girl friendships girls risk being labelled lesbian. The New Wave Girls seem to expose the heterosexual presumption in school (Epstein and Johnson, 1994), which Holland *et al* suggest is very difficult:

Making heterosexuality visible is difficult, since its power as 'the natural order of things' hinders both its actors and the social theorist in extricating contested meanings from the apparent certainties of 'boy meets girl'

Holland *et al*, 1998: 10

However, research needs to expose the discourses and practices which go into making and breaking the 'heterosexual presumption' and consider whether all young women have access to these practices or whether they are limited to white middle-class femininities in specific spaces at particular times. Chapter five focuses on a group of girls described as 'alternative' in order to explore the complex ways in which challenging the 'heterosexual presumption' problematises schoolgirl femininity and practices of friendship.

### *1.5. Summary*

This 'literature review' has both situated my research in an inter-disciplinary field and outlined a number of theoretical concepts which influence my research, analysis and writing in the following chapters. The aim of this review has been to highlight some of the recent developments in geographies of young people, and young women in particular, in order to urge more critical researchers to take the everyday experiences of young people seriously through further empirical studies. In so doing, the second intention of this chapter has been to emphasise the importance of bringing together two bodies of literature. These two bodies of research concern themselves with socio-spatial aspects of young people's

identities and critical education and sociology perspectives on masculinities, femininities, schooling and the complex construction of identities. To bring these studies together is to endeavour to make apparent the complexities and contradictions which go into the making and (re)making of young people's identities across multiple axes of difference. Such challenging studies as reviewed above (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Hey, 1997; Holland *et al*, 1998; Skeggs, 1997) make the experiences of (young) women come alive and make explicit the contradictions that they face when negotiating their femininities and (hetero)sexualities in school. However, this research could be furthered by not only thinking through the empirical realities of complex identity formations as well as how these affect and are affected by the spatialities of school. This thesis therefore uses the everyday realities of friendship to consider the social construction and spatiality of life for these young women at school.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that the aim of this 'literature review' was neither to situate my research in an existing and fixed body of academic knowledge nor demonstrate my significant and original contribution to this fixed body of knowledge. An attempt to do so, I suggest following Game and Metcalfe (1996), would inevitably result in failure. I hope however, that I have given a substantial, although not exhaustive, coverage of the interdisciplinary debates from which my research developed and now partially contributes. In the three empirical chapters (chapters three, four and five) I aim to take the theoretical debates already outlined and discuss them in relation to the empirical research I conducted with young women at Hilltop school.

This thesis focuses specifically on the everyday experiences of young women labelled 'in-between' (Sibley, 1995) and the construction and spatiality of their friendship groups in the secondary school context. Such a focus aims to further contribute to developing debates in the new social studies of childhood literature which calls for further explorations of the spatiality of young people's lives in their everyday contexts (Holloway and Valentine, 2000c). Furthermore, I aim to show the complexities of young women's discourses and practices of friendship in a context which increasingly requires them to act individually. Chapters three and five focus on the relations between and within friendship groups and the way in which performances of femininity and heterosexuality become increasingly

complicated through discourses and practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) and 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000). Chapter five considers these debates through a case study of the 'alternative' girls and aims to further understand the way in which deviations from 'traditional' performances of gender and (hetero)sexuality complicate performances of femininity and friendship at school. Chapter five further considers how an understanding of the school as a porous site (Holloway and Valentine, 2000c) can be beneficial for some young women because it allows them to make space in which to challenge the 'heterosexual presumption'. Chapter four provides a discussion of the way in which young women respond to the school's attempt to formally challenge the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. In this chapter young women's responses to 'heterosexual laddism' provide the backdrop to further illustrate the construction of femininity as masculinity and the production of the 'male-in-the-head' (Holland *et al*, 1998).

The remainder of this thesis aims to build on and critically engage with the literature reviewed here. Firstly in the next chapter through a discussion of the methodology and ethics of putting such research into praxis; and secondly through three interconnected empirical chapters which consider the realities and complexities of young women's lives at school.

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## **Chapter Two. Feminist Research Praxis: working *with* young women in school and the politics of ‘in-betweenness’**

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The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the practicalities and ethical considerations I faced as a relatively young postgraduate researcher working *with* young women in the school context. Before I do this however, the first part of this chapter (2.1.) begins with an exploration of the research framework, that of ‘feminist research praxis’. Here, I give a necessary, albeit short, account of the two bodies of literature which inform and are informed by my research agenda: firstly, feminist theory on research praxis where I explore my commitment to a critical ‘politics of intervention’; and secondly, I investigate the current debate concerning the methods and ethics of working *with* children and young people from a geographical perspective. Here, I argue that to date little research has put these two bodies of research together, specifically in relation to ‘being there’ in context with young people when using participant observation.

From the outset of my research project the main aim has been to research young women’s everyday experiences of school and friendship in context, and this is reflected in the participatory research techniques utilised and described below. The second part of this chapter (2.2.) describes empirically what I did ‘in the field’, in order to give the reader an outline of the methods used throughout the research process and how this material is documented and analysed. I then follow with a third section (2.3.) which outlines some of the practicalities of doing research *with* young people labelled ‘in-between’ in terms of consent and confidentiality.

The final section of this chapter (2.4.) deals with the methodology, practicalities and ethics of this research project. Throughout this chapter I use extracts from my research diary to explore some of the ethical and practical dilemmas I faced during my research with young women in school spaces. I discuss these experiences in relation to geographical research on ‘in-betweenness’ and feminist ethnography (Katz, 1992; 1994). I find this notion of ‘in-betweenness’ useful in

that it allows me to come to terms with the intensity of the research project and it also helps me think through, and reflect on, some of the dilemmas that make the research process problematic and ambiguous in relation to my 'feminist research praxis'. Here I use sub-headings to structure five messy arenas which aim to highlight the concerns and practical consequences of my research project: my position and outward appearance as a young postgraduate researcher; working within and between young women's spaces of friendship; a feminist 'politics of intervention'; challenging 'compulsory heterosexuality'; and finally power, ethics and responsibility. I finish this chapter with a summary (2.5.).

The aim of this chapter is not to provide a neat and decipherable methodology and ethics chapter because the *doing* of this research makes that impossible. But, I hope that what follows gives the reader an insight into the ethics and practicalities of doing research *with* young women in the school context and the way in which this is inherently an ethical and ambiguous process.

### *2.1. Feminist Research Praxis: geographies, methodologies and ethnographies*

As discussed in the previous chapter (see 1.1.), concern with the geographies of children and youth is increasing (see Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a), although research incorporating teenagers, particularly between the ages of 12 and 15, remains sparse (Skelton, 2000)<sup>1</sup>. Theoretical developments in the social sciences and the incorporation of feminist, post-modern, post-colonial, post-structuralist and queer theory into the geographical agenda has led critical geographers to question the production of knowledge as white, masculinist, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied and adultist. Furthermore, the widening of the discipline has not only increased the diversity of topics being researched but also intensified the debate concerning how we study 'in the field'. In particular, feminist geography (Dyck, 1993; *Professional Geographer*, 1994; WGSG, 1997), drawing on wider feminist theory, has heightened awareness of methodological, epistemological and ethical concerns that arise throughout the research process. There is now an immense body of

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to conduct research with young women aged 14/15 (year ten) for a number of reasons: there is a paucity of research with young people in this age range; I have practical experience of working with this age group; and it is a year when pupils are not taking assessed exams.

literature on feminist theory and research methodologies, within, outside and across the disciplinary boundaries of Geography.

Much of this wider debate is concerned with methods of collecting data and the ethical issues raised through the inherent power relations of this process. Power relations 'in the field' have been of particular interest to both child and youth researchers. They have highlighted: the potentially exploitative relationship between (older) researchers and (younger) research subjects through consideration of issues such as confidentiality and consent; access to (potentially vulnerable) groups of young people and the spaces they inhabit; involving research subjects throughout the research process (from development to dissemination); and allowing young people to 'opt in' rather than 'opt out' of research (Alderson, 1995; James, 1986; Mahon, *et al*, 1996; Mauther, 1997; Morris *et al*, 1998; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Valentine, 1999). Many of these themes are reflected in a recent collection of articles on the ethics of working with children and young people in a special edition of *Ethics, Place and Environment* (2001).

In my own empirical research I attempted to adopt a form of 'feminist research practice' (WGSG, 1997), or what I prefer to term 'feminist research praxis'. 'Feminist research praxis' takes into account the dynamic and two-way relationship between theory and practice (Lather, 1991). Such research not only carries out theoretically grounded research but also provides research which empirically informs, contests and potentially challenges academic theory, research and policy debates. Through my 'feminist research praxis' I aim "to provide a rhetorical space where the experiences and knowledges of the marginalized can be given epistemic authority, be legitimated and taken seriously" (Skeggs, 1997: 38). In so doing "... [f]eminism implies an obligation to take moral responsibility for our politics, and so a general ethic of accountability towards the subjects of research, and the way knowledge is produced" (Holland, *et al*, 1998: 16). Following this basic feminist ideal leads me, in principle at least, to treat young people as competent decision makers in their own right, involve them throughout the research process, allow them to 'opt in' and 'opt out', and ultimately work *with*, rather than on or for, research participants (Alderson, 1995).

Furthermore, I consider it part of the moral responsibility of my critical feminist praxis to attempt to transfer these politics into practice, thus developing a critical 'politics of intervention' where research participants acknowledge, and critically reflect upon their own practices (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Therefore, implicit in my desire to make visible the experiences of young women is my attempt to make explicit and challenge injustice, exclusionary practices and oppressive behaviour (Doyle, 1999; Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999), specifically along the lines of age, gender and 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Much debate surrounds the extent to which research should be overtly political in order for it to be constituted as feminist<sup>2</sup>. Raghuram *et al* (1998: 38, following Staeheli and Lawson, 1995) suggest that "...what differentiates feminisms from other approaches is their focus on gender and their distinct political agenda involving the transformation of gendered power relations". Whilst I have a firm commitment to the raising of young women's voices I also recognise that researchers should be cautious when it comes to transformative politics:

...what we as researchers and as feminists might see as empowering women by giving them the tools to analyse their situation in terms of gender and power may actually *disempower* them

Humphries, 1997: 5

Experiences of literally being there with girls across multiple spaces and witnessing oppressive and exclusionary behaviour first hand caused me considerable ethical angst and deliberation. Nevertheless, ethical angst (re)enforced, rather than diminished my commitment to politically motivated feminist research. However, as I explicate below (2.4.), drawing on my own empirical encounters, my research experiences radically shift my definition of a 'politics of intervention'. I attempted to deal with my ethical ambiguities through a process of 'critical reflexivity' (Maxey, 1999; Rose, 1997). However, 'hanging out' with groups of teenage girls meant that I had to confront my 'politics of intervention' head on and deal with such issues as the policing of femininities and sexualities and the exclusion of some girls based on style, dress, attitude, beliefs or bodily behaviour. Before I explore the specific ethical

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<sup>2</sup> Whilst I would argue that feminist research is politically motivated I acknowledge that not all research conducted from a feminist perspective necessarily has an agenda whereby the researchers' politics intervene in the research process through awareness raising. This is why I make a distinction between my initial concern with a 'politics of intervention' and my wider commitment to 'feminist research praxis'.

dilemmas I faced in my research (2.4.), the following sections (2.2. and 2.3.) discuss the participatory methods adopted in my research, the process of analysis and some of the practical and ethical considerations when working with young women in the school context.

## *2.2. Participatory research methods when working with young women in school*

The following section gives a brief overview of what I did 'in the field', as well as how the research developed through the years of my thesis. The aim of this section is to give the reader an understanding of how the empirical research was conducted, documented and analysed throughout the project. This section therefore, does not on the whole provide academic credibility or justification to the research process or the methods used, but rather when necessary directs the reader to literature which focuses on these aspects of concern.

### *Year One.*

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis my research developed from my initial funding application which sought to research the everyday experiences of girls who were labelled by the British press as 'girl gangs'. I decided that rather than focusing on sensational aspects of teenage girl culture I wanted to look at young women's everyday experiences of friendship and school. As I discussed in the previous chapter (1.4.), these are two areas of concern which remain relatively undocumented in geographical research and in which a spatial analysis could benefit other disciplinary debates. Here, I was influenced by the burgeoning field of feminist geography and feminist research practice and the relatively recent interest and concern with geographies of children and young people and the methods, methodologies and ethics of working *with* younger subjects (see 2.1. and 2.3.).

During my first year of research therefore, I refined my subject area and developed a research agenda and methodology in light of debates in these two fields of literature. From the outset I set out to develop a research agenda which prioritised the experiences of young women, took account of power dynamics between the researcher and the researched, had a political commitment to

building reciprocal relationships and challenging discriminatory power relations 'in the field'. I decided therefore, that the methods I utilised had to fit with my research aims and objectives (Stanley, 1990; 1997; WGSG, 1997). I wanted to spend as much time as possible 'in the field' with young people, learning about their experiences in practice, as well as building up levels of trust which would aid my research agenda in terms of building reciprocal relationships and challenging exploitative power relationships between researcher and research participants.

As well as (re)defining my research in terms of academic debate and methods, I also researched the local and surrounding area for policy work and groups/agencies which work with young women. I met and started to build up relationships in these areas in order to understand local youth provision, and their connections with schools. After the Easter break (1999) I started to contact schools by letter (see Appendix One) and made a follow-up telephone call approximately one week later. I also sought advice and assistance from local education authorities.

As a number of school ethnographies have pointed out gaining access to a school for an extended period of time is problematic (Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997). This is especially the case where social science research is involved, where the aim may not necessarily be immediately obvious or seen as legitimate to the school and teachers concerned. Furthermore, the past decade has seen a crisis in the British secondary education system. The system is becoming increasingly bureaucratic through the National Curriculum, the measurement of teachers through Ousted inspections and the constant grading of pupils' academic ability through exams and tests. All these factors serve to make education a pressurised environment in which to work. From the outset therefore, I was more than a little nervous about approaching schools. I was affeared that I would be turned away immediately because of my status as an unknown postgraduate researcher with feminist principles attempting to do research with young women in an educational climate that suggests that it is boys that are underachieving (Epstein *et al*, 1998). Furthermore, my research, in-depth in nature, required my presence in classrooms for an extended period of time, and such research could have been labelled as disruptive and not really worth their while. Added to this was my fear

that research with young people concerning sexuality in the educational context would immediately be rejected because of apprehensions about bad publicity concerning teenagers and sex, Section 28 and the 'promotion of homosexuality'. These debates are discussed further in chapter four. For these reasons I decided to give a broad outline of my research and requirements in the initial letter, and expanded on them in the follow up telephone calls (see Appendix One). After approaching ten schools and speaking to a handful of head teachers I approached 'Hilltop'. By this point I had realised that a multi-faceted approach was necessary and I sent a letter to the head teacher, spoke to the head of the Geography department and the head of year ten. After a number of phone calls I finally met the head of upper school and the head of year ten in late September/early October (1999) and access to research 'Hilltop' was granted for the week following October half term. The head of year ten designed a timetable taking into consideration some of the requirements and suggestions discussed in our initial meeting and assigned me to a registration group which I call 10 Red. I was surprised by the relative ease with which access was granted to me at 'Hilltop'. In fact, during our conversations the head of upper school tried to sell 'Hilltop' to me as an interesting site to do research, rather than me having to sell my research and respectability.

### *Year Two.*

*Multi-locational Participant Observation:* From the outset of my research the use of participatory/ethnographic research methods has been prioritised. Over recent decades human geographers have increasingly used qualitative research methodologies in their research (see Eyles and Smith, 1988; Baxter and Eyles, 1999). Ethnography however, and specifically the method of participant observation, remains rare in geographical research but one that, according to Steve Herbert (2000: 551), provides great potential for research from a geographical perspective<sup>3</sup>. He argues that:

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Herbert (2000) provides a very useful overview of ethnography and participant observation in his article *For Ethnography*. Here, he defines, justifies and explores the criticisms aimed at ethnography, but also explores the potential it holds as a productive method in Human Geography.

Ethnography uniquely explores lived experience in all its richness and complexity ... its intensive analysis and fine-grained detail provide the optimal way to illustrate and explicate the oft-stated connection between the life world of a social group and the geographic world they construct.

Whilst the potential of ethnography and its main method participant observation is yet to be realised in Human Geography (although see Cook, 1997; Cook and Crang, 1995; Herbert, 2000; Jackson, 1983; Keith, 1992), its relative usefulness has been discussed and used in feminist (Olesen, 1994; Skeggs, 1994; 2001; Stacey, 1988) and educational (Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001; Hey, 2002; James, 2001) research. Moreover, feminist geographers have discussed methods and methodologies in-depth (see *Professional Geographer*, 1994; McDowell, 1992; WGSF, 1997). Nevertheless, apart from a few notable exceptions (Dyck, 1993; Katz, 1992; 1994), participant observation is a rich research method that remains relatively unexplored in feminist geography. I have decided not to call my research ethnography, as I prefer the term 'participatory research methods'<sup>4</sup>. I prefer this term for a number of reasons. Firstly, it recognises my multi-method approach (participant observation, semi-structured individual and group interviews and self-directed photography project). Secondly, it takes into account that unlike much anthropological research I did not live with my research participants or take part in their lives outside of the school context. Finally, I agree with Beverley Skeggs (1994: 73) when she argues that it is the length and intensity to research that allows for it to be described as ethnographic. Her research spanned eleven years of varying intensity. I recognise that this is untenable within the constraints of conducting doctoral research but I think she is justifiable in her criticism of researchers that describe their work as ethnographic when they have only conducted a few months in the field and carried out some interviews. With all this in mind, I have taken the decision to describe my research as based on a multi-method participatory approach.

From the first of November 1999 until mid July 2000 I spent at least three days a week in school conducting *multi-locational in-depth participant observation* with pupils in year ten. Participant observation involved being in school three days a

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that my choice of a participatory research approach differs from research described as participatory action research (PAR). PAR involves research participants in the design and implementation of research and seeks to radically challenge research relationships, as well as the lives of the community under investigation. For further elaboration see Reason and Bradbury (2001).

week at first (Monday, Wednesday and Friday), although as research relationships developed my time in school became less structured. Initially however, I arrived at school by 8.30am and stayed until approximately 4pm (see Appendix One for timetables). By multi-location participant observation I mean that I spent time with young people in a variety of locations that encompassed the school day in order to explore how the socio-spatial contexts of 'Hilltop' affected discourses and practices of young women's friendships. Multi-locational participant-observation therefore, is different from the concept of multi-locale ethnography used by George Marcus (1986) when he discusses anthropological research. The aim here, Marcus (1986: 166) suggests, is to identify ways in which "closely observed cultural worlds are embedded in larger more impersonal systems" by choosing two or more locales which would "show their interconnections over time and simultaneously" (171). Marcus also suggests another approach through which ethnography can explore the interconnections between the micro and the macro. Here he uses the ethnographic text *Learning to Labour* (Willis, 1977) as an example whereby "the ethnographer constructs the text around a strategically selected locale, treating the system as background, albeit without losing sight of the fact that it is integrally constitutive of cultural life ..." (172). My research is aligned to the second approach, in that I focus specifically on the site of Hilltop as a space to explore young women's discourses and practices of friendship during the school day. However, I use the term multi-locational participant observation because integral to my research is the recognition that the school needs to be researched as site of porosity which is constitutive of social-spatial practices (see Holloway and Valentine, 2000c and chapter one 1.1. for a further discussion). Furthermore, it is for this reason that my research and participant observation remained located around the school day rather than extending my research to explore young women's lives outside their school context. By focusing on the school day, rather than the site of the school, I was able to explore young women's use of space at lunchtime which frequently meant going outside of the school gates. This became imperative when understanding the discourses and practices of 'alternative' young women's friendship discussed in chapter five.

My school day comprised participant observation in the following spaces: staff briefing, morning and afternoon registration with 10Red, curriculum lessons, i.e. Maths, English, Geography, after school events and sporting occasions, PSHE lessons (see chapter four), the library, corridors, the playground at lunch and break, the dining room at lunchtime, the tuck machine, the local area and shops at lunchtime and the park where the 'alternative girls' hung out (see 2.4. and chapter five). As my time in school developed and research relationships with young women were partially secured my position in lessons and access to spaces of friendship changed (see 2.4. for further discussion). But for the first few months I sat in classes and walked around the school introducing myself to teachers and pupils (boys and girls), taking notes of seating arrangements, names, formal and informal class activities, and group dynamics. I sat in different positions in the class and teachers introduced me sporadically, some explained in-depth my position and allowed me to talk to the young people, others virtually ignored my presence<sup>5</sup>. On the whole, I tried to sit with pupils, rather than sitting separately at the back or front of the classroom and when asked I explained my research and who I was. I tried to distance myself from teachers when outside the staff room, although my role was slightly different in a lower English set where I assisted the teacher with some children who had learning and concentration difficulties.

After the initial month of research I began to accompany girls who had expressed an interest in my research to other lessons. I also began chatting to them at lunch and dinner time in order to document their friendship dynamics in different classrooms and spaces of the school. Over the year I continued to go to formal lessons, but as my research progressed I spent more time in the PSHE classroom (specifically 'sexuality education') because of my developing interest in the socio-spatial relationships of that educational space (see chapter four). I also spent more time with groups of girls outside formal lessons as relationships and levels of trust developed.

*Field Diary Documentation:* From the outset of my research I kept a field/research diary which had three aims. Firstly, to document what I did

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<sup>5</sup> I found that relationships with pupils developed quicker in classes where teachers took time out of their lesson to introduce me and/or allowed me to time to talk to pupils in order to explain my research and role.

before, during and after my field research; secondly, to document the experiences and practices of my research participants through all stages of the research process; and finally, to provide an outlet for me to write down my feelings concerning research relationships, problems, ethics, practicalities, ways forward, changes to the project and significantly how I felt about doing the research myself. The research diary therefore, is a document of what went on 'in the field', as well as a reflexive diary of the researcher. As far as I could I wrote notes to myself when 'in the field', finding space in lessons, the staff room, corridors, the dining room, outside and in the toilet to do this without causing too much suspicion. When I returned home at night I would sit in front of my computer writing and expanding my field notes. For a discussion of the multiple ways in which field notes can be recorded, analysed and incorporated into the final text see Emerson *et al* (2001).

*Document collection:* Throughout the research project I collected documents from the school context (official school documentation, curriculum outlines, school worksheets, articles used, staff bulletins) as well as local youth initiatives which provided me with background and changing debates in the area of my research. I also collected material that related specifically to PSHE provision and national initiatives on sex and relationships education.

*Photography project and in-depth individual/group interviews:* After New Year (2000) and before February half term, whilst continuing with the multi-locational participant observation I approached young women who had expressed initial interest in taking part in the *self-directed photography project* and follow up *semi-structured group or individual interviews*.

Between March and June 2000 I conducted the *self-directed photography project* and follow up friendship group interviews with four friendship groups (Heather, Louisa, Rhona and Lena; Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë; Rachel and Kat; Ani, Faith and Ruth). All thirteen girls were given a disposable camera and I showed them how to use it, including the flash. I provided the girls with a sheet which explained the project (see Appendix One) and explained that I wanted them to take photographs of their friends, people they spend time with inside and outside school, and anything that is important to them. I deliberately kept the remit very wide and open to their interpretation. I allowed the girls to have the camera for

one week, including a weekend, and retrieved them the following week, when I processed two copies, one for me and one for them. We then used their stories of the photographs as an ice-breaker and point of conversation for the group interviews. Most interviews took place within a fortnight of me returning the photographs to the girls, depending on time constraints, holidays and work experience placements.

Initially I was going to make more of the photography project and the school was keen to have a display of the girls' work. However, the girls did not want the photos displayed in the school foyer and they were much more enthralled with the process of taking the photos and having the cameras than actually doing anything 'constructive' with them afterwards. I decided therefore, not to push this area of my research, and this is why they are not part of this final thesis. Researchers have however, used cameras and photography in greater depth to understand the lives and experiences of children and young people (see Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Cohen, 1990; Damico, 1985). Instead I decided to use the photographs as a means into conversation, as Adrian Searle (2001: 12) suggests "a photo is only a picture, but at its best it prises the world open, making a little rend in the fabric of things and allowing us to enter".

I also did a further two group interviews with six girls (Cordelia and Ella; Sonali, Nita, Noreen, and Ahliya), as well as one individual interview with Jo. All interviews lasted fifty minutes and were conducted in school at lunchtime. I transcribed all tapes verbatim myself and then gave a copy of the transcript to the young women for further comment, clarification and informal discussion.

*In-depth individual interviews with educational and PSHE professionals:* In order to provide context to Hilltop and its educational provision I conducted in-depth individual interviews with the head of year ten, Helen Whittingham and the head of PSHE (1999-2000), Judy Fisher<sup>6</sup>. I further interviewed, Jo Adams<sup>7</sup>, the manager of the Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health, in order to provide background to PSHE provision, sex and relationships education and 'sexuality education' in the regional and national context. As these interviews

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<sup>6</sup> All teachers' names are anonymised.

<sup>7</sup> Jo Adams, the manager for the Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health, waived the right to anonymity and therefore, no pseudonym has been used.

were conducted primarily for context they do not form a significant part of empirical chapters three, four and five.

*Year Three/Year Four.*

*School:* In year three and four I continued to access the school, specifically in relation to the PSHE classroom in order to broaden my knowledge of curriculum provision between year 7 and 11 at Hilltop. However, this access was sporadic and provided me with background information only and further maintained research relationships. I have not, therefore, used this material in my analysis and thesis.

*Analysis:* Analysis occurred throughout my field research as an iterative process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), rather than over a discrete period after my field research was complete. Analysis involved empirical observations and reviews of the academic literature from which over time, codes, questions themes, and further academic reading and empirical research were developed. All material collected (participant observation notes, interview transcripts and document collection) was involved in the same process of analysis, although as the discrete forms of collection would suggest these vary slightly in content. I followed a grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) which is widely utilised across social science disciplines. Such an approach to analysis aims to develop theory through emerging research material (data) and is therefore, inductive as opposed to deductive. My research diary acted as the initial site where themes and ideas were developed from my observations at school. In my diary I kept notes of how my research agenda changed in light of practicalities and ethical considerations, as well as potential themes and ideas in relation to what was going on 'in the field'. To separate analysis from the content of the field diary itself therefore, would draw a false distinction between data collection and data analysis. The on-going in-depth reading of my research diary sensitised me to themes that were developing over time. I did not however, at this stage merely make a list of code words which could be identified and developed at a later date. Rather I used the research diary as a place to write

notes and ideas about the themes and codes which were developing. These ideas were then used at a later stage of much more in-depth analysis and coding.

On-going reading, coding and note writing allowed me to develop themes and questions for the in-depth interviews with young women, education and health professionals. Methods of analysis for these interviews were similar to those conducted for participant observation. I was sure to write my research diary on the day of each interview in order to document anything significant concerning the context or the content of the interview process. I also noted silences, which as Tonkiss (1998) argues, are often just as significant as presences. I transcribed each interview verbatim and then after a number of thorough re-readings of the interview wrote out and developed themes of interest which had either developed out of the interview itself or, which I found occurred more often, (re)enforced or contradicted previous observations. I also discussed interview transcripts with everyone I interviewed. After these discussions I further annotated interview transcripts and wrote in my field diary concerning the interviewees' responses to their transcripts, any comments that they had, changes that they wanted to make and additions that they thought important.

Whilst analysis was conducted throughout the research process I also carried out an in-depth period of analysis in the summer of 2000 directly following the end of my field research. During these months I re-read and further developed codes in my field diary and interview transcripts. From these I used documents in Microsoft Word to catalogue every theme. In these documents I included extracts and examples from both my field diary and interviews. I then started to write in note form about the codes, develop further ideas and chapter structures. It was only at this relatively late stage of research and analysis that the central theme of (dis)identification became apparent. Beverley Skeggs (1997: 32) suggests that it is time that allowed her to identify the key concept of respectability in her research. For me, it was time but also physically distancing myself from the research context that allowed me to identify the contradictions and (dis)identifications that are central to the following three empirical chapters. Initially, it was too painful and difficult to put the girls' discourses and practices of friendship onto the page because in some sense their contradictions and (dis)identifications appear to devalue the significance of all-girl friendship and I

found this difficult to acknowledge. Initially, I attempted to find patterns and contradictions concerning the girls' everyday experience of school and I focused on the themes of social inclusion and social exclusion, friendship boundaries and the policing of femininities. However, I had a nagging feeling that the girls would not appreciate me interpreting their lives in this manner. It then struck me that their discourses of friendship were not based on identification. In fact, it was avoiding being fixed and being seen as the same that appeared central to the girls' discourses of friendship, even if these seemed in disjuncture with their spatial practices. In my rush to analyse and write I had started to do exactly what my research participants were refusing throughout my empirical research – to fix their identities through their friendship. It is their attempts to avoid such practices through their discourses of friendship that this thesis explores.

My initial research agenda prioritised the girls' everyday experiences which, to further quote Skeggs (1997: 32) means creating research which is valid. By this, she means research that is:

... convincing, credible and cogent in which the analysis can be evaluated as rigorous and responsible and the account given substantial and satisfactory ... the most plausible explanation for the phenomena studied

I hope that this thesis reflects rigour in my analysis and a continual engagement with the girls' practices and discourses of friendship, as well as the way in which *I* impacted on the research practice, findings and write-up. To follow Sandra Harding (1991) and Donna Haraway (1991) I attempt to achieve a certain amount of 'objectivity' by making the research process apparent and accountable (see also Skeggs, 1997). I do not aim however, to give a true representation of the girls' lives because to do so would be to claim to be able to survey the 'field', to understand and be able to map the power between researcher and researched and for this to be overcome through the research and writing processes. Here I agree with Gillian Rose (1997) who suggests that some feminist geographers have used scale and distribution to attempt to produce a landscape of power that is visible and knowable to the analyst. Both of these tactics she argues "work by turning extraordinarily complex power relations into a visible and clearly ordered space that can be surveyed by the researcher: power becomes seen as a sort of landscape" (Rose, 1997: 310). To completely distance myself from what Rose (1997) calls 'transparent reflexivity', however, is untenable. Whilst, I recognise

that to understand fully myself, the research participants and the context in which we work together is a 'goddess trick'. To not consider or attempt to think through the impact that these relationships produce is equally problematic and dangerous. This is especially true when using participant observation as the main method of research, as the researcher I am literally physically there with young people. My presence in context changes and affects the research process. So, whilst I am an advocate of the concept 'in-betweenness' (discussed in greater depth below, 2.4.), I also treat this concept in an empirically grounded manner which attempts to think through the possible ways in which this politics of 'in-betweenness' may lead to a more critically engaged way of working with young women and power relations. However, before I do this it is necessary to outline some of the practicalities and ethics of working with young people in school.

### *2.3. The practicalities and ethics of working with young people in school*

The ambiguity and difficulties of putting the ethics of working *with* young people into practice will be discussed in much greater depth in the rest of the chapter. However, this section provides a necessary pre-requisite in order to emphasise some of the practical measures put in place through the research process in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Further, I also examine the debates concerning consent when working *with* young people aged 14/15 and allowing young people to 'opt in' rather than 'out of' the research project (Alderson, 1995).

From the outset I was aware that this research could involve potentially sensitive information and could put the young women involved in a position of vulnerability, especially as the research required me to work between and within friendship groups, as well as between young people and their teachers. Therefore, anonymity of the research participants and the research site was made explicit from the very start. I offered all the young women the chance to choose their own pseudonyms, but if they declined I chose one for them. Occasionally young women were reluctant to have their names changed, but with much persistence I explained the importance of this and they eventually accepted it, even if they did not all agree in principle. Confidentiality was also assured,

although this principle was complicated as any adult working with young people under the age of eighteen has responsibility to report anyone they fear or suspect is being emotionally, physically or mentally abused by an adult (Children's Act, 1989 – see Alderson, 1995 for further clarification). Confidentiality therefore, could only be secured to a certain extent. Luckily for me the young people in year ten were used to this because these levels of confidentiality had been explained throughout their PSHE programme. Therefore, I used similar language and explanation to their PSHE tutors and constantly reminded the research participants that anything said to me would not be shared with any of their peers or teachers, unless it alerted me to some form of abuse. My principles of anonymity and confidentiality were also explained in all letters to head teachers, pupils and parents throughout the research process (see Appendix One). In case young people confided in me I carried around a list of contact details of local and national support groups so that I could assist young people in making contact with trained professionals and agencies.

Working *with* young people involves a considerable amount of ethical and legal deliberation, as relations between the researcher and young people inherently involve a differential power relationship with the researched in a potential position of exploitation. Implicit in the breaking down of boundaries between the researcher and the researched is a heightened approach to ethical considerations embedded in the research process. As Stacey (1988:24) suggests “the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater is the danger”. Conducting research with young people is especially sensitive, as they may feel obliged to take part in the research. This is further complicated by my positionality as a young postgraduate researcher a point I discuss with reference to examples below.

My research focuses on young women aged 14/15, who are still legally defined as minors. However, my research positionality suggests that I treat them as competent adults who can make their own informed decision about whether to become involved in the research, although their parents/guardians and teachers may have had a different opinion with regards their competence. Overall, young people should have the choice to ‘opt in’ rather than ‘opt out’ of research (Alderson, 1995). However, this becomes problematic when participant

observation is one of the main research methods. Young people could not leave the classroom when the teacher had made the decision to allow the researcher to be there, or when the head of year/upper school had decided that I could have access to a specific classroom. I did learn however, through the research process that whilst young people cannot physically 'opt out' of participant observation, they could make their feelings about my presence known through looks and comments. So, I soon realised in which lessons and spaces of the classroom I was accepted and acted accordingly. When asking young people to be involved in the self-directed photography project and the interviews, I made sure that I approached them, explained the project to them in-depth, allowed them time to think about it and then waited for them to come back to me with an answer rather than pressurising them into a decision. I was also explicit about their ability to say no if they were too busy or it did not interest them, and further explained that the teachers would not know whether they had 'opted in' or 'out'.

When it came to both the self-directed photography project and the in-depth interviews, I asked all young people to self-consent to take part in the photography project as well as the interview. I provided them with an outline of what they were being asked to do and then asked them to sign a consent form. I kept a copy of the consent form and gave a copy to the participant (see Appendix One). I explained the ambiguity of consent when working with this age group to the head of upper school and then head of year ten. They seemed happy to accept my argument and agreed that young people could self-consent without me contacting their parents/guardian. From the outset however, I informed young people and teachers that if any parents had questions or wanted more information about my research then my contact details could be given to them. The issues of consent and competency when working with children and young people have been debated in-depth within social science research (for an overview see Valentine, 1999). The test case for consent when conducting research with children/young people is cited as the *Gillick* report. Mrs Gillick took her local health authority to court in order to ensure that 'children' under sixteen could not get access to medical treatment without their parents' consent (see Alderson, 1995 Section 8 for an in-depth discussion of the *Gillick* case and other consent

issues)<sup>8</sup>. The case ruled against Mrs Gillick and according to Priscilla Alderson (1995: 72) this “ruling opened the way for children to have the right to be consulted seriously about all decisions which affect them: medical treatment, residence and contact with their parents, their education, religion and welfare”. There is now a legal definition known as the ‘Gillick competency test’ which states that a competent child is one who:

‘achieves sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to understand fully what is proposed’ and that the competent child has ‘sufficient discretion to enable him or her to make a wise choice in his or her own interests’

Morrow and Richards, 1996: 95, quoted in Valentine, 1999: 143

I decided in discussion with my supervisors and the teachers at school that the young people I worked with were sufficiently competent to self-consent to being part of my research project. Allowing young people to self-consent went well until I had conducted the photography project and an in-depth friendship group interview with one group of white middle-class academic girls (Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë). The parents of one of the girls contacted the school with concern that their daughter had been involved in a research project and that the researcher had not contacted them as her parents to consent to her being part of this project. I discussed in-depth this issue with my supervisors as well as the school. The parents used the ‘research’ practices of the visiting film-maker (see chapter three, 3.4.) to argue that I, unlike the film-maker, was an irresponsible researcher<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps, ironically, it was the girls’ inclusion in the film project that caused fissures within the friendship groups, as I discuss in chapter three. I wrote to the parents and explained the background, methods and ethical considerations of my research, but apologised for any misunderstanding and vowed to inform other parents through a letter (see Appendix One). I had written on the bottom of the young person’s self-consent form that any queries from them or their parents/guardians could be directed to me and I would be more than

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<sup>8</sup> This case was concerned specifically, with a young woman’s right to gain access to contraception and advice on family planning.

<sup>9</sup> The film-maker had put together a package of material for the parents to explain her project to them. Parents had to consent to their daughter being part of the film process. Parental consent was given priority over the young person’s desire to take part in the film. I decided against such an approach at the outset of my research because I wanted all young women to make the decision to be part of my research project, without being influenced by their parents/guardians either way. I recognise that the ethics of each project are different and this should be reflected in their approaches. However, the responses of this family were that the film-maker’s ethics were correct and mine were irresponsible and dangerous.

happy to discuss my project with them in person or over the phone. However, they chose not to do this and after the initial letter which invited the parents to meet with me I heard nothing else from them. After this unfortunate incident I gave all pupils a specific letter for their parent/guardian (see Appendix One), which they could choose to pass on or not. Luckily for me, the school was very supportive and at no time was my access to the research site threatened.

This initial discussion of confidentiality, anonymity and consent explicates some of the ambiguities encountered during my research. In the sections in the remainder of this chapter I use empirical examples from my 'field diary' to illustrate some of the ethical practicalities of being there with the girls, the problems of intervention and complicity in their exclusionary practices, and the difficulties of transferring my politics into practice when working between and within multiple friendship groups in school.

#### *2.4. Being there: the ethics and practicalities of 'in-betweenness'*

According to Gillian Rose (1997) the concept of 'betweenness' has been used by a number of feminist geographers (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Nast, 1997) to describe their experiences of conducting research from a feminist perspective<sup>10</sup>. Their positions as feminist geographers are described as 'between' 'field' and 'not field', between theory and practice and also between researcher and researched (Rose, 1997: 313). As Cindi Katz (1994: 72) writes:

I am always everywhere in "the field" ... By operating within these multiple contexts all the time, we may begin to learn not to displace or separate so as to see and speak, but to see, be seen, speak, listen and be heard in the multiply determined fields that we are everywhere, always in. In this way we can build a politics of engagement and simultaneously practice committed scholarship.

It is this very 'betweenness' that Rose suggests in her discussion of 'situated knowledges' that can be used productively to "forge critical, situated understandings by thinking through difference and similarity" (ibid.313). In the following examples from my field experiences I use the concept of 'in-betweenness' in a number of different ways. Firstly, in what follows, the young

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of 'betweenness' has also been used by Homi Bhabha (1994) in his post-colonial work. See chapter one for a further discussion of the way in which 'in-betweenness' has been used specifically in research with young people.

women as research participants and myself as the researcher, are literally placed 'in-between'. I transgressed age and bodily boundaries of 'pupil', 'teacher', 'adult', and 'child'. I also worked literally 'in-between' groups of girls as well as within groups of girls who are also by their physical age located 'in-between' 'adulthood' and 'childhood'. Furthermore, to some extent my physical age (24/25 at the time of field research) and outward bodily appearance and performance<sup>11</sup> allowed me to access young women's friendship groups across multiple sites during the school day which further added to my 'in-betweenness'. My feminist task therefore:

... becomes less one of mapping difference – assuming a visible landscape of power with relations between positions ones of distance between distinctly separate agents – and more one of asking how difference is constituted, of tracing its destabilizing emergence during the research process itself

Rose, 1997: 313

In the following examples I discuss the ethical dilemmas of my research to show some of the ways in which my status as a young postgraduate feminist researcher engaged my differences in a potentially enabling and transformative way (Katz, 1992).

*“You must admit you look very young”: locating myself within the school as a young postgraduate researcher*

Gill Valentine (1999: 149) highlights that there is an “obvious power imbalance between adults and children in terms of biological age, bodily size, lack of knowledge, experience and social, political and economic status ...”. However, my experience of 'hanging out' *with* teenagers shows that my biological age (24/25 at the time of field research) and embodiment that is my visual appearance (specifically in relation to my height, 5'2”), bodily performance (i.e. how I act, where I sit in class and being with the girls at break and lunch) and dress (similar to teenage fashions) did not necessarily distinguish me enough to highlight the power imbalances that I recognise as intrinsic in my research. From

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<sup>11</sup> The impact of my own embodied identity and bodily performances will be discussed in greater depth in the following sections. However, I am white, short (5ft2in) and my dress sense is quite youthful! My age is frequently mistaken both inside and outside the research context. I am often (mis)recognised as an undergraduate student which has implications on my teaching and relationships with students.

my first few visits to Hilltop I should have known that I would be an 'inappropriate other' (Trinh. Minh-Ha, 1988). Hilltop is a split location school, the youngest people at upper school are 14, and there is no school uniform to immediately distinguish the pupils from staff and other visitors. On my second visit to Hilltop to meet the head of year 10 I was taken into the staff room and introduced to the head of Geography who I had previously spoken to on the phone. The first thing she said to me was "You know when you build up a picture in your mind about someone, well it was completely wrong" (research diary). My instinct was that she was referring to my age, and subsequent discussions confirmed this. Even when I had been in lessons for months it sometimes took teachers a while to acknowledge my presence. Many appeared to see an expanse of bodies/faces in which mine did not stand out. I walked the corridors at break time and I was often subject to the same treatment as the teenage girls with whom I was working. At times, I was trampled on and sometimes knocked against the wall, albeit by accident. I have been physically barred from the staff room on several occasions by teachers who knew me, asked to take part in Chemistry experiments which involved me running up and down the stairs and then weighing myself in Newtons, and occasionally asked for my class work/homework:

I wonder at the outset whether the teacher knows that I am not a pupil, I don't say anything and accept the handouts that she gives me along with the other pupils ... The teacher starts to collect the work early, all of a sudden she is stood in front of me asking for my work: "Have you finished your work?", I can tell that Sally and Sonja are both looking at me. "I haven't done it", I reply, she looks blankly at me, "I'm not a pupil" I say hesitantly, at this stage she looks even more confused, I sigh, "I'm a researcher, not a pupil". She hesitates again and then looks really embarrassed. "You must admit you look very young", she says in an accusing manner, as if this is something really negative and something that I need to do something about. "Yes", I reply. I feel really put on the spot, I turn to Sally and say, "I knew that was going to happen, do I look really young?". Sally doesn't seem to think so ... From this point the teacher pays more attention to me in class and uses me as an ally ... when a pupil misbehaves she turns to me and raises her eyebrows or shrugs her shoulders, as if to say "what to do?". I return the glances but also try and avoid them. I feel something of a paradox at the end of the lesson, I have had this teacher tell me "you must admit that you look very young", as if this is my fault and Mr Jenner during registration mistaking me for a teacher, all this in the space of an hour.

research diary

Teachers usually knew who I was in advance of the lesson because I had asked for their permission to be present. However, on some occasions when the usual

teachers were away, incidences like the above extract occurred. I usually introduced myself to new or supply teachers at the beginning of the lesson and made sure they consented to my presence. Nonetheless, on the above occasion I entered the class with the girls and by the time I realised that it was not the usual teacher the lesson had already started. The supply teacher appeared visibly on edge about being asked to teach PSHE, and I could not find an appropriate moment to introduce myself without disrupting the lesson. I also feared that I would end up being embroiled in 'policing' classroom behaviour.

My experience of being neither a teacher nor a pupil (but at times mistaken for one or the other) allowed me to inhabit a very ambiguous space which frequently left me in difficult positions with teachers and the pupils alike, as the following incident highlights:

When I arrived for registration there was a hell of a lot of noise. I sit down in my usual area and wait ... The bell rings to signal the end of registration, nobody has turned up to take the register. I ask Jayne what they do when this happens. She says it depends, sometimes one of the pupils goes to fetch someone, but she adds "then, they're in for it". Or, she says, what usually happens is that they wait and they are late for next lesson. Olivia adds that it is only PE next so that is what they will do. I begin to worry now, what do I do? I think about the 'tests' that Valerie Hey (1997) talks about in her ethnography, this could be one of mine. I know that the teachers will think that I should be responsible and go and get a teacher, tell the office or send them to their next lesson ... I feel in an awkward position, I know from Jayne's comment that they will not be very impressed if I go and alert someone. I also think about just going to my next lesson and pretending that I haven't seen them, but they may think that I have told someone, or someone may see me ... All of a sudden Abi lets out a shriek, 'Oh Shit', I think, I feel like a naughty school girl. A teacher has arrived ... everyone scrambles for a seat and there is silence. They know that they are in for it. I feel so guilty, I try and bury my head on the desk in my bag and avoid the teacher's eye contact by sitting with my head behind Zoë's.

research diary

A right rollicking ensued, but somehow I managed to get away with not being spotted and luckily 10 Red (the registration group) did not get a detention - as I would have felt compelled to go. I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to negotiate the school without seeing the teacher in question. Whilst this situation was unnerving it was also productive: I gained an insight, albeit small, into the everyday experiences of these young people's lives and got a chance to see how they interacted with their peers and teachers in my presence. In addition, I felt that by being present during these interactions my rapport and acceptance was tested and perhaps partially 'secured'. Over time and space my position in the

classroom shifted, sometimes I was ignored or given curious glances and other times I was partially included in their 'antics'! However, I also recognise that I was placed in a position of quasi adult authority by pupils and teachers when I was called upon to sort out a dispute, to watch a lesson for five minutes whilst the teacher popped out or act as a teaching assistant in a lower English set.

Over time pupils learnt that I would not 'tell on' them but I frequently felt caught between the pupils and the teachers. Given that I have prior teaching experience, I often had empathy with teachers who sometimes struggled to gain the attention, and respect, of their teenage students. By colluding with their non-curricular activities in the classroom I sometimes felt disloyal to teachers and feared losing access to the classroom.

### *Working between and within young women's spaces of friendship*

As I discussed in section 2.2. of this chapter, gaining access to a research school was initially problematic and time consuming. However, unlike other research, (Hey, 1997) once the head teacher, head of upper school and head of year ten at 'Hilltop' had agreed to my presence my access to the site of the school was luckily never threatened. Access to young women's spaces of friendship however, proved slightly more problematic and spatially and temporally contingent on the girls' perspectives and my own levels of discomfort.

Research on the ethics of working with young people and children suggests that working within the context of a school where adults are given authority makes it very difficult for children and young people to refuse to take part in research (Alderson, 1995; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001; Morris, Woodward and Peters, 1998; Valentine, 1999). As I stated earlier however, throughout my period of participant observation it was easy to identify the lessons I was welcome in by pupils and teachers and those that I was not. Over time as the young people became aware that I was not a teacher, a new pupil or a schools inspector any authority I was given was relinquished, especially when I could not help them with questions in Maths or Chemistry! Thus, any young women who did not want to speak to me were able and quite happy to snub my presence

leaving others, who were more willing, to accommodate me. This starts to emphasise the ambiguity of my position in the classroom with the girls.

So far it could be concluded that because of my relative closeness in age, my ability to know what they were talking about (usually gained by reading the latest edition of 'Sugar' or watching quite a bit of TV) and my inability to enact and embody the girls' perceptions of 'adulthood', I was to some extent accepted into the friendship groups with which I worked. Nevertheless, I have learnt through my research that this is a rather naive and problematic assumption to make. The girls I did in-depth research with made me very welcome, but I frequently found myself saying "when I was at school...". I hated this as I felt it sounded condescending, but it served to remind me that the ten years that separated us did make a difference in experience - even with the girls who came from a similar socio-economic background to myself.

Furthermore, whilst I recognised some of their everyday experiences and practices and remember taking part in them myself, I found many situations difficult to deal with, especially around such issues as 'bullying' and name calling as the following example highlights:

Some of the boys start arriving, then Sally, followed by Natalie. They both sit to the side of me. One of the boys, Karl, who is sitting near me on the other side shouted Bulldozer at Natalie, she ignores him, although she looks quite embarrassed. She seems to be really shy and appears to be conscious about her bodily size in the way that she moves. She was ill last week and spent most of the time in the lesson with her head in her arms, she did the same this week ... I feel for her and I want to turn around and shout at Karl, but I don't feel able to do this, I don't even trust myself to turn around and look at him ... He tries to grab her attention a number of times, but she ignores him.

research diary

This incident occurred in a Geography lesson with a teacher present, who either was oblivious to the interaction or chose to ignore it. I however, was sat between Karl and Natalie, so the interaction was going on literally over my head. This is a prime example of the type of oppressive behaviour I wanted to challenge through my research agenda and 'politics of intervention', but I felt unable to do so in this particular situation. Incidents like these placed me in an awkward position. By being there, I felt complicit in the 'bullying' and wished many times that I could stop it or at least somehow intervene. Moreover, I felt that direct interference on my part would potentially worsen matters for Natalie, affect my

position in the group and place myself in a position of quasi-authority that I wanted to distance myself from. I endeavoured to counter the bullying behaviour of Karl by taking an interest in Natalie's experiences through my research. However, all my action did is perhaps ease some of Natalie's pain and attempt to alleviate my feelings of guilt and complete inadequacy at not being able to intervene in this oppressive situation. Nevertheless, it is the ethics of dealing with Karl's verbal abuse and my lack of intervention at that moment that challenged the politics and practice of my research.

I felt helpless and perhaps complicit in oppressive behaviour when present during overt verbal bullying, but by the very nature of spending time with multiple friendship groups I put myself in difficult positions both between and sometimes within 'friendship' groups. To outline but one example I now focus on Faith, Ani, Ruth and Jo who I met in Maths, a group of girls who are part of the wider friendship nexus labelled the 'alternatives' discussed in chapter five. Faith was the first young woman who really spoke to me and took an interest in my research, she in turn introduced me to Ani, Ruth and Jo who also welcomed me as a distraction in their Maths lesson last thing on a Monday afternoon. They were very open and candid with me, we discussed what we had been up to, how my research was going and they told me about the disputes that were going on with their 'arch-enemies', the so-called 'Townies'. Whilst I felt very privileged to be accepted into their discussions I found myself feeling constantly on edge about being there. Some of the girls they referred to were in the same class, and by the very fact of aligning myself to Faith, Ani, Ruth and Jo I was excluded from the other girls who sat on the opposite side of the room<sup>12</sup>. This not only affected my position in Maths, but also in other spaces in school, where I was sometimes on the receiving end of the stares that excluded Faith, Ani, Ruth and Jo, again placing me in an ambivalent situation 'in-between' groups of girls.

Furthermore, whilst Jo sat with the other girls in Maths she was to some extent separate from them and was not described by Faith, Ani and Ruth as being part of their immediate friendship nexus. This only really became a problem when it came to doing the in-depth research:

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<sup>12</sup> For a further exploration of the complex micro-spatialities of this group see chapter five.

I am concerned about Jo, she seemed to presume she was automatically involved in the photography project, I have nothing against this, but I know that Faith, Ruth and Ani don't really hang around with her and they didn't envisage her being involved before the Easter break ... Shit, I thought there wasn't going to be any friction because Jo had moved away from the group but then she came back and stood right next to me when I was explaining the cameras to the girls. I only had three camera packs with me, I carried on explaining things with Faith, Ruth and Ani and then when they were signing the consent forms I turned to Jo and said "Unfortunately I don't have enough cameras I was wondering whether I could interview you, perhaps we could talk about it next week?". I felt like shit and she looked a little rejected in her face, but I didn't want to encourage her to be involved if the group hadn't invited her ...

research diary

When I knew that there were complex dynamics within a group I tried to negotiate these by speaking to the girls separately outside the lesson. However, on this occasion the girls had engaged me in conversation about photography when Jo was there, they were potentially not quite as aware as me of the possible impact<sup>13</sup>. My politics of allowing Faith, Ani and Ruth to 'opt in' to my research had in practice excluded and marginalised Jo, and by providing some form of compromise, my actions may have made her feel even more marginalised. In this case I was placed in an ambiguous situation 'in-between' the group members.

Sitting with Faith, Ruth and Ani in Maths provided them with a good excuse not to do any work, although I was constantly trying to find strategies to deal with this:

I am conscious of the fact that they are not doing any work, hence my attempt to look in my filofax and write in my diary, but it only interests them more. Faith has developed the art of reading upside down and I can tell that Jo's looking over my shoulder. I explain to them that I am worried that Mr Lenton will think that I am disrupting them, but Faith says that they don't do any work anyway and that I am a convenient distraction. However, I know that Mr Lenton will not think this, and I want them to get on with their work and do well ... They start asking me what I am writing, and can I read things out of my diary to them, I explain about confidentiality issues ...

research diary

From the very outset of the research Faith asked me about what I wrote in my diary. When I entered 'the field' I had every intention of sharing my diary with the girls, but in practice I have found this problematic - especially when they could read things about other pupils and/or teachers. Instead I attempted a

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<sup>13</sup> Although I realise that this could have been a strategic move on behalf of Ruth, Faith and Ani to overtly exclude Jo.

compromise by openly sharing information when it concerned them directly or incidents that they had been involved in. Ideally, I would have liked a reciprocal relationship with the girls where we all shared information. However the power relations were such that I knew that sharing information on other people would be breaking confidentiality and may have caused conflict. Furthermore, when chatting with girls they involved me in their lives and requested that I involve them in mine by sharing personal information or asking me to comment on topics they were talking about. This became immensely difficult in an environment where for the most part 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Epstein and Johnson, 1994) is a given. I found it very difficult to join in on a conversation about the merits of Michael Owen's legs (Liverpool footballer), as the next section will outline in relation to challenging 'compulsory heterosexuality' in the school context.

To some extent I know that my age helped me to relate to the young people involved in my research and enabled me to gain access to their spaces of friendship, but this caused anxiety. Whilst the girls did not treat me like a friend, I think they felt more relaxed with me than a teacher and so were able to tell me things that were going on in their lives. Nobody confided anything which was a serious child protection issue to me, but by 'hanging around' with the girls and hearing the comments they made (i.e. family situations), and from being in the staff room (where young people's situations were discussed) I knew that many young people were involved in very difficult situations, which, as I am not a trained youth or social worker I would have been unable to deal with. Thus, on some occasions I made the choice not to pursue certain conversations, as I knew this could have placed them and myself in an awkward situation. One such situation arose which raised a plethora of ethical ambiguities and complexities which form the final part of this chapter on power, responsibility and ethics. But before I discuss this the next section looks specifically at the problems raised by doing work on 'compulsory heterosexuality' in the secondary school context.

### *Colluding in 'compulsory heterosexuality'?*

In chapter four I discuss in greater detail some of the theoretical and policy debates concerning sexuality and schooling. However, for the purpose of this chapter it is important to highlight a number of ethical issues that arose. Unlike many schools in the UK Hilltop does have a comprehensive PSHE programme in which gay, lesbian and bisexual issues are discussed and debated openly (see chapter four). However, throughout my research, both within the PSHE classroom and in other spaces at Hilltop, I often felt that as a researcher I colluded in the (re)production of the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). I did this in two ways. The first example illustrates how I failed on a number of occasions to challenge the use of overtly heterosexist language by young men. I was sitting in History with Olivia, Zoë and Jayne, who were working diligently as usual on their course assignment<sup>14</sup>. We were sitting second row from the front and Adam and Larry were sitting behind us, the following interaction ensued:

“Olivia, you’re a lesbian aren’t you?” ... I take a deep breath ... I start to feel uncomfortable, I am wary to look at Olivia or twist in my seat to look at the boys. I feel guilty but I don’t want them to start on me. Olivia just replies “yeah”, she appears calm and not embarrassed at all, certainly not how I used to feel when I was in her position at school. After a few more shouts of lesbian, Larry says “you all are, aren’t you?”, Olivia just replies “yeah” again ... Jayne replies “occasionally”, then Olivia and Jayne joke about being lesbians at the weekend ...

research diary

I was surprised but pleased by the way Olivia and Jayne responded to the boys’ attempts to insult them, but throughout this interaction I felt very uncomfortable. From previous interactions with Larry and Adam I expect they wanted the girls to get upset or defensive when their presumed heterosexuality was called into question. I suspect however, that Olivia and Jayne were able to deal productively with the previous incident because of their popularity and respectability at school. Thus far this incident remains a ‘humorous’ interaction. However:

Adam turns to Larry and says “you’re gay...”, Tom replies “yeah, I’ve got a roll of wrapping paper in my bag” (perceived as phallic), Ashley retorts “Oh and I bet you use it”. This exchange was all said in a playful manner between the two

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<sup>14</sup> The following research diary extracts are also used in chapter three (see 3.4.) in another context.

... Steven who is on the front row leans over to Maggie, and says in a fairly loud and brusque manner "Are you a lesbian", she totally ignores him and looks down, she blushes and appears embarrassed ... Larry and Adam cease making comments to the girls and continue exchanges between themselves, these appear to be a list of insulting heterosexist comments such as "prostitutes.....faggots....sucking cock".

research diary

There is obviously a lot in this short extract that could be unpacked concerning constructions of femininity, heterosexuality and peer group culture, and I do this in chapter three (see 3.4.). However, here I want to emphasise one point: that is, my feeling of powerlessness when I was sitting in this lesson. This incident occurred during a week when there was another unsuccessful call in parliament to abolish Clause 28, and media and political debates were strewn with popular homophobia. Furthermore, the above extract co-incided with the start of the year ten course on sexuality, and this did little to reduce my despair at the levels of popular homophobia articulated by some young people in school. I sat there mute and very angry about my inability to intervene or question Larry and Adam on their homophobia, or challenge them on their use of inappropriate and offensive language or to support Maggie in her embarrassment.

The second example is subtler than the first and begins to expose the frequently undocumented ways in which 'compulsory heterosexuality' works to silence deviations from the norm. Part of my research necessarily involved 'hanging out' with teenage girls inside and outside lessons. As my research progressed I was increasingly invited into my research participants' spaces of friendship. It has been well documented that much 'girl talk' involves the (re)enforcement of femininities through heterosexualities by talking about boyfriends, romance, heterosex, etc. (Griffin, 1985; Holland, *et al*, 1998; Hey, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). This was fine and all very interesting when I was observing these interactions and not being asked directly for my opinion. However, the more our relationships developed the more the young women wanted reciprocation and contributions on my part, and rightly so. I was sitting with Olivia and Abi in a Religious Education lesson, it was one of the final lessons before the end of term and the teacher was allowing more space for chat:

Olivia and Abi start talking about men/lads they fancy. Olivia fancies Jamie Oliver 'The Naked Chef' who appears on television, she likes the blonde, blue eyed, messy hair 'type' ... They start talking about some lad they like, but they

suggest that he is a little old, he has just turned 25, “that’s outrageous”! I say. Abi asks “you’re not that old are you?” ... They then joke with me “you’re getting on a bit”. Abi starts asking me if I fancy Jamie Oliver, I make some silly comment about his cooking abilities! They then try and think of some older men for me, Jon Bon Jovi is one of them. I try and get around having this conversation with them by talking about his music and concerts, I remark “Jon Bon Jovi’s getting better with age” – I can’t believe I said that.

research diary

Following this gaff the conversation moved on quickly to Abi’s penchant for Michael Owen, a Liverpool football player whose picture was posted all over her RE exercise book. I was quite able and willing to engage with young women about contemporary youth culture, but I found it very difficult to talk ethically with them about fancying ‘hot boys’. I think this small incident reflects how uncomfortable I felt about potentially misrepresenting my feelings to them and consequentially (re)enforcing presumed heterosexuality. I could have lied to them directly as I did on occasions with my friends when I was their age. Instead, I avoided conversations, potentially appeared stand-offish and, as in the above incident, made comments that I would more than likely attribute to someone of an older generation!

Throughout my research I wanted to create an environment of trust where I worked *with* young women rather than for them, allowing them to speak for themselves. However, transferring my reciprocal feminist politics into practice became increasingly problematic when asked for personal information. For me these two examples raised one major disjuncture in doing research with young women on (hetero)sexuality in school. My feminist politics suggest that through my research I question the inevitability of heterosexuality. However, an overriding feeling ensues; rather than questioning and challenging ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ in school I actually perpetuated it. Now, I can aptly leap to my own defence and say this is strategic silencing so that I can survive ‘in the field’ and use my networks elsewhere to challenge; and to some extent this is the case. However, saying “yeah, ok but ...” does not take away the feelings of helplessness and anger I experienced during my research. Neither does it support young gay, lesbian or bisexual pupils, nor does my silence challenge the potency of heterosexism or what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or indeed heterosexual. According to Epstein and Johnson (1994: 225) “[heterosexuality’s] invisibility is part of its power”, thus my practice in the previous examples did

little to expose the ways in which heterosexuality works as a silencing mechanism within the field of education. So, the disjuncture, therefore, is whether it is possible to challenge the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality' without in fact colluding in it yourself? In order to challenge young people's heterosexism I firmly believe that the practices that (re)enforce the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality', thus producing prejudice and discrimination, need to be made apparent 'in the field'. Even when working from the perspective that recognises "for the 'reflexive researcher' to assume that they can be fully aware of their own self-conscious and simultaneously survey the entire landscape of power is extremely problematic" (Maxey, 1999: 201-202). However, how is this to be done when the educational climate is such that researchers, teachers and pupils can only make space for alternative femininities, masculinities and sexualities through strategic silence and collusion?

From my experiences of attempting to put my politics into practice I suggest that collusion can take on many forms and are personal to the specific research process, as well as spatially and temporally contingent. However, through a process of critical reflection I have come to understand my ethical anxieties during participatory research as refracted through a process of (dis)identification. By this I mean that in both examples, consciously or not, I attempted to distance myself from the power relations in the field – something I theoretically recognise is impossible. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, my 'feminist research praxis' aims to develop reciprocal research relationships with participants. Nevertheless, I am left feeling that throughout the research process I actually did the opposite and distanced myself from the research participants because I did not feel comfortable with the dynamics. By disassociating myself however, I feel that I have also become involved in practices of (dis)identification that are central to an understanding of young women's friendship construction at Hilltop. This theoretical awareness should not allow space however, to excuse levels of researcher responsibility and it certainly does not diminish ethical dilemmas and emotions encountered 'in the field'.

One final thought to finish this section. You may be wondering why I have not made explicit my position "as a ..." specific social-sexual category. I have long deliberated this issue and it is still not resolved. For now, I purposely leave my

identifications ambiguous because I want to challenge other critical feminist researchers to consider issues of responsibility and collusion in the research process. Perhaps my ambiguity is yet again a process of (dis)identification which serves to disassociate myself from being fixed through social categorisation, and one which does an injustice to my political responsibilities. But I wonder whether it makes a difference to an interpretation of my practice and my collusion in 'compulsory heterosexuality'? Am I more likely to be excused from this collusion if I identify as straight or gay? Does it make it easier to challenge heterosexism if you do not take it personally? Or have you just presumed my sexuality?

### *Power, responsibility and ethics*

I want to finish this chapter with a discussion of some of the ethics that arose in the final few months of my research in school when I was asked to accompany the 'alternative' girls to the park one lunchtime. I got quite excited at this prospect, not only had I been asked to join the girls outside the boundaries of the school but they told me that their friendship was based on territory (see 5.4.) and as a Geographer this affirmed my disciplinary allegiance! I accompanied the girls a number of times to the park and I felt my research was progressing. However, on my third visit I started to feel uncomfortable. Faith had asked me previously whether I minded that some of the other pupils smoked? I explained that I was in an awkward situation because I was not a teacher, but that teachers had expectations about my role in school. However, I thought I could probably get away with ignoring smoking, as most teachers did when they saw students smoking outside the school gates. However, one lunchtime I smelt something a little odd!:

Most of the boys are sat over on the stones/benches near the steps ... I smell it before I see it. They are smoking dope, I have a sudden dreading feeling, I can see that one girl is smoking it with the lads, I can't see who else is partaking and I don't want to know. I get the impression that those who don't want to stay away. Rowan asks me if I will 'dob on them'? I explain about my awkward position and try and move the conversation on, I'm not prepared for this, I don't know whether to leave or say that I'm not happy about it. By saying that I'm not happy at this point won't make a difference, I'm worried that if I leave now without saying something this will make it worse. I have now decided that I should just take Faith to the side and tell her that I'm not happy with being there when this is

happening, as an adult I can't condone the smoking of weed in public and at lunchtimes when they have lunch at school. I feel really uncomfortable, especially with the fact that I am sitting with Jo who probably has the most concern about what they are doing, I worry about the impression I am giving by being there and condoning their behaviour.

research diary

As the above extract explicates the odd smell alerted me to the fact that a number of boys and two girls had a penchant for a little weed at lunchtime. Whether I condone smoking cannabis was not an issue. How could I explain that for me to witness this over a sustained period of time during the school day was problematic? My position as a young researcher had allowed me access to the park and they obviously trusted my presence but I felt that I could not remain in the park because I also have a certain amount of responsibility for their behaviour and welfare to the teachers of the school. After this incident I withdrew from going to the park at lunchtime and explained to Faith the reasons for this. However, I did not tell the teachers about their location or their activities, even when some of them were a little blurry eyed in afternoon lessons. Being outwardly young therefore, and not being attributed the status of adult or teacher allowed me to access spaces of friendship but it also made me confront ethical dilemmas that affected and were affected by power relations in the research. Consequently, because of the moral responsibility I felt for the young people's welfare my research did not develop outside the boundaries of school spaces.

### *2.5. Summary: towards a 'politics of intervention' ...*

In this chapter I have sought to make visible some of the ethical concerns that arose out of my personal commitment to a feminist 'politics of intervention' when working with groups of teenage girls. To date, research on the geographies of children and youth has neglected to engage with a feminist 'politics of intervention' in favour of considering the power relations that critical researchers recognise as inherent in research. A continual method of critical reflection inspires me to deliberate over personal and ethical anxieties I encountered during the research process, especially when confronted with oppressive behaviour.

At times ethical anxieties made me question whether there is a place for politics in academic research. However, I maintain a commitment to such research, perhaps even more so when ethical dilemmas appeared insurmountable and/or the 'politics of intervention' did not necessarily transfer into practice in the manner originally envisaged. The ambivalent spaces and politics of location I inhabit through the research process led me to reformulate my feminist research politics towards a politics that is emergent and contingent upon daily ethical experiences rather than fixed and trans-situational (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

In this chapter I have focused in particular on the political and ethical dilemmas that were raised in the school context because of my position as a relatively young postgraduate researcher. I have written the chapter in what I feel to be a very pragmatic way. Research experiences and feelings have been siphoned through my research diary, drafts of the thesis, as well as conference papers and presentations. Regrettably, therefore, some of the intensity, joy, messiness and anguish of doing the research has been lost. But perhaps what has been recovered is the importance of talking about and debating the everyday experiences and dilemmas of the research process. Throughout this chapter I have shown how my age, status and outward bodily appearance allowed me to position myself as 'in-between' - an ambiguous situation to inhabit which gained me access to spaces of friendship.

Nevertheless, this 'in-betweenness' raised more ethical dilemmas than it created productive possibilities and this chapter no doubt raises more questions than it answers. However, it is this 'in-betweenness' that is both incapacitating and productive in the feminist research process. It is the ambiguity and conflict I felt during the research process that alerted me to the multiple contradictions that mediate the girls' discourses and practices of friendship outlined in the following chapters. Moreover, it was being there in context, and documenting young women's experiences, albeit, from a partial perspective, that has given me a small insight into the complexities and ambiguities young women continue to grapple with in their everyday school lives.

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## **Chapter Three. Young women's friendship groups and practices of (dis)identification**

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This chapter explores how young women in this research study negotiate their collective identities of friendship, through practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) within friendship groups at school. This chapter explores the obvious and deliberate contradiction in the previous statement. How can young women in practice sit in huddles at break, always choose the same place in class, appear to share tastes in fashion and music, meet up at specified points at lunch and exchange notes and secrecies without recognising their friendships (similarities)? What investments do young women have in denying the importance of collective identities when friendship in practice is such an important feature of everyday school life?

Research to date on young women's friendships suggest that the "social rules [of friendship] are based on the exact opposite of undisciplined individualism" (Hey, 1997: 65). Strikingly however, it is the discourse of individuality that permeates young women's explanations of their experiences in year ten at Hilltop. It is through young women's insistence on the importance of individuality that their involvement in a complex and often contradictory web of (dis)identifications becomes apparent. That is not to say the young women whose experiences provide the backdrop to this chapter are involved in overt practices of exclusion and distancing practices such as verbal and physical abuse. In fact, it is the complete opposite. All young women involved in this research are heavily invested in a discourse of inclusion and acceptance, crystallised through the statement "we're all friends here". This proves yet another contradictory message to the visibly distinct groups that are discernable to the eye. However, it is through these (dis)identifications with age/immaturity, white working-class (hetero)sexuality, and academic ability, that young women's investments in not being fixed become apparent and central to their movement towards appropriate and respectable womanhood.

Nevertheless, whilst discursively young women are able to invoke individuality as central to their identity constructions, in practice, not all young women are accepted as appropriately individual; and this is where the young women's experiences diverge from those stipulated in recent academic research on the individualization of youth in late modernity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991, see chapter one 1.1.). Whilst initially it may appear from this research that young women are acting individually, rather than collectively, it is within these very collectives that young women attempt to come to terms with their move towards adulthood. Trying to articulate a discourse of individuality within a friendship group highlights many contradictions for young women who occupy a space of in-betweenness between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. However, by dealing with these contradictions within friendship groups, rather than focusing on the differences between groups, it allows the young women in this study to sustain wider discourses of acceptance and individuality which are central to their identity productions. Thus, this discourse of individuality could be described as an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) which serves to draw the attention away from the power relations that are inherent in the formation of friendship and mask lines of discrimination based on gender, class, 'race' and sexuality.

This chapter, therefore, begins by outlining the immediate and most obvious (dis)identification that girls invoke - a distancing from childhood and immature behaviour, symbolically constructed in their move from lower to upper school (3.1.). Then using the experiences of three groups of young women - Rachel and Kat; Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen; and finally Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë - the chapter looks at three separate practices of (dis)identification between groups of friends: bodily performances of working-class white (hetero)sexuality (3.2.); 'Asianness' (3.3.); and 'nice middle-class academic' girls (3.4.). I have chosen to focus on these three practices because they proved the most convincing throughout my analysis (see chapter two, 2.2.). Furthermore, whilst these three groups have distinct (dis)identifications both between and within their friendship groups, the tensions and contradictions within the groups serve to highlight the similarities in their processes of (dis)identification, as well as their differences

(for a further discussion on analysis see chapter two). Finally, I end this chapter with a summary of the main points explicated (3.5.).

### *3.1. 'Havin' a laff' with the 'lads': the symbolic construction of lower school as a space of immaturity*

This section provides an introduction to the theoretical framework of (dis)identifications (Skeggs, 1997), which is imperative to understanding the friendships of year ten girls at Hilltop. The section comprises two parts. In the first I discuss how lower school (years 7-9) becomes imbued as a symbolic location of immaturity that young women are able to distance themselves from on their move towards adulthood and individuality. The girls use the boys' objectification of the girls' bodies as an example of immaturity to (re)enforce their distance from lower school. However, by doing so the girls introduce the second part of this section and that is the contradictions that they face in year ten if they continue to label boys as immature. The girls attempt to reframe their relationships with the boys in year ten by suggesting that "they're alright for a laff". However, in practice this chapter shows that "havin' a laff" with the 'lads' often means (re)enforcing dominant performances of masculinity and femininity from which the young women are attempting to distance themselves.

#### *Lower school as a space of immaturity:*

From the outset of my research young women and teachers suggested that if I really wanted to look at peer group culture in school I should go to lower school. Here, I was told, girls were always fighting, falling out with each other and name-calling. It is as if disruptive behaviour makes friendship visible, in that friendship only becomes named when it is threatened. Friendship appears, as Vivienne Griffiths (1995: 75) suggests, "synonymous with falling out". Furthermore, for teachers at least, peer social relationships are issues for younger pupils at school. The physical move from lower to upper school at Hilltop appears to signify a transitional move towards maturity and adulthood. Pupils are expected to be working individually towards their exams and futures rather than engaging in the collective immature and childish behaviour of falling out.

The teachers' expectations concerning young people's behaviour in school and their dismissiveness of friendship reflects the changing nature of education in late modernity, where young people's experiences of schooling have involved a dual process of standardization and diversification (Olk, 1988 in Chisholm, *et al*, 1990) and where pupils are expected to negotiate an increased number of risks at school individually rather than as members of a collective (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997 following Beck, 1992 and Giddens, 1991).

The summer months from year nine to ten are discursively constructed between girls as a transitional space of maturity:

Rachel: ... whereas at lower school you felt like a right little child

Kat: Yeah, when you go back for PE, walking back into that building it's like being back at primary school, it's horrible

Rachel: You're not allowed out, out of any gate at dinner time ...

Kat: ... at all

Rachel: ... you've got to, something about on the stairs?

Kat: Oh yeah, there's a code...

Rachel: there's a code, sort of things, isn't it?

Kat: Yeah, if you want to ...

Rachel: Yeah, if you want to walk up the stairs you have go like on the left hand side and if you want to walk down the stairs you have to walk down the right hand side. See, and nobody does it ...

Kat: No, it just like that (makes gesture) ... it's pathetic isn't it?

Rachel: It's sad, some of the teachers just treat you like you are babies.

Rachel and Kat

In order to distance themselves from childhood, lower school is constructed as a space of control, full of rules and regulations to maintain discipline which is labelled belittling and unnecessary. In opposition, upper school is a step forwards and represents a move towards maturity and adult status, as Louisa explains:

You have to get your lunch, all of that and everything, take your work more seriously ... we do, because like it's the exams innit this year and year nine it was like a skive (group laughter), it were, cos' we didn't do any work in year nine, we just, I don't know ... You didn't have to concentrate ... They treat us, I don't know, like, we are older, we are treated by our age, like in year nine we were treated like a two year old. You're not to go outside, you're not allowed to eat outside ...

In relation to lower school pupils at upper school are given more freedom to make their own choices, as being allowed off site at lunch time signifies, for example. The added pressure of mock exams in year ten and the threat of G.C.S.Es<sup>1</sup> the following year are enough, for girls at least, to realise that they have to be seen to take their work seriously. The move in location, verbalised through a move from down to up, therefore is used by the girls as a symbolic construction of age and maturity. As Rachel puts it succinctly:

I think when you get up here, you realise how old you actually are ... 'cos I mean down there, especially down there at break you've got people at break play fighting and chasing each other about. But at break here you've got people standing around talking. I think when they get up here they realise the change and stop acting so immature.

Running around and messing about is designated childish behaviour by many of the girls and replaced by the more adult pastime of standing around and chatting<sup>2</sup>. Like other researchers (Griffiths, 1997; Hendry *et al*, 1993; Hey, 1997; Thorne, 1993) I rarely saw young women taking part in non-sedentary activities outside lessons, whereas many of their male peers were more active in their pursuit of football or basketball. To be seen to be adult for girls is not to take part in behaviour constructed as childish. Some girls did play football and took part in other team sports but they did this after school or at weekends away from their peers at school.

Through the symbolic construction of lower school as a space of immaturity, young women are able to distance themselves from childhood. In stark contrast to social policy<sup>3</sup> and contemporary academic debates (Aitken, 2001; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; 2000b; James, 1986; 1993; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; James and Prout, 1990; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Prout and James, 1990; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta and Wintersberger, 1994; Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Valentine, Skelton and Chambers, 1998) that aim to understand children and young people as legitimate social actors and beings (Holloway and Valentine,

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<sup>1</sup> This is an acronym for the 'General Certificate in Secondary Education'. These are exams taken by 15 and 16 year old pupils in the UK at the end of their compulsory schooling.

<sup>2</sup> Girls appear to distance themselves from the physical body through designating certain activities childish. The mind, associated with 'adulthood' (James, 1986), is given greater worth by young women when they suggest that they prefer hanging around and chatting.

<sup>3</sup> Mission statements for the majority of charities and social organisations that work with children and young people emphasise the importance of listening to the experiences of children and young people, respecting their views and understanding childhood as a valid period in a person's life. See for example Barnardo's, local council youth department initiatives etc.

2000b), girls in this study are active in producing themselves as human becomings, as adults in the making. Thus, like socialization theory (James and Prout, 1990) girls produce childhood and their recent experiences as insignificant, a condition of immaturity that all children pass through (James, 1993) and which they have left behind at lower school. As James (1986: 156) suggests therefore “‘adolescence’ can be described as a liminal experience, but it is a rite of passage to adulthood which adolescents construct for themselves in the absence of any institutionally conducted transition to the adult world”. The move from lower to upper school is not officially an institutional transition, as most secondary schools in the UK have all their pupils from the age of 11 to 16 or 18 located on one site. However, the girls’ understandings of their age and maturity at Hilltop are filtered through a physical and symbolic move from lower to upper school, from childhood on the way towards adulthood.

*“Havin’ a laff with the lads”*

The physical move of location between lower and upper school is characterised by girls as a symbolic move towards maturity and socially significant adulthood. However, it is not only the move in location which allows young women to (re)interpret themselves as mature but also the discursive construction of boys at lower school as immature:

... the lads sort of seem to pick on anyone that, that wasn’t like a size 6 and blonde and had like a really like, like “arggh” (girlie noise) stupid appearance, but now they seem to have grown up slightly (laughter). There’s a lot, the people are sort of more grown up here, which is, it was quite different actually, ‘cos people like changed over night from lower school

Cordelia

For me, moving up here, the end of Year 9. Like, cos’ in like Year 7 the lads were really horrible weren’t they? You only needed to wear a top and it was like “Oh my God, you look so fat in that” or, or something like that, weren’t they? They were quite nasty ... to everyone, they were really horrible, now they seem alright actually

Abi

According to research participants, teachers and participant observation at lower school, visible displays of verbal and physical harassment are more prevalent between pupils in the first three years at secondary school. As Cordelia and Abi suggest power struggles between young people, particularly between young men

and women are frequently played out on the body as a performance of institutionalised male power and heterosexuality (Holland, *et al*, 1998). Lower school is described by pupils as an 'edgy' environment, marked by flux and instability (James, 1993: 107 following Rapport, 1990). Few pupils know more than a handful of other pupils assigned to their form as they have come from feeder schools located all over the city. Pupils therefore, have to consolidate relationships and make friends fast which according to teenage girls' experiences of lower school often relies on boundary marking through categorisations and stereotypes, as Sibley (1995: 14) notes:

Stereotypes play an important part in the configuration of social space because of the importance of distancing in the behaviour of social groups, that is distancing from others who are represented negatively, and because of the way in which groups of images and place images combine to create landscapes of exclusion

Girls imbue lower school with social categorisation and recollect in particular their experiences of being seen and treated as sexual objects by boys<sup>4</sup>. Lower school is constructed as a physically aggressive environment, where bodies (physical appearance, size, bodily parts, colour, smell, style, clothing) are used to demarcate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and where young women construct a sense of belonging through friendship (James, 1986).

By using the boys' objectification of their bodies as an example to locate immaturity in lower school and their successful negotiation of the move towards adulthood the girls reach a twofold contradiction in their (dis)identification. Firstly, now they are at upper school if the girls continue to describe boys as immature they directly contradict one of their dominant discourses, that of their discourse of acceptance that suggests "we're all friends here" at upper school. This statement is supposed to include all pupils, young men and women<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, and linked to the previous point, if girls were to label boys as immature in the same manner as they reflect back on at lower school then they

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<sup>4</sup> Girls do discuss exclusionary behaviour by other girls, see chapter five. However, more emphasis is placed on boys' bodily control, this may be because girls do not wish to label young women as involved in this behaviour because they realise the potential negative effects to their femininity.

<sup>5</sup> At first the statement "we're all friends here" appears collective. However, I argue that it is used by young women at Hilltop to act as a strategy to mask boundaries between and within friendship groups. Thus, reproducing the girls' investments in discourses of individuality and acceptance.

could risk being labelled as non-heterosexual by girls and boys<sup>6</sup>. To question 'compulsory heterosexuality' in such a way potentially results in sanctions such as name calling (lezzer/dyke) and a withdrawal of friendship (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Hey, 1997; Holland *et al*, 1998) This is discussed in more depth in chapter five when I examine the construction of the 'alternative' young women's friendship group<sup>7</sup>. By relegating 'lads' behaviour to the past young women socially sanction and (re)enforce the dominance of white working-class masculinity, epitomised by Willis' 'lads' (1977) and actively produce themselves as girls who get on with their male peers. Note the girls' use of 'lads' in the majority of quotations when questions have been phrased using boys. Not all boys treat girls as sexual objects or take part in displays of heterosexism, but as other research on schooling sexualities has shown (Duncan, 1999; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Kenway and Willis, 1998; Nayak and Kehily, 1997) young men have investments in heterosexism to (re)produce the dominance of masculinity. Name calling, an everyday occurrence for some young men<sup>8</sup>, although explained away by jest, frequently sanctions boys who are seen to spend too much time with girls (poof/girl), who take pride in their work or get on with teachers (swot/muppet) and who do not get involved in sex talk and brag about sexual conquests (queer, poof, woman, bent). By being seen to take part in activities that are labelled feminine (reading/chatting) and/or (dis)identifying with behaviour designated 'masculine' (sport/bragging/name calling/objectifying girls) in school has implications for masculinities (Connel, 1987; 1989; Haywood

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<sup>6</sup> One-way to avoid this is to date an older boy or make explicit that you have desires for someone older or outside of your school context. However, the girl then risks being labelled a 'slag' because of her links to an older person of the opposite sex.

<sup>7</sup> The extent to which these risks are hypothetical or empirically quite prevalent is difficult to determine. The complexity of the girls' (dis)identifications and their investments in a discourse of individuality is such that I find it impossible to say whether their responses are reflective of real risks. However, I do suggest that their responses are delivered through their experiences at lower school which from their discursive accounts suggest that name calling there was prevalent and an everyday occurrence for some girls (and boys).

<sup>8</sup> The extent to which this name-calling occurs is not within the remit of this thesis. However, a number of boys in upper school whose performance of masculinity deviate from the perceived norm in one way or another (bodily performance etc. see James, 1993) bear the brunt of name calling. Name-calling however, is often subtle, under the breath and away from the teachers' gaze. At upper school it is far more likely to be sporadic rather than persistent, as boys that are verbally harassed have learnt to spend time away from their male peers within and outside the classroom context. Furthermore, name calling, in conversation with me and in PSHE, is often explained away as a mild form of joking, that pupils should learn to put up with (see chapter four).

and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Nayak and Kehily, 1997; Thorne, 1993).

Girls therefore (re)frame their present relationships with their male peers in order to manage the twofold contradiction:

Kathryn: Umm ... so, if you, do you actually class the boys as your friends then?

Group: Yeah

Kathryn: So, what type of, do you have different relationships with them, that you do with, with all of you lot and things ... Do you talk to them about things that you talk to each other about?

Group: Naa, no

Lousia: We just know them

Rona: We just mess about with boys

Louisa: Yeah

Rona: You can have a laff with boys, you can with girls but sometimes they might take it the wrong way

Louisa: Yeah, like with boys they will mess about in class or whatever, and sometimes they'll do things that'll make you laff ...

Heather, Rona, Lena and Louisa

By labelling 'lads' as "good for a laff" they both acknowledge their immaturity but at the same time refuse to completely (dis)identify with the opposite sex that could potentially risk their investments in (hetero)sexuality. By relegating boys' negative behaviour to the past girls have little option but to produce present relationships as positive and more tolerant. This leaves little room for active masculinity and gendered discrimination to be held accountable<sup>9</sup> or for present behaviour to be discussed and criticised. Whilst girls maintain that they are friends with boys the majority of girls still spend most of their time in all girl groups at school, inside or outside the classroom context. Or if they are mixed gendered groups the use of space is still markedly gender differentiated. For further clarification on this point see the discussion of the 'alternative' girls' use of territory in chapter five. Interchanges between boys and girls are often short comments exchanged across lessons or during break. Furthermore, as the following discussion exemplifies the increased access to space at upper school (signified by being off site at lunch time and being taught in mixed ability and setted groups as opposed to form groups) allows girls to put more space between

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<sup>9</sup> This is similar to discussions that take place in PSHE (see chapter four) when girls justify previous homophobic behaviour particularly by boys in the past as misinformed immaturity.

themselves and the 'lads' whose behaviour at lower school is remembered as most problematic:

Abi: ... they [lads] were really horrible [in lower school], now they seem alright actually.

Olivia: Hmm

Abi: You could put yourself down in front of them now and they'll boost you back up. They would never do that before.

Zoë: Partly, because we don't see as much of our class, which [sic] a lot of people in it ...

Abi: Yeah, yeah

Jayne: And now we are split up a lot more, so the boys that in like Year 7 and 8 we were like with all the time because we were like in lessons with them, I mean I hardly ever see them now ...

Abi: No

Jayne: ... 'Cos I'm not in their lessons, it's just registration

Abi: And it's nice, 'cos when we do get together it's, not 'special' (emphasis) as in my God it's brilliant, but ...

Jayne: it's enjoyable

Abi: ... you get on well because you haven't seen each other for a few lessons so you can talk to them about the lessons you have just had, or you can talk about so and so because they're not in that lesson. So, that's quite good about having lessons that are separate from your form.

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë

From the girls' comments there is no way to quantify whether boys' behaviour has actually changed from lower to upper school. Rather, it is possible to glean from their observations that the girls are involved in an ambiguous relationship with their male peers. They rely on framing boys as immature in order to make investments in their own maturity but at the same time they are aware that distancing themselves completely from the opposite sex works against their investments in femininity (Holland *et al*, 1998; Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, 1990).

Nevertheless, as girls' experiences at lower school can attest to, for the boys "havin' a laff" frequently relies on the objectification of girls' bodies. Therefore, the reframing of their relationships with their male peers inadvertently excuses and further socially sanctions normative, active and often oppressive performances of masculinity. As Janet Holland and colleagues (1998: 171) suggest:

By understanding gender identities as tied together in an unequal yet dynamic relationship it becomes clearer that the achievement of conventional masculinity and femininity are mutually dependent. In producing themselves as feminine, young women can play an active role in constituting and reproducing male dominance.

That is not to say that young women are culpable for the way in which boys in school objectify them, but rather there are few options for them to successfully negotiate the liminal space of adolescence. By repackaging their relationships with boys as based on humour girls attempt to make their way through this often contradictory time with few risks.

There are many examples in my research diary which suggest in practice that the ability of girls to “have a laff” with the ‘lads’ is dependent on a variety of variables. Namely the popularity of the young people involved, their investments in femininity, (hetero)sexuality, class and ‘race’, the time and place of the interaction and the presence of friends to provide a support mechanism. The following interaction in History is just one example which demonstrates some of the complexities of “havin’ a laff” has in practice<sup>10</sup>:

Adam and Larry, who are sat behind me start shouting to Olivia, Jayne and Zoë. They start on Olivia. “Olivia, you’re a lesbian aren’t you?” I can’t make out whether this is Adam or Larry as my back is to them, I take a deep breath and wait for the fallout. I start to feel uncomfortable and am wary to catch Olivia’s eye or twist in my seat to look at the boys. Olivia just replies “yeah”, she appears calm and not embarrassed at all, in fact her and Jayne are giggling and rolling their eyes at each other whilst continuing with their work. After a few more shouts of lesbian, Larry says “you all are, aren’t you?”, Olivia just replies “yeah” again. He then directs his question at Jayne, she replies “occasionally”, then Olivia and Jayne joke about being lesbians at the weekend. Zoë then stands up and goes to get some books, Larry says something to Zoë, but she ignores him. They then ask about Abi, who is not in this lesson ...

research diary

During the above interaction the teacher is either oblivious to the language being used or refuses to interject. Olivia and Jayne respond to Adam and Larry’s name-calling through ‘banter’ which is perhaps not the expected response. Zoë on the other hand chooses to ignore the comments and get on with her work, and for the most part Adam and Larry ignore her because Olivia and Jayne continue to engage with them. In other contexts Zoë frequently retreats from such

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<sup>10</sup> I have chosen this example in particular because it complements my arguments concerning ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ in the PSHE classroom in the next chapter. I have also used this extract in chapter two when I discuss my potential collusion in ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (see 2.4.).

situations where Olivia, Jayne and Abi may “give as good as they get”<sup>11</sup>. A little later in the lesson the heterosexist ‘banter’ continues:

Steven who is sat in front of me leans over to Maggie and says in a fairly loud and brusque manner “Are you a lesbian”, she totally ignores him and looks down, she goes a little pink and looks embarrassed. ... Throughout the lesson Tom and Larry continue with vulgar name calling “prostitutes.....faggots....sucking cock”. Larry then shouts at Olivia “Sexy Olivia”, she turns around with a slight grin on her face, “open a window” Larry says, “get lost” she replies “Ugly Olivia”, he retorts.

research diary

Steven picks up on the ‘banter’ that is going on behind him and decides to ask Maggie the same question. However, the interpretation of his comment is taken differently by Maggie, who responds through closing off her body language, by burying her head in her arms and turning a shade of pink. Unlike Jayne, Olivia and Zoë who have each other as a support mechanism Maggie is sat at the front of the class with a group of boys, one of whom is her boyfriend. She does not have the immediate support mechanism of her friends and she does not appear to receive any support from her boyfriend. The interchange ends there as Steven<sup>12</sup> does not get the desired response and Adam and Larry continue goading Olivia. Olivia’s refusal to open the window and take part in Larry’s ‘game’ meets with a slight on her appearance and desirability.

In this context therefore young women have differential responses to boys just “havin’ a laff”. In practice boys’ humour often relies on treating girls as sexual objects or making comments about their bodies, appearance, behaviour and (hetero)sexuality (Duncan, 1999; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Halson, 1991; James, 1993; Skeggs, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990). In fact, Abi suggests that in order to “have a laff” with boys you have to respond through flirting, which is often used “... as a tactic ... to avoid being positioned by others as sexual; it is seen as playful and non-direct. Flirting is always ambiguous, so can be denied if necessary” (Skeggs, 1997: 127). Potentially therefore, for girls to respond to

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<sup>11</sup> Zoë is a high achiever and often ignores comments in lessons in order to proceed with her work, she noticeably ignores comments from boys. During a Religious Education lesson Zoë leaves the classroom after becoming upset because Dino shows a picture he has drawn of her to his mates. The picture depicts Zoë with spotty skin, she has suffered from acne in the past and her skin is marked. The different responses within this group to boys are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Nayak and Kehily (1997: 145) suggest that not all young men can get away with sex talk to enhance their reputations, for some talking about sexuality to confirm masculine power can backfire for those whose reputations were less macho.

boys' attempts to "have a laff" is to appear to take part in flirtatious behaviour. To do this is to give boys the desired response but at the same time can be delegitimised if young women are at risk from being labelled sexual. But for some girls, like Maggie in the above exchange, they are not able to respond to boys' attempts to "have a laff" through flirting. To do so would risk leaving themselves open to judgement:

Here femininity becomes the ultimate legitimator of masculinity ... it offers to masculinity the power to impose standards, make evaluations and confirm validity. This is also a high risk strategy. Paradoxically, only those who conform to textually mediated masculine ideals of desirability, may have the confidence to expose themselves to judgement. Femininity does not have the discursive power to operate as an authoritative narrative. It is masculinity which provides the authorization

Skeggs, 1997: 112-113

It is usually popular white middle-class girls like Abi and Olivia who are able to respond in practice to boys "havin' a laff". They do not, unlike white working class girls, rely on boys to legitimate their femininity and desirability (Skeggs, 1997).

On many occasions girls look at me and just shrug their shoulders or roll their eyes as if to say "there they go again" and ignore whatever comment or flying object has just been directed at them. They often laugh at the boys' behaviour as long as it does not risk getting them into trouble with teachers<sup>13</sup>. However, as the example above explicates the socially sanctioned masculinity espoused by Willis's (1977) 'lads' allows white working-class young men to use vulgar and aggressive language which if used by their female peers would label them as aggressive and vulgar (Skeggs, 1997). Being fixed as sexual subjects for working-class girls is problematic and will be discussed in greater depth below and in the next chapter. However, from the above discussion it is possible to see that not all young women can "have a laff" with 'lads' in the 'public' forum of the classroom. Nevertheless, by framing their relationships with boys as one based on humour girls validate hegemonic masculinity, render their behaviour

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<sup>13</sup> The majority of girls say that it is much easier to "have a laff" with the boys because displays of femininity are less sanctioned. According to many of the girls with boys you can use vulgar language, mess around and say silly things without being taken too seriously or labelled as not the right kind of girl. As Rona suggests "If someone asks you for some't and you say no, but if you, if a boy had said to a boy "give me a chewing gum" and they said "no, shut up you daft cunt", they wouldn't say nowt, but if you said that to a girl, they'd start cryin' and walk off"

normal, (re)enforce femininity as passive, and thus police their own behaviour (Skeggs, 1997: 126).

The next section of this chapter takes a closer look at the way in which girls in this research study (dis)identify with the significance of their clothed bodies as signifiers of friendship. The concept of the 'Townie' is introduced in order to elucidate how their (dis)identifications give meaning to their performances of class, gender, 'race' and (hetero)sexuality.

### *3.2. (Dis)identifications with the body: performances of white working-class (hetero)sexuality – the 'Townie'*

As discussed in the previous section young women in this study are constantly trying to (dis)identify with lower school and their experiences of their bodies being objectified by boys. This section will exemplify how these understandings shape their present articulations of friendship and performances of class, gender 'race' and (hetero)sexuality.

My initial observations at Hilltop were concerned with the obvious markers of fashion and style that were discernable from the girls' clothed and dressed bodies:

I sit down near the door next to a girl who has a 'Hello Kitty' bracelet on [Zoë]. Pupils, mainly boys are still milling into registration ... I look around the form room ... I notice on the other side of the room a group of four girls by the window. They are sitting close together but there seems to be little verbal interaction between them, apart from the odd comment. This is in stark contrast to the group of girls nearer to me who are reading from Sugar [teenage girls magazine] and whooping in disgust and hilarity at some of the problem page issues. The girls on the other side of the classroom are all white and dressed in a fairly similar style. They all wear trousers, tight T-Shirts and sports coats. Most of them are wearing the sports brand Kappa which is signified by the two girls sitting back to back on the label. They all have small gym/sports bags with them, although I'm not sure how they get all their books in them for the day. Three of them [Heather, Rona, Lena] have their hair tied up in a pony tail with scrunchies and blue eye shadow on, whilst the other [Louisa] has shorter bobbed hair and no make up. The three girls with longer hair have a lot of gold jewellery on, necklaces and nearly a ring on every finger, whilst the other girl has little jewellery or make-up.

research diary

I immediately became aware of these distinctions between groups of girls because of their spatially segregated seating patterns in registration (above) and

in other lessons. The similarities within, and differences between, teenage girls' friendship groups' clothed and styled bodies is striking and concurs with Skeggs' (1997: 82) observation following Bourdieu (1986) that the body plays an important role in the signification of identity:

... the body is the most indisputable materialization of class tastes. Bodies are the physical sites where relations of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced. A respectable body is white, desexualised, hetero-feminine and usually middle class. Class is always coded through bodily dispositions: the body is the most ubiquitous signifier of class.

Nevertheless, no matter the meaning given to the body in social theory or my observations, the girls unequivocally deny the importance of their clothed and styled bodies in the construction of their friendships. Like their (dis)identifications with boys, drawing distinctions between groups of girls through categorisations of style are discussed as a product of the past. Lower school was the place where similarity between group members is espoused and as Cordelia suggests:

Some of the girls look at you a bit dodgy if you are sort of wearing like something that's slightly different to what everyone's (emphasis) wearing, like you're not a sheep anymore, they think it's bad if you're not a sheep...

At lower school it was not good to stand out, to look different from the crowd. Through my research it became apparent that markers of fashion, style and leisure activities were important at lower school in order to 'heighten the perception of similarities within categories' and 'to sharpen the perception of difference between categories' (Taylor, 1981: 84 in James, 1993: 106). However, for girls in year ten naming and labelling groups (social categorisation) is in direct conflict with their investments in their double discourse of individuality and acceptance. To be involved in social categorisation is to be immature like boys. Furthermore, to admit similarity between members of the group signifies conformity (James, 1993) which is at odds with girls' current investments in presenting themselves as individual. In Roger Abrahams' (1983) work on West Indian masculinities there is a clear tension between 'respectability' and 'reputation', and in Skeggs' research individuality is in direct contrast to her research participants' attempts to 'fit-in'. Whereas, in my research, and highlighted here, young women's investments in discourses of individuality appear a significant component in their investments in making themselves respectable. For these young women, to be respectable, is to be seen

to be individual. Although, as I show here in relation to Rachel and Kat, individuality has its own parameters which are refracted through performances of their classed femininities.

Whilst girls distance themselves from the labelling and social categorisation between groups of girls, the groupings in year ten that are socially and spatially manifest in school have historical links to the recent past (lower school) and social categorisation. The importance of the 'Townie' concept first became apparent when speaking with a group of 'alternative' girls at school. The 'alternative' group are the only girls who openly talk about the significance of this categorisation (see chapter five, 5.2.), apart from Rachel and Kat who use the concept to (dis)identify themselves from members of their own group (see below). When talking to other groups of girls about the meaning associated with the label 'Townie' it is immediately recognised but relegated to the past:

Rona: Like ... (Group laughter) ... all these kind of clothes (Rona motions to her clothing), we have been called 'Townies' ...

Louisa: like named

Rona: like the shoes we wear, or anything we wear is named or ...

Kathryn: So is that, is that what it means, yeah you wear branded clothes and that sort of things ...

Lena: Yeah

Rona: yeah

Kathryn: So do you ... do people, do people group you as that then?

Louisa: Naa, no

Rona: No

Louisa: No-one really says it anymore, do they? They just say it as something to do

Rona: They just say it cos' ... (? - muffled)

Heather: It's not clever

Kathryn: Sorry? What did you say

Heather: (laughter) ... (elongated pause whilst the girls look at each other and laugh)

Rona: Street corners

Heather: Street corners

Louisa: Yeah

Kathryn: And that is what they say?

Rona: Or in certain shops

Louisa: Or they wear right tight tops, or right short ones, or, you know what I mean?

Heather: or Shazzas and stuff

Kathryn: So, are 'Townies' always girls then?

Louisa: Yeah

Rona: Yeah, they're not boys

Louisa: Naa

Rona: Boys call it us

Group: Yeah

Louisa: If you wear ...

Rona: Boys call it girls

Louisa: ... if you wear like tight tops for school and like no jacket or whatever, or, whatever ... and I don't know, like peddle-pushers in winter and whatever

Rona: wow, freezin ...

Heather, Rona, Louisa and Lena

In the above quotation Heather, Rona, Lena and Louisa recognise that in the past their clothed and made-up bodies have signified their status as 'Townie'<sup>14</sup>. However, whilst social categorisation conjures up group identity it does not necessarily create one (Cohen, 1986; Jenkins, 1996), it is in the interplay of identification and categorisation that collectives are (re)configured. Moreover, the young women in this research study are continually trying to avoid being fixed as homogenous and static collectives, with varying degrees of success. To identify and name their similarities, i.e. their fashion/music tastes, is to risk being fixed into identities not of their own making and judged as non-respectable sexual subjects. Girls are quick to draw distinctions of respectability within the 'Townie' label in order to distance themselves from it. To be 'Townie' is not just about what you wear, although branded clothing, gold jewellery, make-up and a specific hairstyle may serve as external markers (Ortner, 1991 in Skeggs, 1997). To be 'Townie' is to also be marked as sexual and working-class (prostitutes), to be classified as rough and common (mouthy/vulgar), unfeminine (unnatural), epitomised by the name 'Shazza'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> There is some speculation between and within groups of girls whether boys can be 'Townies'. Whilst boys can sometimes be attributed 'Townie' status, it is usually boys who mark girls as this because of the significance of 'Townie' as a marker of hyper-sexuality.

<sup>15</sup> As Skeggs (1997) suggests the popular representation of working-class white girls is epitomised through the label of Sharon (or Tracy). These names signify girls as sexual, vulgar and unfeminine, a means to control them by men and other young women who profit from their denigration.

Moreover, as Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë point out the label not only connotes how you speak, where you hang out and live, but also signifies class as a dialogic experience (Skeggs, 1997):

Abi: I think lads that look probably, are hardest to be called a 'Townie' because lads do wear sports gear more than girls, don't they?

Kathryn: So do they hang around in certain places then? Is that why they use the word 'Townie'?

Olivia: It's not really where you hang around, it's more about ...

Abi: Some are

Olivia: I suppose it is where you live, and if you live, if you hang around where you live and it happens to be in a place which is a 'Townie' area then you are called a 'Townie'.

Kathryn: What do you mean?

Jayne: It sounds really stuck up (laughter)

Olivia: I know it does, I was just thinking that ... I'm, you know, not mentioning any areas because different people have different opinions

Abi: I think the stereotype is if you hang around by the 'Fen' (area) or what are those flats called? 'Green Rise' flats, is it or something?

Jayne: Yeah

Abi: Umm, if you hang around there then you are common, probably get called something like a prostitute or something (laughter), I know it sounds really really snobby, I think that's what it used to be. But like you could hang around on Craigley corners and you probably wouldn't get called anything.

Olivia: Yeah

Jayne: People wouldn't see you probably (laughter)

Abi: Even though Craigley is actually not that posh anymore

Olivia: No, that was what I was trying to say. I wasn't being snobby it was just that in some areas if you hang around you get called a 'Townie' it doesn't mean that you are.

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë are embarrassed about the distinctions they draw above and are quick to distance themselves from such behaviour. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascertain from the above quotation that it is middle-class girls who are able to draw such distinctions because it is rarely girls with such classed and raced subjectivities (white, middle-class) who are at risk from being named and judged as such (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, 1990). In addition, as class is produced dialogically (Skeggs, 1997) they rely on such subtle labelling practices to recognize and (re)produce themselves as not common and not rough, hence respectable white middle-class girls. Middle-class white girls who embody

'tasteful' femininity have the power to define and label because they are not open to the same extent to judgement through their bodily performance. Whereas, when Heather, Rona, Louisa and Lena speak about the concept there is an uncomfortable air to the conversation, it is as if they recognise that if external markers of identity were believed, their sexual reputation could be called into question.

It appears that the concept 'Townie' at lower school served as a stereotype to "... highlight the network of fine and criss-crossed lines of discrimination drawn by children, enabling the process of friendship-making and friendship breaking to be plotted and the attribution and evaluation of different social identities to be mapped out" (James, 1993: 107). By denying the significance of such categorisations and the body as a marker of social identity girls attempt to make themselves more respectable by distancing themselves from such immature behaviour. However, the extent to which the girls go to deny the continued relevance of the body as an external marker of social identity only served to interest me further. I now turn to Rachel and Kat to consider the complexities of this (dis)identification.

#### *Rachel and Kat – differences as a source of cohesion?*

Initial appearances and comments made by the 'alternative' girls Rachel and Kat and their wider friendship nexus embody the 'Townie' style. However, by looking closely at their articulations of friendship their relationship with the concept becomes ambivalent and contradictory. I have shown above how the distinctions that girls may have made between friendship groups have been relegated to the past and consigned to the space of lower school. These distinctions *between* groups of girls have been replaced with a focus on the dynamics *within* their given friendship group<sup>16</sup>. That is not to say that their friendship is (dis)identified with per se, rather that their internal group differences are used as a source of cohesion and an exemplar of their increasing individuality.

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<sup>16</sup> The shift from a focus on between group dynamics and within friendship group dynamics becomes apparent with later groups under discussion as well.

When I first met Rachel and Kat in a Drama lesson they were quick to (re)present themselves as 'best friends'. I took their close bodily affiliations, their hugging, holding hands and giggling as signifiers of friendship. They also told me at the time of meeting that they were becoming inseparable. However, by the time the photography project came around they were telling a different story<sup>17</sup>. Through their photographs and subsequent interviews and discussions Rachel and Kat expand their friendship group to incorporate approximately five more girls, Melanie, Sally, Sonja, Andrea and Claire. Rachel and Kat say that they're all friends because they're different, they all have different personalities, few of them enjoy the same music or taste in fashion. The girls explain that trust and reciprocity are very important in their relationships with each other (Giddens, 1991; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; McRobbie and Garber, 1975; Nilan, 1991; Way, 1996). They have all lived through family break-down of one kind or another and look to each other for support. Rachel and Kat emphasise that they're all friends because of "who they are", rather than any common similarity in fashion/music. In order to explicate this Kat uses her taste in 'punk style' to emphasise their internal group differences:

Kat: ... I'm definitely a punk ... You've got your 'Goths', there are a few 'Goths' here, which I think is great, 'cos this school is really open like that, you can get loads of different people coming in. Of course other people do say stuff, but if you've got supportive friends then you're alright.

Rachel: Yeah, there are some people who are so, they're dumb really

Kat: Yeah

Rachel: They'll say stuff to you, but really they are just not intelligent at all

Kat: Or they'll just really admire you or stuff like that. 'Cos our group is like, we believe in just like, you know, letting people be who they want to be, we're friends with people because of who they are. So, like when I went weird (laughter), you know everyone just ...

Rachel: Yeah, she came in black lipstick and black nail varnish ... and her hair really long

Kat: Yeah, everyone just came with me because that was just the way I wanted to be for a bit and I still want to be like that, but I ain't got the means to be like that at the minute.

Kathryn: Is school cool about things like that then?

Rachel: Yeah

Kat: Apart from at weekends which I still am ...

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<sup>17</sup> There was about six weeks between the time I first met Rachel and Kat and their involvement in the photography project.

Rachel: What?

Kat: you know about my weekends and stuff ...

Rachel: What?

Kat: ... but school is alright with it.

Rachel and Kat

Through my conversations with Rachel and Kat they focus on the inherent qualities of each of their group members. Such as Melanie who is described by Rachel and Kat as supportive and a good listener, Kat also tells me that Rachel picks her up when she is feeling down. Nevertheless, in the above quotation Kat uses her taste in style to explain group member individuality, suggesting that the whole group “was cool with it” when she went “weird”. However, when Kat suggests that she still dresses differently at home and wears black lipstick and nail varnish Rachel refuses to acknowledge Kat’s attempts to produce herself as different. Drawing distinctions between group members using fashion and style as an explanatory signifier appears to cause tension between Rachel and Kat when such behaviour is not relegated to the past.

The conversation moves on quickly, changes pace and the tension between Rachel and Kat dissipates as their conversation moves on to Andrea and Claire. Rachel and Kat become conspiratorial in conversation and tell me that “this has to be completely confidential because if it gets out we’ll get boxed”<sup>18</sup>. It is as if the differences between Rachel and Kat are forgotten by focusing on their group differences with Andrea and Claire. They explain that Andrea and Claire, two of their ‘friends’ “invite[d] themselves into their friendship group”. The inclusion of Andrea and Claire is explained as not of their own making, and by doing so Rachel and Kat distance themselves from appearing to take part in exclusionary behaviour. If they did not ask for them to be there, how can they exclude them? According to Rachel and Kat, Andrea and Claire are “right Townies”, they have a real attitude problem signified by the “speak to the hand” gesture<sup>19</sup>, they’re hypercritical and very two faced. Rachel says that she and Melanie are often (mis)taken for being ‘Townie’ because of their bodily appearances and tastes in fashion:

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<sup>18</sup> They mean that they will get physically beaten up or punched by the girls.

<sup>19</sup> “Speak to the hand” is a shortened version of “speak to the hand ‘cos the face aint listenin’”. Sometimes this sentence is spoken but more often than not the message is sent by either “a look” or holding your hand in front of your face at the person(s) you are directing the comment to.

Kat: Well, I would, people wouldn't say I was a 'Townie' because I don't like the 'Townie' style (laughter), I'm like into other stuff, so ...

Rachel: There's a fine line between a 'Townie' and just a person

Kat: Yeah, you've got other kinds of people, like real hard and like walk around like ...

Rachel: Like Andrea and Claire are just like so 'Townie', they are as about as 'Townie' as you can get

Kat: Claire is definitely 'Townie', you should study them for a bit, that's your 'Townie' group

Kathryn: So, with the word 'Townie' then, do they hang around in town or anything or is that just ... (laughter)

Rachel: Nah

Kat: No, no

Rachel: I think what it means is, I'm not sure ... like a prostitute type thing

Kat: But we're not saying they're prostitutes because they don't, they ...

Rachel: They're not real prostitutes or anything but ...

Kat: A lot of 'Townie' girls are generally slappers I've got to say that

Rachel: Yeah, and tarts, and sluts or ...

Kat: Yeah

Kathryn: So what makes them that then?

Kat: Just the way that they carry on with boys and stuff like that, and just their attitude, their whole attitude, it's just pathetic, I hate it.

Rachel: I mean Andrea, she been, it's been a month and she's only been with three lads, and one of them is twenty-seven and he is seeing someone and the other one has been in hospital from a drug overdose. And it's like being in a soap opera with her sometimes (laughter), it really is. It's a bit stupid.

Rachel and Kat

Kat attempts to doubly (dis)identify with being fixed as 'Townie'. She self-styles herself as 'punk'<sup>20</sup> which removes herself from being seen to have the clothed appearance of the others and along with Rachel she (dis)identifies with the sexual reputation of Andrea and Claire. However, by marking herself out too much from Rachel, Kat potentially risks her inclusion in the friendship group, so she appears to have to relegate her 'individual' behaviour in practice to the home and (re)enforce distinctions between Andrea and Claire and the rest of the group in order to save the reputation and investments of Rachel. By being seen to hang around with Andrea and Claire, Rachel recognises that she risks being judged and fixed as 'Townie' which potentially risks her investments in femininity:

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<sup>20</sup> Kat calls herself a 'punk' because of her taste in music (The Offspring) and her desire to wear 'punk' clothing and dark make-up. It doesn't seem to matter to her that she doesn't either do this at school or have the economic means to do this at home at the moment.

Being continually marked as sexual through a multitude of signifiers generates resistance to and difficult negotiations of sexuality. It also means that shame is not infrequent. Fixing through signification generates recognition and disidentification

Skeggs, 1997: 124-125

As Skeggs (1997) remarks for Rachel to be recognised as sexual even via default because of her affiliation to Andrea and Claire potentially risks her investments in femininity. Ironically, by drawing distinctions between group members like those explored above, Rachel and Kat (re)enforce the social categorisation of women based on their sexuality and class, which they attempt to (dis)identify with by framing their friendship on individuality and differences within their friendship. Rachel and Kat both (dis)identify with the significance of their styled bodies because of the meanings attributed to them through social categorisation. However, in practice to produce themselves as individuals Rachel and Kat have to draw on distinctions based on style to distance themselves from the non-respectable behaviour of Andrea and Claire whose sexuality is designated non-respectable. As James (1986: 162) suggests “adolescence, then, is about conformity but it is conformity to a particular style in a particular manner the rules of which have been defined from within”. Rachel and Kat use conversations with me to affirm their ‘individuality’ through (dis)identifications with Andrea and Claire who in practice still appear part of their friendship nexus, spending time with them in lessons, at break and at lunchtime.

It is through our conversations that Rachel and Kat expose the contradictions in becoming respectable for white working-class girls. In order to mark themselves as respectable they rely on a discourse of acceptance to signify individuality within their friendship group and the school. In practice however, framing themselves as individual relies on drawing boundaries within the group along lines of respectable femininity. For Kat this means relegating her individual expression of ‘punk’ to the home and fitting in at school; and for Rachel it means drawing distinctions within the concept of the ‘Townie’ in order to make herself respectable. However, by doing so, she draws on the very distinctions that she is trying to distance herself from and (re)enforces the objectification of women by markers on the body. From this observation therefore, it is possible to maintain Hey’s (1997: 64/5) stipulation that “...negotiating feminine friendship and its associated powers is a delicate business, being always already constituted

through the socially coercive male gaze, which endlessly seeks to position girls within its regulation". There appear few opportunities within a school context for the "socially coercive male gaze" to be anything but unfractured, singular and homogenous. It is the fear of being positioned, labelled and objectified by external markers of class, gender, 'race' and sexuality that encourage young women to (dis)identify with their collective friendships. It is not that these friendships have to be forsaken but that their constitution has to be made complex in order to successfully articulate a discourse of individuality. In so doing, distinctions within friendship groups are utilised which make relationships complex and stressful. Furthermore, young women are working within a regime that denies their ability to celebrate friendship and the positive connections from which they could benefit.

I now turn to a further two groups that explicate this process of (dis)identification within friendship group construction. Firstly, Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen.

### *3.3. Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen: (dis)identifications with 'Asianness'*

Research recognises that young people are positioned in relation to institutional racism and racial and ethnic identities (Back, 1996; Hall, 1992; Holland, *et al*, 1998). Hilltop is a mixed comprehensive secondary school with a significant number of pupils from ethnically diverse backgrounds. In fact, this is one of the main marketing strategies of the school; nearly every piece of literature promoting the school emphasises the value of a comprehensive (socio-economic and ethnic) intake of pupils. The school also offers ethnic minority support workers in order to deal effectively with cultural diversity<sup>21</sup>. In fact, during my field research at Hilltop and subsequent visits I never heard any overt expression of verbal or physical racism between pupils<sup>22</sup>. Mac an Ghail (1995 in Duncan, 1999: 25) "... illuminates the specificity of each school as a unique site for the

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<sup>21</sup> The extent to which this transfers into practice is not within the remit of this thesis. However, there were a number of occasions in school where the male 'Asian' ethnic minority support worker was in direct conflict with the ethos of the PSHE department, particularly in relation to the inclusion of young Muslim women in sex education lessons and the debates concerning sexuality education and Section 28.

<sup>22</sup> I think this would have been different if I had conducted my research at lower school where from my minimal observations and talking with girls at upper school more distinct boundaries were drawn between groups through physical and verbal harassment.

production of gendered and ethnic identities mediated by staff and students". Unlike schools in other research studies which point to a proliferation of racist hostility between groups of pupils (Duncan, 1999; Shain, 1996) Hilltop at least on the surface appears to lack overt racial tension<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, whilst there is a paucity of overt aggression towards ethnic minority students at upper school, there are distinct groupings in school, particularly of 'Asian' girls. Teachers and other 'adults' (learning support workers) are quick to point out groups of girls whose friendships they identify as being based on shared cultural identities of 'Asianness', 'Blackness' or mixed race composition. However, during research at Hilltop young women never overtly identified 'race' and ethnicity as determining factors in friendship construction. This section of this chapter therefore considers the friendship construction of one group of girls, Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen, who are loosely defined by teachers as a group of "quiet Asian girls".

I first met Sonali in a Science lesson. I think she took pity on me, because like her, I was left to sit on my own in a lesson which was made up of large groups of white pupils who took little interest in my presence. Sonali was the only 'Asian' girl in that lesson and often sat on her own or with Rowan<sup>24</sup> at the front of the class, spatially separated from the other pupils by a row of benches. Sonali then in turn introduced me to her friends Nita, Ahliya and Noreen. The girls invited me to spend lunch with them in the dining room before going outside to sit on their bench to listen to Bhangra music on a shared Walkman and watch the boys play football on the playing fields. From the outset of my research with the girls they wanted to make sure of one thing:

I am sitting with Sonali, Nita and Ahliya in the dining room, Noreen is away from school again. We have queued to get our lunch and I have waved at a number of girls who I know from other classes which caused Sonali to ask me how I know the other girls. I can see the teachers at the 'teachers table' watching me. We have not long started eating when Sonali says directly "Are you talking to us because we're Asian"? I was a little taken aback at first by her

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<sup>23</sup> My research was conducted prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> when the aeroplanes hit the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many schools in the UK have seen an increase in racial and religious tension between pupils since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Rowan is a white middle-class girl who hangs around with the 'alternative girls', but who is likewise excluded from the large groups of 'popular' cliques who seem to proliferate in this Science lesson. Sonali and Rowan sit next to each other, but conversations are often short and both equally get on with their work. Neither Rowan nor Sonali speak to each other outside this lesson.

directness but I was also pleased that she had asked me – it's not as if this is something I haven't thought about. I explain that I am talking to her and her friends because she took an interest in my research from the outset. I explained that I'm not talking to them specifically because they are 'Asian', but that I recognise that their ethnicities could be important in their friendship. The girls nodded and carried on gossiping about the boy who was on the other table and staring at Ahliya which she didn't like ...

research diary

The girls' initial reaction to me being interested in their friendship group is to make sure that I am not solely interested in them because of their 'Asianness'. The above extract from my research diary alerted me to their investments in challenging external representations of their friendship. Their inclusion of me in their lunch time routine was allowed because of my successful negotiation of their question. Throughout the research Sonali, Ahliya, Nita and Noreen (dis)identify with their 'Asianness' – that is not to say that they deny their differences, quite the opposite, but that they refuse to name their friendship as based on a shared cultural identity. It is through their articulations of friendship that they deconstruct the meanings of 'Asianness'. In her research with young Muslim women Claire Dwyer (1998: 50) suggests that the construction and negotiation of their cultural identities depends upon a contestation of dominant representations. Whilst Sonali, Ahliya, Nita and Noreen are not all Muslim their narratives of friendship are invested in (dis)identifying with being seen to embody a homogenous definition of 'Asianness'. As with white girls at Hilltop Sonali, Noreen, Nita and Ahliya's experiences of lower school are significant in their current narratives of friendship and allude to their (dis)identifications:

Kathryn: Is that, is there a lot of name calling between girls and girls or is it like mainly boys and girls?

Sonali: That doesn't really happen in upper school that much, it used to happen a lot in lower school

Kathryn: What happened in lower school?

Nita: Girls and girls

Sonali: Girls and girls, believe me, girls and girls. Umm, things like ...

Nita: Oh yeah ...

Sonali: "oh, she looks like a nun with that scarf on" and things like "Oh, she's not got her Nike trainers" or "she's wearing Nike trainers trying to copy us". Umm, or she's, "oh, look at her hairstyle, it's a right mess", "oh she thinks she's just it, give her some of that", "or she's trying to be like us". If anyone wants to be like them, or if anyone does anything like them, one day a woman comes to, a girls comes to school with clips in her hair and the other day, a week later somebody else comes with the same clips and obviously shops sell them and if

you like them you buy them. Oh and then you get “oh, she’s trying to be like me” and they go up to her and bully them, but that doesn’t happen here that much, *it just happens if you do something*<sup>25</sup>

Sonali, Ahliya, Nita and Noreen all locate bullying behaviour in the past and the location of lower school. However, in opposition to the narratives of the white girls in school they deny that such occurrences are now obsolete through the statement “it just happens if you do something”. It is through being fixed at lower school as ‘Asian’ by their clothed bodies that they now invest in not being judged by external markers of identity. Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen recognise that the mere shift in location does not change relations of power between groups of girls, rather allows them to control their behaviour. This usually means sitting away from groups in class who were problematic at lower school and staying in school at lunch, rather than going to the local area where the majority of other pupils spend their lunch hour. The exclusion of Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen at lower school from mainstream (white) schoolgirl culture has resulted in the use of different cultural references being used by the girls. Unlike white girls who have an awareness of the different cliques and groups that were apparent at lower school (e.g. the ‘Townies’), Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen have their own cultural references for the girls’ groups in school:

Sonali, Nita, Ahliya and Noreen explain the different girls’ friendship groups to me. They’re still groups now but they don’t get called that anymore. They seem to group girls into high class and low class. They describe low class girls to be girls like themselves, they are quiet in lessons, they get on with their work and are kind to the teachers. The high class girls on the other hand are popular. They are opposite to them, they are mouthy, answer back and are always getting into trouble which they think is cool. Sonali, Ahliya, Noreen and Nita don’t think it is clever though, they just sit there and try and ignore them most of the time, stay out of their way ...

research diary

From my experience of working with Sonali, Ahliya, Nita and Noreen they are completely excluded from dominant white references to the composition of school friendship groups. They are conscious that they do not appear in the majority school culture and are not a significant group with regards to popularity because, according to them, they avoid confrontation with teachers and their

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<sup>25</sup> I expect that the girls have learnt through their experiences at lower school the ‘rules’ of appropriate behaviour. They are likely therefore, to be careful not to step out of line in front of ‘witnesses’ (Griffiths, 1995). Space and time appear important in the construction of friendship.

peers. Furthermore, they are aware of the popular groups and what gets you approbation in school, but their references are different. Like other friendship groups in school, regardless of 'race'/ethnicity the girls are quick to deny the significance of between group categorisations.

When asked about their friendship construction rather than focusing on their common cultural identity Sonali, Ahliya, Noreen and Nita, like Rachel and Kat, focus on their internal group differences:

Nita: We have arguments in our friendship group

Ahliya: We disagree

Nita: But it's messing about arguing though

Sonali: We have disagreements

Nita: We disagree all the time, she starts shouting (referring to Sonali) and she wants to have her own way and she can't get her own way

Sonali: Yeah, even, we nearly got into tears because they wouldn't understand my point of view, it is just something like, "why should we do this?"

Nita: Because we all have different ...

Sonali: ... families

Nita: ... and perspectives and we don't understand each others way, and we say how can you do that, and we shout to make our point clear you see.

Kathryn: What type of things do you argue about?

Sonali: She doesn't argue (referring to Ahliya)

Nita: She does sometimes

(laughter)

Nita: We argue about umm, family ...

(sound of the bell ringing to signal registration)

... religion, hmm, weddings, habid, wedding ceremonies, which ones right ...

Nita: (laughter) ... who can sing better

Ahliya: (laughter)

Kathryn: Have you all got different religions then?

Sonali: No, we've got the same religion but you know some religions are ...

Nita: We're all Muslim

Sonali: ... she has a different religion

Nita: We're the same religion, she's Hindu (referring to Ahliya)

Sonali: You know that's really weird, because only me and her fight (referring to Nita), we don't fight with her (referring to Ahliya), saying, how come, we don't understand this, if we ever do I think it's just because I'm curious and I think I know more about her religion than she does

Ahliya: (laughter)

Peter Jackson (1989: 147) notes that in the British context 'Asian' is a misunderstood term used by the majority (white) population to categorise a diverse group of people and subsume differences in language, nationality and religion. By focusing on their internal group differences and arguments the girls attempt to take the focus of their friendship away from their 'race'/ethnicity and highlight their heterogeneity. In order to highlight the differences amongst the group of friends, the girls use their different takes on cultural practices and, in particular, the differences that their religious practices mean to them. Ahliya is Hindu, whilst Noreen, Nita and Sonali are Muslim. However, further complexity is added to these differences by the girls' insistence that even within these religious categories they argue about marriage, clothing, future work and education. Furthermore, Sonali, Nita and Noreen joke that they know more about Hinduism than Ahliya. For the girls, differences between group members allow them to challenge external representations of them as homogenous 'Asian' girls, and thereby produce themselves through the same discourse as the white girls, that is that they are all individual. However, by concentrating on their group differences within their friendship group they are to some extent (re)enforcing white hegemony and doing little to challenge the external representations and practices which continue to subtly exclude them. It could be said that the girls' discourses of friendship break down white assumptions of monolithic 'Asian' identity which has the potential to challenge whiteness. However, within the school context it appears difficult to transfer this potential into practice because the girls' discourses of internal group heterogeneity remain within the boundaries of their friendship group.

#### 3.4. *'Nice academic' girls: managing individuality through space*

"...[G]irls who are nice, kind and helpful are guardians of the moral order" (Walkerdine, 1991: 77). Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë are certainly represented as such girls by the teachers. In fact, Mrs Whittingham, the head of year ten, probably thought as much when she assigned me to shadow the registration group of ten red. Over the year Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë are called upon by Mrs Whittingham and other teachers to show visitors around school and run errands, they can "be trusted". Unlike the girls in *The Company She Keeps* (Hey,

1997:56) ‘goodness’ is not described as a central characteristic of friendship construction by girls’ themselves. Their investments in producing themselves as individual and accepting through the statement “we’re all friends here”, does not allow for such overt boundary marking. However, niceness is implicit in their discourses of acceptance and individuality.

Nevertheless, it is through their exclusion in lower school from such labelling practices that their popularity and niceness becomes apparent. Abi, Jayne, Olivia and Zoë’s white middle-class position makes them unlikely candidates for ‘Townie’ status. Neither are the girls ‘alternative’ in their dress and style (see chapter five), nor are they too academic in order to be described as ‘boffin’. From the outside they appear to be a “solid four”, they recognise that they have this reputation attributed to them by their teachers, their parents and their peers. However, it is this very construction of them as an inseparable collective that they attempt to (dis)identify with through their narratives of friendship<sup>26</sup>.

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë have spent most of their educational lives together, as Abi, Olivia and Jayne went to the same nursery school, and Zoë joined them a couple of years later at primary school. Furthermore, Abi, Jayne, Olivia and Zoë’s familial networks are interwoven and their friendships are therefore solidified by parental ties and time spent together outside of the school context. Within the school setting Abi, Jayne, Olivia and Zoë are always together. They sit in the same place every day at registration, even if the tables have been moved for exam conditions. In other lessons, Religious Education for instance, they sit in the same formation. Due to setting and different option modules they are not always in the same groups and when this happens many of them sit together as possible. At the start of the year all four girls spent their breaks together and lunch would be spent going to Birchley (local area), doing some lunchtime shopping and/or eating sandwiches.

Over the course of year ten, however, their friendship began to change and they began to put emphasis on their changing tastes and individualities:

Jayne: we get on differently now, we kind of changed, didn’t we? Because it used to be like Olivia and Zoë and Abi and Jayne, quite separate ...

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<sup>26</sup> It is likely that Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë were involved in the production of social categories at lower school because of their status as white, popular, middle-class girls, even though they distance themselves from such childish behaviour now.

... (we are interrupted by a teacher getting something out of a cupboard)

Jayne: ... but now it has kind of changed into Olivia and Abi, and me and Zoë.

Abi: Yeah, but we all come back as a four and then split off, which is good because we need a break sometimes

Olivia: Yeah

Abi: cos' I sit with Jayne in lessons, if it is a two and Olivia sits with Zoë, (loud bang from the door closing) if it's a four we sit together and they sit together, but, so it's a weird friendship actually ...

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë

The girls told me conflicting stories of allegiances within the group, often talking about experiences they shared at lower school as a four, and at other times, as in the above extract, they talk about time spent as pairs. During my research it became increasingly obvious from conversations and lunch time activities that the four were developing into two pairs, that of Jayne and Zoë, Abi and Olivia. However, that is not to say that they have fallen out or that their changing relationship has resulted in bitchiness as described in other research stories of teenage girls' friendships (Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997). The girls appear heavily invested in maintaining an appearance of external togetherness. They have to manage their increasing awareness that their interests and desires are changing whilst being invested in maintaining an outward appearance of friendship, acceptance and togetherness. It is by focusing on their internal differences, like the other girls in this chapter, that Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë produce themselves as individual. However, they recognise that focusing on their differences has the potential to cause stress within the group. Their changing relationship with boys is a case in point:

Kathryn: Do you get on with the lads in year 10?

Abi: Yeah ... I love yeah, I don't mean when I say I love them I don't mean it like that, but I get on with most of them yeah, they're funny (laughter). They're funny cos' they're so immature but they think it's really mature to act that way<sup>27</sup>.

Kathryn: Cos' a lot of them today were just really loud.

Jayne: Like in RE today

Olivia: But sometimes it is fun to join in with them, some are alright

Jayne: It is but sometimes they are just really ...

Olivia: whoops

Abi: Dino for instance, I can't stand him personally, I think he's a real pain in backside, but the only one I like out of those is Karl and Colin.

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<sup>27</sup> This contradicts what Abi said before about boys being more mature since lower school.

Kathryn: There's a picture of Karl somewhere

Abi: Oh that big, the big ... (laughter)

Kathryn: (in unison) the close up

Abi: of Karl, yes (extended group laughter) ... I'm surprised they developed it. God, yeah, I get on with Karl because I have History with him, so he's quite, he lives on the same road as Alex so. So yeah we get on with most lads in us class don't we?

Kathryn: Do you all get on with the lads? ... Do you, do you hang around a lot with them?

Jayne: I hang around with, cos' there's Walter and Turner, who we hang around with quite often, not many boys in this class, I think, I don't know I don't get along with them as well as Abi does.

Abi: You don't get on with them because Jayne, because when they try and flirt Jayne says "back off, get off me" (group laughter), and lads don't like that, they tend, they, I think they prefer you to act like bimbos ...

Jayne: they think that you should rise to them don't they

Abi: yeah

Jayne: and I just can't be bothered (laughter)

Abi: And Jayne like ...

Jayne: just go away (laughter)

Abi: whereas, Zoë just doesn't bother at all, do you? (laughter)

Zoë: I am friends with them and I have deep conversations with them (laughter)

Jayne: intellectual ones (laughter)

Zoë: yeah

Kathryn: What about you Olivia?

Olivia: Umm, I more get on with them as mates

Kathryn: Yeah

Olivia: sort of as a 'tom boy' or whatever you say

Abi: Yeah, you are, you're like my

Olivia: I kind of more take the mickey out of Abi with them, sort of thing

Abi: Yeah, yeah (laughter)

Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë

The girls' dislike of boys' behaviour at lower school proved to be the factor that solidified their friendship, when they used to hide in the toilets at lower school to avoid name calling, rough behaviour and the sexualisation of their bodies by their male peers. Like Suzy, Lara and Barbara, the white, gifted and middle-class girls in Valerie Hey's (1997: 106) research, Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë are attempting to come to terms with an "intensification of the (hetero)sexualisation

of relations” now that they are at upper school<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, within their friendship “divergent views on boys and the desirability of dating created significant tension ...” (Hey, 1997: 106) between group members. The increasing attempts on behalf of Abi in particular to embrace a hyper performance of femininity through fashion, make-up, flirting and leisure activities threaten the previous homosocial ties of the all-girl friendship. The girls appear to manage these tensions by splitting off into the pairs of Abi and Olivia, Jayne and Zoë. Olivia acts as a side-kick to Abi’s hyper-sexualised performance of femininity by larking around, listening to her constant talk of Alex (year eleven boy), going shopping with her and generally winding her up. Jayne and Zoë, however, are much quieter and over the year their presence in the group becomes peripheralised and less active as they strive to succeed in their up-coming exams. There are two significant moments over the year when tensions within the group become glaringly obvious. The first incident occurs when a local filmmaker, Tara Samson, interviews the group to take part in a documentary about what it is like to be fifteen in the twenty-first century<sup>29</sup>. The second incident occurs on Abi’s birthday. The tensions within the group surrounding these events and their coping strategy are explored in the remainder of this chapter.

With the help of a Drama teacher Tara organised a filmed interview with approximately fifteen girls in year ten to decide who she would like to be in the film. From the outset Tara explained explicitly that she would be making the film *on* the girls rather than *with* them. I was immediately concerned about the ethics of the film as the drama teacher explained that Tara was interested in talking to young women who had similar interests to her when she was growing up, such as “havin’ a laff and boys”. The girls were asked some very personal questions during the recorded interview and nearly all the girls answered them openly, even though they appeared nervous and unsure. The girls were asked if their home lives were happy, about their friendships, their activities inside and outside school, whether they had boyfriends and if so, whether they were close. The interviews were conducted with the Drama teacher, myself and the

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<sup>28</sup> This is two years earlier than Barbara, Lara and Suzy in Valerie Hey’s research study.

<sup>29</sup> The girls’ involvement in the film caused a number of ethical dilemmas in my research project concerning their ability to self-consent. These are discussed in chapter two (see 2.3.)

cameraman present, as well as all the other girls, some of whom were friends with each other, others who were not. The following diary extract comes from the 'audition' that was conducted with the girls and refers specifically to Jayne and Abi's responses:

Jayne explains that she knows Ella because she is in her Drama class, but that Abi is her best friend, but they usually hang around in a group of four with Olivia and Zoë. Jayne adds that she has a lot of other friends through choir, but they all go to another school. She sees them a lot at weekends and her boyfriend who she has been going out with since February [month]. Jayne explains that all the girls used to be close until Zoë stopped going to choir, since then the group dynamics have changed. Abi and Olivia are closer and Jayne explains that she is closer to Abi. Jayne says that she enjoys going to the park, walking the dog and playing the piano. It is then Abi's turn to tell the film-maker about herself. Abi starts by saying that everyone in school is friends, but that she belongs to a core group of four. She adds however, that she is closer to Olivia. Abi explains that the group used to do things as a four, i.e. go shopping, but now "Zoë gets faint in the shopping centre", so Abi now spends time in town with Olivia. Tara then asks Abi what they do in town. Jayne butts in "lads, lads, lads". Abi says they chase the lads, Tara asks "do you get them". Abi looks embarrassed, and replies coyly "sometimes". Abi is visibly embarrassed, but she is very open about the lad she is chasing at the moment, she admits that she used to chase a lot of lads, but now there is only one. She has been after him for a while, but he has a girlfriend, she adds "but she can be got rid of". He goes ice-skating and she is there, Abi says she goes sometimes. They are friends, they walk home together, since they started walking home together they have become close and they can talk about loads of things, but the others don't see what she sees in him, they don't see his nice side. They don't walk to school together because he is too lazy and goes by public transport. He's in year eleven, Abi says she won't go out with lads in year 10 because "they're all mongs".

research diary

Abi, Jayne, Zoë and Olivia are chosen by Tara to be in the film. Tara tells me that she chose this group because of the way in which Abi responded to the questions, both in their content and because of her comfortableness and banter in front of the camera. During the interview, Abi is described by Jayne as 'boy mad' and always chasing boys. Whilst Abi is a self-styled flirt, it is the labelling of her as such by Jayne, in a group context with other girls present, that causes friction between the group and sees the initial divergence of the group into pairs. When Jayne makes 'public' Abi's investments in femininity during the 'audition' for the film she makes Abi's investments in heterosexuality visible and leaves them open to misrepresentation by the filmmaker and other girls present as the above extract reflects. The response from Abi is initially light-hearted, but over the next few weeks during the making of the film stresses increase and more time

is spent apart - although at no point during this time do their differences result in a 'public' display of antagonism. Nevertheless, a couple of days later I ask Jayne about the film. Jayne tells me that she really embarrassed Abi by her comments. Jayne and Abi realise that they were both messing about but from this experience they are both worried about the impact this will have on the filming. Jayne explains that there are some things that they said in the 'audition' that they would not want on film, and were worried that their behaviour could be misrepresented and misinterpreted. In fact, the final representations of Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë in the film attest to their increasing individuality and paired friendship. The film consists of a number of separate frames where the girls' interests are focused on in a number of spaces (e.g. shopping, home, school). In the final film the girls are either being fifteen on their own or with their paired friend, it is only in the linking frames that the girls are represented as a four. The film therefore, hides many complexities and contradictions within the friendship group. Moreover, being part of the film-making process (re)enforces and compounds some of the already present tension between group members. Unfortunately, however, because of the issues discussed in chapter two, I felt unable to further my observations beyond discussions with the girls during the filming project. I was asked to accompany the girls shopping when they were being filmed, however, I felt that becoming embroiled further in the ethics of the film-maker's project, my own research and the complexities of the girls' friendship would further damage research relations.

The second incident, which highlights the internal complexities of the girls' friendship, occurs a few weeks later. For Abi's birthday the girls spend a day and evening together to celebrate. Obviously Abi gets to choose what they want to do because it is her birthday. However, this becomes a source of contention after the event because of the differences that become apparent between group members during the seven-hour long shopping trip and subsequent visit to the ice-rink. The tensions which arise during the shopping trip compound the differences that became apparent during the making of the film. Through these two inter-related events the girls' responses and coping strategies to their changing tastes in fashion, leisure activities and heterosexuality become apparent. Like other girls in this research study Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë

make investments in becoming individual. Part of their focus on individuality means that their collective sameness, previously emphasised at lower school, requires (dis)identification. As alluded to above, Abi, Jayne, Zoë and Olivia, like other girls discussed in this chapter, do not focus on their bodily markers of difference as points of divergence within their friendship group because of the stress this causes. However, through the making of the film the fissures and differences within the group become apparent and more noticeable than they would have normally. They are not merely named as a discursive strategy in their performances of individuality; they become a source of tension within the group.

In response to the growing tensions however, the girls maintain their group differences and individualities by identifying space as the sustaining factor in their friendship. They affirm that they are all individual, but this does not matter to their friendship because they are able to sustain it through an awareness of their individualities. They do this by using space as a coping strategy, thereby, spending time away from each other. As Abi clarifies:

It's nice actually sometimes 'cos if you've had a lesson, like RE, with all four of us, it's nice to split off and and get a break from each other and then come back and have a chat. Umm, but it is usually me and Olivia just hang around school probably looking for Alex (laughs). And then those two go up to Birchley with Wal and Turner and come down and we might [meet] up, we might not, but there's not a big thing if we don't, it's not like "where were you" type of thing.

By recognising the stress points in their friendship, spending time away from each other at lunch time and doing other things outside school the girls are able to (dis)identify with each other without this becoming a huge source of stress and anxiety within school and their friendship. Space is, therefore, used both literally and metaphorically to sustain their friendship. Jayne and Zoë will probably never go shopping again with Abi and Zoë after their seven-hour trawl around the shopping centre on Abi's birthday, so they literally go to different places. However, they also need space from each other as well in order for their differences and performances of femininity and heterosexuality not to cause anxiety. Nevertheless, whilst Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë produce themselves as individual within their friendship group, and use space as a coping strategy to relieve the tensions that became apparent in the two examples discussed above, the girls' continue to sustain the outward appearance of being an inseparable

four. They do this by spending all their compulsory time in school together, i.e. in registration, lessons and break; it is only at lunch time and outside school that the complexity of the friendship becomes more apparent and space is used to develop their friendships as pairs.

### *3.5. Summary*

In this chapter I have used three groups of young women, Rachel and Kat; Ahliya, Nita, Noreen and Sonali; Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë, to show three different practices of friendship construction. Whilst I have presented these three practices as discrete case-studies, all the young women in this chapter have one thing in common: their attempts to produce themselves as individual through a series of (dis)identifications. That is not to say that this interpretation is the only way in which young women's practices of friendship could be explored. For me however, the focus on (dis)identification outlined in this chapter has made sense of the girls' investments in discourses of individuality, which serve to produce their contradictory discourses and practices of friendship.

I introduced this chapter, and the concept of (dis)identification, by looking at how these girls, and other young women in the study, produce a discourse of acceptance, signified through the statement "we're all friends here". The young women's discourses of acceptance are significant because of the symbolic construction of the move from lower to upper school as a transitional space of maturity. Through this move the girls (re)frame their relationships with both their male peers and each other. The complexity of young women's friendships at upper school is such because the symbolic and physical move from lower to upper school has engendered a radical shift in the meanings of friendship. To be mature at upper school is to be individual. This means that any form of collectivism and similarity has to be (dis)identified with, which is the very practice that served to make them respectable at lower school and solidify friendships. This is why, for me, young women's friendships were so difficult, contradictory and complex to comprehend. At first, I did not understand why young women were unable to talk about their friendships. But through their series of often contradictory (dis)identifications, both within and between

friendships, I came to understand that it is very important for these young women to distance themselves from external representations which serve to fix, homogenise and often objectify them. It is through internal group differentiation therefore, and a distancing from the significance of their clothed and styled bodies, that the young women attempt to produce themselves as individual and respectable.

I have shown in this chapter that whilst all young women produce their friendships through a series of (dis)identifications and discourses of individuality, not all young women are able to transfer these discourses into practice. This chapter has especially highlighted the significance of within group (dis)identification and the way in which framing friendship around differences within the group often causes stress between group members. The ability for young women to negotiate within-group complexity and contradiction is dependent on femininity, class and 'race'/ethnicity. Furthermore, within all these groups complexity is paramount because it is often their within-group (dis)identifications, which rely on markers of difference written across the body, to name and express individuality. The very thing young women aim to distance themselves from therefore, i.e. characterising people through external representations, is the very thing that they rely on to produce their within-group (dis)identifications and differences.

Moreover, the girls' investments in discourses of individuality, signified through the statement "we're all friends here", serves to mask power relations both within and between groups of girls at Hilltop. Individuality as a concept is a product of the middle-classes (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001), but in this research it is used by all young women, regardless of their class position, to hide traditional forms of exclusion, whether overt or subtle, along lines of class, gender, sexuality and 'race'/ethnicity. Invoking a discourse of individuality to explain relations both within and between friendship groups therefore, creates an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This I suggest succeeds in masking the relations of power between and within young women's friendship groups in year ten at Hilltop. Furthermore, this 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) delegitimises the significance of friendship in young women's lives. It also

serves to mask the potential that such collective support mechanisms can and do have for young women in a time where "... the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outside the control of individuals" (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 114).

The fact that all young women in this chapter, no matter their class background, make investments in individuality - albeit differently and with varying degrees of success - suggests that some young women will never be able to succeed in their investments. This is shown particularly in relation to the young white-working class women in this chapter and the young 'Asian' women. For them, there are often competing discourses which allude to their impending failure to produce themselves as individual. For Rachel and Kat it is their inability to completely (dis)identify with their investments in heterosexual femininity that makes it difficult (impossible) for them to produce themselves in practice as successfully individual. For Ahliya, Nita, Noreen and Sonali it is their inability to make 'public' their internal group complexities, that fails to make them successfully individual. Or, perhaps more appropriately, the context in which they are friends (school), makes it impossible for their internal group complexity, which is paramount in their production of friendship, to be outwardly expressed. Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë learn to cope with their developing individualities through using space as a coping strategy. That is not to say that this group of middle-class academic girls are able to fully negotiate their collective friendships at the same time as producing themselves as individual. But rather that they find a coping strategy - the physical and metaphorical use of space - to deal effectively with tensions that develop within the group.

I discuss some of these concepts in greater depth in the following chapters. The next chapter looks specifically at young people's responses to 'sexuality education' at Hilltop and the missing discourse of female sexuality.

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## Chapter Four. Young people's responses to 'sexuality education' at Hilltop: the missing discourse of female sexuality

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... the values, the values comes from them ideally ... because that is what education is, it's not, it's not going to teach you about being a hetero, heterosexual or a homosexual, I'd rather teach you to think

Judy Fisher, PSHE teacher

The sex[uality] education class can allow the two worlds of adolescent sexuality and the institutional authority of school culture to confront one another. It is not surprising that the educational potential of this situation is rarely realised. Yet where individual teachers have the support and confidence to manage these tensions the result can be memorable

Holland *et al*, 1998:60

Schools are sites and spaces for the articulation, (re)production and contestation of young people's masculinities, femininities and sexualities (Epstein, 1994; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Haywood, 1996; Holland *et al*, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1996a; see chapter one, 1.3.), even though the implications of this for young people's learning and well-being in school are often ignored by policy makers, politicians and the media. Critical education theorists explicate how both the formal curriculum and informal student cultures (Epstein, 1994; Epstein *et al*, 2002; Holland *et al*, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1996a, 1996b) produce and sustain the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'<sup>1</sup>. Attempts to include the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people into the formal curriculum are actively discouraged by the political climate in the UK. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the continuing debate concerning Section 28 (Epstein, 2000; Sanders and Spraggs, 1989; Waites, 2000; Wise, 2000).

To date researchers have had little opportunity to do ethnographic work with schools that attempt through formal curriculum provision to question the school

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter three (3.3.) discusses in greater depth the concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality', specifically in relation to critical education theory.

as a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’<sup>2</sup>. Some research has looked at sex education (Harrison, 2000; Holland *et al*, 1998; Ingham, 1997 in Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Jackson, 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1996b; Measor *et al*, 1996; Thompson, 1994; Thorogood, 2000; West, 1999), but the role of ‘sexuality education’ (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Redman, 1994) remains a utopian aspiration. Consequently, little research has been able to look at young people’s responses to formal provision of ‘sexuality education’. The aim of this chapter therefore, is to look critically at an eight-week course on ‘sexuality education’ provided as part of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) at Hilltop.

The remit of this chapter is deliberately limited and focused on pupils’ responses to sexuality education in the classroom, rather than the political climate in which these discussions take place. This is not to say either that government/social policy and media representations of sex(uality) education are not relevant here or indeed serve to (re)produce the responses discussed below, but that they have been adequately covered elsewhere for me not to retrace their steps (see *Sexualities, 2000*; in particular Thorogood, 2000 – cf. Epstein, Haywood, Johnson, Mac an Ghaill). However, a certain amount of context at the level of the institution is necessary. This is provided in part one (4.1.) and two (4.2.) of this chapter where PSHE and ‘sexuality education’ at Hilltop are discussed respectively<sup>3</sup>. The third and substantive content of this chapter (4.3.) deals with young people’s ‘public’ responses to ‘sexuality education’. To date there is a paucity of research on femininities, sexualities and schooling in favour of a focus on masculinities (Haywood, 1996; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1995, 1996a, 1996c; Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Nilan, 2000; Redman, 2000; Rofes, 2000). So initially I was concerned with young women’s responses to ‘sexuality education’, and to some extent this aim holds true. However, I soon came to realise the impossibility of understanding young

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter two (2.4.), methodology and ethics, for an in-depth discussion of the problems and sensitive nature of doing ‘sexuality’ research in schools. For a discussion of the term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ see chapter one (1.3.).

<sup>3</sup> Whilst I recognise that the critical take on ‘sexuality education’ is important and forms the most substantive part of this chapter I think it is imperative to give space to how PSHE and ‘sexuality education’ are framed and dealt with in the education context. Such work is often silenced out of fear and in the case of some research conducted by Debbie Epstein the school actually withheld consent for publication.

women's reactions to the material provided without also thinking about the gendering of the classroom through the physical set up and methodology of PSHE, the dominance of the discourse of 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998) and the bodily performances of male homophobia.

On initial inspection it may appear that within PSHE, and 'sexuality education' provision in particular, that there is the potential, as Janet Holland (1998) and her colleagues suggest, for memorable pedagogy. It is the young women who appear confident in class, who respond critically to homophobia through an articulation of acceptance in relation to sexuality. Nevertheless, critically thinking through my observations in class and young people's responses in the 'public' space of the classroom highlights the traditional gender relations being reproduced. In fact, contrary to recent policy debates (*DfEE*, 1999; *DfEE*, 2000; *Home Office*, 2000; *Ofsted*, 2002) which suggest that sex education and PSHE have often excluded young men from this arena, this chapter illuminates that it is indeed masculinity that shapes the gendered and heterosexualised relations of the classroom, leaving little or no room for the discussion of female sexuality and desire (Fine, 1988; Harrison, Hillier and Walsh, 1996).

Furthermore, by thinking through young women's verbal and bodily (non)responses in class girls are understood not as "... unitary subjects uniquely positioned, but are produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless" (Walkerdine, 1990: 3). Relations of class, gender, 'race'/ethnicity, sexuality, academic ability and popularity position and make available subject positions in the 'sexuality education' classroom which affects young women's ability to respond in class to the material provided. However, it is the dominant power relations in the classroom that reproduce a polarised debate concerning sexuality which serves to mask the power relations between femininities and masculinities, thus (re)producing static and unitary subject positions for young men and women in the space of the 'sexuality education' classroom. Woven through this discussion is the importance of young people's practices of (dis)identification. The polarised debate within the classroom is made possible because young men have, in order to sustain respectable heterosexuality, to (dis)identify with homosexuality and homosociality. The

material used in class therefore whilst dealing with the most publicly despised form of homosexuality, that is sexual relations between men, actually (re)enforces rather than challenges the mapping of heterosexual relations onto binary opposed gendered bodies. So whilst in theory the values do come from young people, and this is what the methodology at the heart of PSHE serves to produce, they are not fashioned in an ideological vacuum. This is what this chapter seeks to document.

The analysis and research methods utilised in this chapter (participant observation, document collection and in-depth semi-structured interviews with sexual health teachers and practitioners) are discussed in chapter two (2.2.). I start this chapter with a necessary exploration of the Personal Social and Health Education curriculum before exploring how 'sexuality education' fits into this wider provision at Hilltop.

#### *4.1. PSHE at Hilltop: Epistemology, methodology, methods and the space of the classroom*

As I have already outlined in the literature review young people are frequently placed 'at risk' in popular, media and government debates concerning sex education and more specifically sexuality education (see 1.3.). However, in all these disputes the voices and experiences of young people are notable in their absence, as is the provision and implementation of PSHE in British schools. Until recent policy publications concerning sex and relationship education (*DfEE, 1999; DfEE, 2000; Ofsted, 2002*) there was no national framework to assist schools in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of its pupils. Nevertheless, as part of the Ofsted process which marks, grades and assesses British schools, individual schools are judged on their ability to develop these areas of pupils' lives as well as their academic knowledge and attainment.

It is perhaps surprising therefore, given the very recent policy interest in this area and the politically sensitive nature of schools' involvement in the personal that Hilltop established a PSHE department in 1996. Hilltop is quite unusual, if not unique, in the course it offers its pupils. Since its inception the programme has won a number of national awards, been praised by Ofsted, and is used by

educators as an example of good practice in schools. Indeed it is described by Jo Adams, a sexual health worker who advises national government on such policy, as a “shrine to self-esteem”.

The PSHE programme at Hilltop was initially developed because of inadequacies experienced by teachers whilst delivering PSHE through the standard tutorial format, as Sarah Whittingham, the head of year ten suggests:

I think it is a good programme and I think of course it's better because they [Judy and Brenda], they want to teach it. When I, when I first came here, perhaps in my second or third year here, I taught it, I hadn't produced any of the materials, it was all there, it was a very good programme and everything, but I didn't feel any ownership towards it and it was virtually sort of dictated to me, I had lessons plans given to me, this is what you do. And various other people taught it and didn't have a great deal of interest in it and so it wasn't done well. So, now we've got a sort of core of people who do it and who are keen on it ...

Most schools still adopt the standard tutorial format for PSHE which was deemed inadequate by teachers at Hilltop. As Judy Fisher explains if the government want PSHE taught well “... it has got to be properly resourced and properly funded and properly timetabled and trained ...”. Judy Fisher and Brenda Bishop, the two full time teachers of PSHE at Hilltop, have personal investments in developing the PSHE curriculum at Hilltop. Their investment and training in the subject avoids some of the pitfalls in the traditional tutorial format where teachers have little or no training:

... there isn't [sic] good training opportunities ... most teachers receiving initial training don't do comprehensive sustained sex and relationship training and there isn't sustained in-service training around it. So, many teachers feel anxious, embarrassed, ill equipped to do the work and therefore they will do what feels most, least risky and most comfortable which will normally be the biology. You know the bit is impersonal, the bit that deals with bits, now there are many teachers who are doing excellent work and want to work on moral dilemmas and emotions and anxieties and concerns. But the ones who may either be drummed into it or who may be umm, want to do the work but don't feel skilled up equipped and confident will fall back on biology, which is really the last thing young people want to hear about, you know. If you, you are being chatted up by some lad in a club on a Saturday night knowing how your ovaries work isn't going to help you (laughter) deal with that situation you know ...

Jo Adams, Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health

It is evident from the above quotation that without adequate training and resources it is unlikely that PSHE is going to be done well. Teachers trained in curriculum-based subjects are on the whole used to teaching and learning which is more didactic in its approach. As Game and Metcalfe (1996) suggest

curriculum-based subjects usually rely on the communication model of teaching, or what has been described by Paulo Freire (1972) as the 'banking system' of education. Here, teachers (adults) relay the facts to pupils (children) who digest the information and regurgitate it for exams later in the year. Using such an approach for PSHE, a subject which deals with personal and emotive topics, results in inadequate provision for pupils (the 'biological bits') which is potentially dangerous for their social and sexual lives. Furthermore, teaching PSHE in an abstract form relies on a gendered 'protective discourse' of sex education (Holland *et al*, 1998: 56) which exemplifies that young men are the agents of this discourse and that young women are the potential victims of a 'natural' and active male sexuality which involves physical and moral danger. Such an approach disregards young people's lived experiences and does little to challenge relations of domination and subordination.

The PSHE department at Hilltop was not initially created to implement child centred pedagogy. However, it is being developed as such by the PSHE staff, Judy and Brenda, who place discourses of pupils' welfare at the centre of curriculum and methodological development.

### *Epistemology – developing individual selves*

Hilltop promotes PSHE as an ENTITLEMENT for all pupils (see Fig.1).

Through this process of education the school aims:

... to provide learning situations in which pupils can consider and evaluate knowledge, attitudes and beliefs pertaining to their personal and social lives, and develop skills and understanding which equip them to be responsible, happy and healthy members of society

Hilltop PSE documentation

By providing 'learning situations' where pupils are encouraged to develop their multiplicity of selves pupils are expected to become actively engaged in their own identity project. Throughout the course, documentation emphasis is placed on the individual to take responsibility for their own learning and, as the

quotation at the start of this chapter suggests, to think for themselves. The course attempts to develop pupils' selves through the following course objectives<sup>4</sup>:

- Develop self awareness, positive self esteem and confidence
- Develop a healthy lifestyle
- Learn to keep themselves and others safe
- Develop effective and satisfying relationships
- Learn to respect the differences between people
- Develop independence and responsibility
- Play an active role as members of society
- Make the most of their abilities

Hilltop PSHE documentation

#### **What is Personal and Social Development at Hilltop<sup>5</sup>?**

*Personal and Social Development includes the development of the:*

Bodily self  
Sexual self  
Social self  
Vocational self  
Moral self  
Political self  
Aesthetic self  
Spiritual self  
Self as learner  
Self within an organisation, community and social group

#### ***What is personal and social education?***

Personal and Social Education is a school's overall **PROVISION** for pupils' personal and social development. It includes a range of experiences within school which can promote pupils' active involvement, as well as work done in lessons.

Personal and social development is, therefore, the **OUTCOME** of PSE. That is why PSE should be seen as an **ENTITLEMENT** of every pupil.

Figure 1: PSE documentation Hilltop

<sup>4</sup> For more information concerning PSHE aims, objectives, skills, concepts, etc see Figure A in PSHE Appendix.

<sup>5</sup> Documentation concerning PSHE at Hilltop refers to Personal and Social Education (PSE) rather than the recently adopted preferred term that incorporates Health (PSHE). PSHE however, was used more commonly in conversations with teachers at Hilltop and other sexual health workers. Therefore, throughout my thesis, apart from in official documentation, I adopt the preferred term PSHE.

PSHE at Hilltop is explicitly about developing the ability of pupils to learn about themselves and others who live in the world around them and to equip young people with skills (personal development, social, communication and problem solving) which are deemed necessary for participation in a democratic society. It is emphasised by teachers that there is no right answer to any of the topics under discussion, everyone is invited to put their opinion across. PSHE uses set topics (see Fig. 2 for topics covered in yr.10<sup>6</sup>) to provide ‘learning situations’ in order for pupils to explore a spectrum of knowledges and differences of opinion along which they will be located. It follows therefore that PSHE does not rely on didactic and distanced teaching methods (see below) to quantify pupils’ knowledge through exams, and indeed the subject is not yet bound by the structures of the national curriculum, although it is likely that recent documentation (DfEE, 1999; DfEE, 2000; *Ofsted*, 2002) is paving the way for a national framework for schools to be in use in the next couple of years.

**PSHE: Knowledge (Topics Outline)**

*Year Ten*

- Co-operative group work, team building, building trust and self-esteem. Careers guidance education
- Peace and War including speakers – a major and colonel from the army careers office, representation from At Ease and a religious peace campaigner who worked in Bosnia and in the Gulf Peace Team
- Health education/environmental education. Healthy eating relating to vegetarianism, meat eating and animal rights/animal testing.
- Sex Education. Sex and the law – revision from Y9. Sexually transmitted infections (including speakers from local GUM clinic). Appropriate and inappropriate situations. Homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, assertiveness, self-esteem.
- Prejudice and disability – visiting speaker on living with cerebral palsy

Figure 2: PSE documentation Hilltop

Hilltop uses a ‘spiral curriculum’ so that PSHE is developed as a process over the years in conjunction with parents, teachers, parent governors, youth agencies and sexual health workers:

Our co-ordinated approach ensures that all students receive the same experience because of the teachers’ continuity over several years, the leadership by the whole school co-ordinator, and the close teamwork of all PSE staff. Moreover the spiral

<sup>6</sup> See Figure B in PSHE Appendix for a full list of topics from year seven to eleven

nature of the curriculum provides progression, continuity, and reinforcement of learning. Key themes e.g. assertiveness, conflict resolution, rights and responsibilities, prejudice, equal opportunities etc. are revisited at different stages of development

#### Hilltop PSHE documentation

By providing a course which runs over five years, rather than stand-alone topics the curriculum makes space for the development of selves over time and age. This not only allows teachers to provide lessons that are relevant to the age range of pupils but also gives pupils the space to think through and develop understanding over time.

The development of the curriculum in conjunction with outside youth agencies and trained sexual health workers, drugs counsellors and outside visitors aids pupils in their understandings of topics and also provides a means of support and training for staff<sup>7</sup>. By providing young people with the chance to develop their skills over a number of years and revisit topics it potentially provides them with the opportunity to learn, develop and question their views, making explicit that knowledge is not gained once and then possessed, rather it is produced through dialogue and learning. The extent to which these aspirations are brought into fruition are beyond the remit of my research. However, if national policy does develop then there needs to be some serious consideration of how such a theory transfers into practice.

In theory therefore within the 'public' forum of the classroom every pupil at Hilltop has the right to express their opinion on the topics under discussion. Central to this aspiration is the methodology and methods utilised within PSHE. Indeed, it could be argued that the methodologies adopted are more important than the actual topics under discussion because they promote dialogue and deep thinking rather than traditional knowledge transference.

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<sup>7</sup> All teachers have undertaken training in a variety of areas and support each other in departmental training concerning topics, methodology, teaching techniques and curriculum development. Recently staff have taken part in training sessions concerning anti-homophobic bullying, anti-racist education, gender aware education and work on HIV/AIDS.

### *Methodology, methods and the space of the classroom*

PSHE at Hilltop is compulsory for pupils between year seven (aged 11) and year eleven (aged 16/17), although parents/guardians can withdraw their children from sex education modules<sup>8</sup>. There are two full time teachers, Judy Fisher (acting head of PSHE, 1999-2000 and Brenda Bishop, head of PSHE, 2001-) and one part time teacher of PSHE. It is hardly surprising given the historical position of women as nurturers and moral agents in the teaching profession that both teachers of PSHE, a subject that deals with the personal and the emotional, are women (Walkerdine, 1990).

From year seven to year eleven pupils have one contact lesson per week of PSHE which lasts fifty-five minutes. This time commitment to PSHE at Hilltop is unlike most schools in the UK. In lower school (aged 11-13) classes are taught in mixed ability form groups and in upper school, year ten and eleven pupils, are taught in mixed ability, mixed form groups. This is done to encourage a greater challenge through different social mixing for older pupils and in order to provide continuity for younger pupils. Class sizes vary, but contain approximately thirty-five young people. In upper school there are two designated classrooms for PSHE whereas currently in lower school teaching occurs in a standard classroom<sup>9</sup>.

As discussed above knowledge transference is not at the centre of the PSHE curriculum, but pivotal to the subject are the methodologies adopted to encourage dialogue, awareness, understanding and participation. The methodology of PSHE is integral to creating an environment where learning can take place. This includes the use of facilitative teaching methods but also careful consideration of the physical layout of the room and the social relations that may affect young people's ability to participate fully in the lesson.

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<sup>8</sup> To my surprise during my year of research no pupils had been withdrawn from any part of their PSHE programme. By law parents are allowed to withdraw their child/ren from sex education modules if they deem these inappropriate. However, in the year proceeding my research one 'Asian' girl was removed from PSHE and Judy Fisher feared that this would encourage a number of other 'Asian' families to remove their daughters from lessons.

<sup>9</sup> At time of writing a new lower school is in the process of being built, it is envisaged that two rooms will be made available for PSHE teaching, although one may be joint with Religious Education. At the moment classes taught at lower school have to be prepared by teachers in advance, this is time consuming and inadequate as only chairs can be moved into the expected circle. Classrooms cannot be decorated accordingly because other teachers use them for national curriculum lessons.

Figure 3 shows diagrammatically the methodology of the PSHE classroom. All classes are discussion based, "...teaching rooms are arranged with seating in a circle to encourage a supportive, relaxed environment and safe environment in which no-one is represented as more important than others and so that students have visual and oral access to each other" (PSHE documentation). The teaching methods utilised in class vary depending on the topic under discussion. These can include full group discussion, small group work, paired work, the use of video and audio material, sentence enders, individual thinking time and speakers from outside agencies. Small group methods are used to limit non-participation in topic discussion. However, the methodology of the PSHE classroom remains constant; that is participation within a circular dialogic environment. The dynamics of the classroom are strikingly different from disciplines that strive to distance and silence social relations between pupils and pupils, and teachers and pupils. Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe's (1996: 10) reflections on the space of the university lecture theatre resonate with the physical layout of a traditional secondary school classroom:

Students are thus segregated, depersonalised, quantified, as one among many, potentially in competition, and they are pinned in this confined position by writing desks that fold down in front of them.

To date, little research exists in Human Geography that looks specifically at disciplinary sites of learning and knowledge production; such as the classroom, seminar room or lecture theatre (for notable exceptions see Delph-Janiurek, 1999; 2000; Fielding, 2000). By maintaining a distance through the physical space of the teaching room (chairs/tables and desks) the boundaries between adult (teacher) and child (student/pupil) are maintained, thus sustaining academic credibility, the status of the teacher/adult as producer and bearer of all knowledge and student/pupil as passive receptor of information. Spaces that remove such physical barriers to communication are often the most feared for learners, and here I mean both teachers and pupils/students. Such facilitative learning environments threaten the very foundation through which adult/child relations are sustained.



PSHE therefore not only removes such physical barriers to learning but also attempts to provide an environment where students are encouraged to relax and feel comfortable. Each PSHE room at upper school is decorated with topical posters, fitted carpets, plants and curtains, and contains an information desk where pupils can pick up further information, addresses and telephone numbers of local/national agencies and support groups. Judy Fisher explains the reasoning behind such an environment:

Judy: Umm ... to make, to have them come in here feeling that it is a relaxed, supportive, comfortable environment as far as we can make that, hence the actual physical environment of the room, comfortableish chairs, curtains, plants, a carpet, you know as, as comfortable as we can make a classroom.

K: music ...

Judy: Music, that's it yeah. And I try not ever to be in too much of a hurry to start, I try to fiddle a bit and talk, and go and talk to an individual about something and it gives them a chance to come in, settle down, work out who they are sitting next to and make a link and so there is a social interaction, before the session ever gets going. And, if I'm able, if I'm not under pressure I try to allow that, so that it's not too formal. Sometimes it has to be very formal like things are done in test conditions and seats are out in rows, an assessment or an evaluation. And then, they accept that, in fact they'll come in saying is it an exam? And they accept that there might be formal occasions, but for the most part I want them to come in feeling that they're not going to be put under masses of pressure, but they're also not going to get away with totally dropping out. And we can't always succeed at that, because there are thirty children in here and a discussion group should be fifteen, you know to get a really good discussion in an hour in which everybody actively take, takes part we should be working with half groups ...

Judy Fisher

All of the techniques outlined above are used to create an environment where dialogical discussion can prosper, one which "...invites participants to reflect together upon their situation and action in the context of more general social and political conditions ..." (Young, 1997: 8). Dialogical as opposed to monological talk aims for discussion to take place in a group and be reciprocal rather than focus on individual responsibility, confession and blame. However, as Judy points out in the above quote the number of people in the classroom means that not everyone can get involved in the discussion. Furthermore, not everyone is confident in speaking in the full group discussion so small group methodologies are used.

Nevertheless, whilst the 'setting up' of the classroom environment may appear facilitative in its approach to learning, pupils are still expected to work within constructed boundaries set by the teachers:

We engineer our groups, the people in here have been engineered to be separate from the people in there. The people in this room have their best friend sitting next door, they are not sitting with their best friend, as far as we can organise, we can't always. And that is for a number of reasons, one disruption is absolutely at a minimum, cos you don't get those personal exchanges going on, the murmuring, that can disrupt any class. Two when they leave the room, what happens it that they link up with their mate and say we talked about this today, well we talked about that, so you get double effect of the effect, what goes on in there, even though there is the same agenda there may well be, the outcomes may be very different from what occurred in here, cos they, they take up the issues and we take them to wherever they're going. Umm, and there's a third one, yes that students, have to act without a prop, they can't be propped up by, by their friends, so the very shy students, are challenged as well as the more confident students to speak for themselves, to think for themselves, to act for themselves, by not having somebody who's been linked arms with them for three years ...

Judy Fisher

By teaching pupils in class forms for the first three years of secondary school Judy and Brenda have an awareness of social relations between pupils, of pupils' cultures of inclusion and exclusion, tension between pupils, friendship groups and pupils who may be suffering social isolation. At the start of each lesson name cards are placed on chairs and pupils are expected to sit where they are directed, allowing the teachers to engineer the seating arrangements. Based on my own observations, class seating arrangements and subsequent interactions, are strikingly different to those in other classrooms where, for the most part, pupils sit in friendship clusters of choice. By engineering the seating pattern as described above there are obvious advantages of controlling disruptive behaviour.

In the previous quotation Judy suggests that the environment created by PSHE teachers at Hilltop aims to encourage young people to act without a prop, to think, act, speak for themselves, to stand on their own two feet and become individual by expressing their own opinions in class without the support of their friends. In all other environments at school outside of exam conditions friendship groups provide a support mechanism to harness young people, even if this is denied through practices of (dis)identification (see chapter three). In fact, the centrality of pupils' friendships as a coping mechanism to negotiate the humdrum of everyday school life has been well documented by other researchers (Griffin, 1985; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997). The space of the PSHE classroom therefore, serves as an environment where potentially this individuality can be tried out. Nevertheless, removing a young person's supportive friend from their

immediate physical proximity does not dissipate power relations and allow the individual to think, act and speak on their own. Young people's responses in class are still affected by the teachers and the other pupils present. The use therefore of ground rules and depersonalisation is to ensure, as much as possible, the creation of a safe environment to express personal beliefs. This way, it is hoped, that young people will be able to voice an opinion without it being used against them in another classroom context or outside in the playground.

The first PSHE topic in year seven (aged 11) involves 'Introductory Team Building'. This module serves as a getting to know you exercise, but it is also a collaborative exercise whereby pupils and teacher draw up a list of ground rules for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. A typical list would include 'listening attentively, involving everyone and respecting other people and their beliefs' (PSHE documentation). The extent to which these are 'self-constructed' by the pupils is obviously problematic, as they are constructed in discussion with the PSHE teacher and she is in charge of producing the final documentation. The list of 'self-constructed' ground rules is used throughout the PSHE programme as a guidance to behaviour. It is revisited especially when behaviour during a lesson is deemed unacceptable by the teacher.

From the outset and throughout the course it is emphasised by staff that all discussion in PSHE should be depersonalised. Issues should be raised rather than the telling of personal stories or other people's personal experiences:

Judy: ... I think another thing that puts people off teaching PSE is that they think it is some form of confessional you know where you tell everyone all of your blumming secrets, it is not a confessional (laughter), the children don't know my sexuality, I have never discussed it with them. I would ask them not to ask about it, and I don't ask theirs, that's not the point. So teachers who say I couldn't teach PSE because they ask me if I've had sexual intercourse, nobody has a right to ask you if you have had sexual intercourse, you'd say mind your own business, you know, PSE got to, teachers have got to rise above that fear of having to talk about (laughter) very intimate and personal things. We can talk about the political and the social and the personal without feeling we are going to be attacked for it ...

Judy Fisher

Depersonalising topics under discussion appears in direct conflict with developing the individual self and this is where the disjuncture between theory and practice in the PSHE classroom starts to become visible, even before pupils' responses in class are considered. Pupils are expected to have their own opinion,

to respect difference and be able to discuss these issues in class. Therein lies the contradiction however, in that by depersonalising responses pupils are sent the message that in that given space and time certain opinions for some young people could be dangerous<sup>10</sup>. By personalising responses the lesson risks being turned into a confessional that gives ammunition to other pupils to use if conformity and normality within school is not adhered to<sup>11</sup>. For young people, to have an opinion that differs from the majority, or to vocalise that opinion, is to set oneself apart from everyone else and has implications as I discuss below<sup>12</sup>.

The efforts on behalf of the PSHE staff to create a supportive environment seem to reduce disruptive behaviour prevalent in other research studies (Kehily and Nayak, 1996; Measor, *et al*, 1996; Nayak and Kehily, 1997; Skeggs, 1991; Walkerdine, 1990). The effects of a removal of such strict boundaries become glaringly obvious when Judy is called away from school one lesson when the topic under discussion is anorexia<sup>13</sup>:

When I arrive there is a lot of noise, chairs are arranged to face the video, so students sit wherever they want. This results in the majority of 'the lads' sitting in a long row at the back of class, under usual circumstances they are never allowed to sit together in PSHE. The supply teacher is stood at the front of class, fiddling with papers and attempting in a very quiet voice to silence the class. I am immediately struck by her body language, she appears very unsure of herself, the students seem to pick up on this immediately. Throughout the lesson there are discipline problems, 'the lads' flick elastic bands at the back of the girls heads, there is back chat and inappropriate use of language. When the topic of the lesson is introduced, anorexia, some of the boys make very disparaging comments about eating disorders and the bodily size of some of the girls in class, they discuss the girls who in their opinion definitely aren't anorexic. The class quietyens when the

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<sup>10</sup> Similar rules are used in equal opportunities training with adults, ground rules are set to develop good practice and avoid confrontation when opinions differ. However, information is not necessarily depersonalised. Adult participants are given the choice to opt in or out of disclosing personal information and usually confidentiality within the working group is emphasised. Adults therefore are given the choice whether to disclose and they are credited with the ability to not use this information outside the learning environment.

<sup>11</sup> Depersonalising young people's responses is also imperative to avoid the disclosure of personal information that may require teachers to notify the Child Protection Officer at school. Pupils are made aware of Child Protection issues from the very start of PSHE. It is explained to pupils that if they disclose any form of physical, mental or emotional abuse to their teachers they are expected by law to contact the teacher in charge of Child Protection at school who will in turn contact social services. For a further discussion of the implications of Child Protection see chapter two (2.3.).

<sup>12</sup> The PSHE staff also talk about the need to depersonalise their own feelings in class, to not do so would risk young people trying to succeed through being like their teacher, as a form of projection (see Walkerdine, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Judy usually arranges for another PSHE teacher to take the class or for the class to do a piece of written work on a topic which is deemed less sensitive, however, on this occasion neither of these coping strategies were available.

video is put on, probably because of some of the horrific images that are being shown of some young people with emaciated bodies ...

research diary

When PSHE staff are absent work is usually set that can be done in 'traditional' teaching environments, so that staff not comfortable with the methodology of the PSHE classroom do not get into a situation such as that described above. Judy's absence allowed the usual boundaries of the PSHE classroom to be relaxed and some young men made the most of the supply teacher's obvious inability to cope with the methodology of the PSHE classroom. The result was a very unsafe environment where a sensitive topic was used by some male students to personally harass girls by making judgements about their bodies, reminiscent of some of the stories young women told about their experiences at lower school. Thus, this one example shows the contradictory nature of PSHE; whilst the methodology suggests that all young people have the right to express their opinions, not everyone can or does in practice, especially when discussion is not facilitated in a controlled environment. With little control the 'lads' focus on girls' bodies as a means to harass them rather than discussing the social, personal and political consequences of eating disorders. Ironically, it is the objectification of the body that 'the lads' use to disrupt the class when they are supposed to be thinking through pressures of sustaining a particular body image.

Now that I have given an introduction to the epistemology, methodology, methods and space of the classroom the next section gives a brief introduction to the year ten course on 'sexuality education' and how this fits into the wider programme of PSHE.

#### *4.2. 'Sexuality education' at Hilltop*

##### *Sexuality and Human Rights*

... I certainly don't have an agenda that says, I mean the agenda, there is a very clear agenda which is to raise awareness, to challenge bullying behaviour and to give gay and lesbian students the knowledge that you are valued members of society and that we are going to take this seriously. Just as every social issue we do, we take seriously, the best example, the best feedback I've had of that was when we did our work on disability and prejudice with year ten students last year

in the summer term, and one boy had come to us from a number of schools, he had been excluded from a number of schools and we discovered that exclusions were always for fighting and he was fighting in this crazy defence of his brother who's epileptic and has cerebral palsy and every time (emphasis) the boy heard anybody (emphasis) say you spaz or you phlid or you anything, he would go in fists flying, he came here, we were just finishing the work on sexuality, he was like ... a bear because he hadn't gone through the course so he wasn't tuned in with us on the issues. And then we moved on to issues around prejudice and disability, prejudice and discrimination in relation to disability and his ears, you know you could tell from day one he was, he had suddenly found that somebody (emphasis) is beginning to take one thing seriously and is treating it as if it is a proper serious subject and obviously he had never had that before. And he's not, he's not a particularly academic student, but he wrote to the papers to say, you know to the [local newspaper], a letter, to say that he had gone to lots of schools in [the city], been in a lot of trouble with them and he had come to Hilltop and Hilltop did take these issues seriously. And then I found out when we'd finished the work, and if you saw the boy now you'd think, thug (laughter), but what he did then was he realised that if you had prejudices and discrimination in one area then it follows there might be prejudice and discriminations in another, and if he's walking around with all this stuff around sexuality ... but he's judging other people for walking around with all this stuff about disability then he's got to start questioning some of his values and he, bless him, has started that process and instead of saying gay people are wicked, sinful, bad, evil, I would headbutt them and the stuff that I've heard from students, he's now having to think very very carefully, if I want to be taken seriously on one level then I must take people seriously on another, so there's that wonderful transition then. We do that all through the course, year nines are working on gender, year sevens are working on bullying, umm, year eight students they're working on human rights, and that includes things lesbian and gay, transsexual, students, educational rights, we've a right to go to school, we've a right to be treated fairly in school, we've a right to be safe. So all through the course we are looking at ways in which we make judgements about people, that are unfair and might lead to inequality and unfairness. Often unintentionally cos we were ignorant or didn't care enough.

Judy Fisher

It is important for PSHE staff to emphasise that 'sexuality education' in year ten does not stand alone. They do this in two ways. Firstly, through an emphasis on the wider agenda of PSHE - of which 'sexuality education' in year ten is a part - PSHE staff aim to raise awareness and challenge discrimination at all levels across a variety of social categories. As the above quotation makes clear all discussions in PSHE are framed around Human Rights issues rather than minority issues. It is hoped that by doing this young people will make links across lines of discrimination and realise that, as in the above example, that if discrimination because of disability is wrong then discrimination because of sexuality equally has to be questioned<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, and connected to the first

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<sup>14</sup> Neither Judy nor myself are able from such anecdotal evidence to qualify whether the young man has, or is in the process of challenging his homophobia.

point, sexuality relates to a number of PSHE topics throughout the five year course; it is not merely part of a one off module. Sexuality and discrimination is mentioned in modules from the outset of the course when pupils draw up their ground rules and discuss their initial topic of bullying, right up until year eleven when students do a module on the law:

... we can't leave it 'til year ten to start looking at issues around sexuality and around, certainly around it as a human rights issue and as an issue around bullying and as an issue around relationships. But it had to start much earlier than that, so whilst what you've been watching in year ten has been the formal programme in which we are raising awareness, raising lots and lots of questions, thinking through lots of issues, umm, we now actually start the awareness raising in year seven ... so that when we look at bullying as a year seven unit of work we include homophobic bullying among the put downs that children, sadly, all too commonly are involved in, all sorts of children ... it's not, it's not associated with one class, one sex, one group, one race. Umm ... and in fact I've heard teachers indulge in the odd bit as well, so you know not even associated with a particular age, so if we are looking at issues around bullying we'll make sure, if the children don't themselves, and often they do (emphasis), that issues around sexuality are raised.

Judy Fisher

Framing 'sexuality education' and discussions of lesbian, gay and bisexual rights against the backdrop of Human Rights adds legitimation to its inclusion in the curriculum. This is especially pertinent in the current political climate where in spite of intense pressure put on the Blair Labour Government by health and education professionals, as well as activists, Section 28 fails to be abolished. Furthermore, recent sex and relationships guidance (2000) does little to aid the confusion concerning the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual rights in the educational context.

*'(Sex)uality education' at Hilltop*

- Sex Education. Sex and the law – revision from Y9. Sexually transmitted infections (including speakers from local GUM clinic). Appropriate and inappropriate situations. Homosexuality, heterosexual, bisexuality, assertiveness, self-esteem.

Figure 4: Hilltop documentation

Figure four shows the 'official' definition of the course that appears in school documentation. The course is never labelled 'sexuality education', and this is why I always use this term in inverted commas. The term is problematic because people unaware of the course content and methodology could be mistaken for

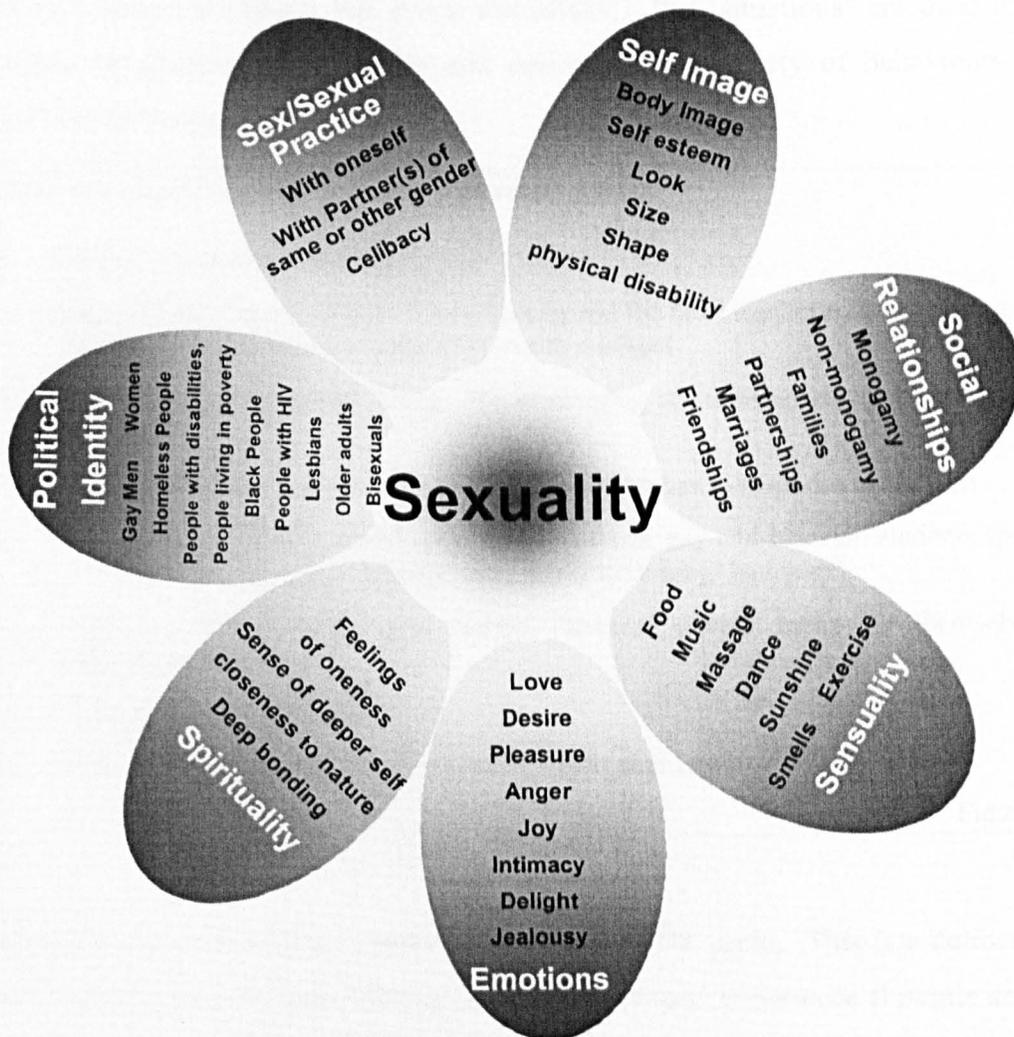
thinking that the course deals with the 'biological bits' of being gay, lesbian or bisexual. It is therefore ironic that in order to limit unwanted interest from press and 'concerned' parents the focus on emotions and sexuality have to be de-emphasised.

Regardless of the official definition of the year ten course on 'sexuality education', this module and other modules in preceding years concerned with sex and relationships are framed through an holistic approach to sexual health, where the physical act of sex is only one part of a person's sexuality:

... we increasingly call it sex and relationships education, so that, it's a million miles away from the kind of biological 'how do your ovaries work' sort of (laughter) approaches. So it will be around sexuality, it will be around your own sexual health, it will be around self image, it will be around relationships and it might well touch on things like conflict in your family or negotiating skills or communication skills or your right to use primary care. So, it's much broader than a conventional biology based sex education, it's much more about relationships and emotions and we really try and put the emotional development of the young people in the centre of the work that we do.

Jo Adams

Framing sex education around sex and relationships rather than biology allows teachers to work with students' experiences, emotions and feelings on a given topic - as the 'sexuality flower' developed at the Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health by Jo Adams and Carol Painter shows diagrammatically (see Figure 5).



These all add up to how we define ourselves as sexual beings

Sexuality = sexual selfhood

Sexuality involves our relationships with ourselves, those around us and the society in which we live - whether we identify as gay, heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual or celibate

©Carol Painter & Jo Adams

Design: Jon Fox

Figure 5: Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health: Sexuality Flower

### *'Sexuality education': course outline*

The course comprises eight lessons (see Figure 6) and begins with pupils being given a list of (in)appropriate situations which they have to discuss in smaller groups before holding a full group discussion. The 'situations' are used as a means of eliciting ideas, issues and opinions on a variety of behaviours in specific locations.

#### **Year Ten course outline: sexuality and relationships**

- Week 1: Appropriate Situations
- Week 2: Focus on two issues: 2 men kissing and the head teacher refusing to support a lesbian, gay and bisexual support group in a school
- Week 3: Film: 'Beautiful Thing', the developing relationship between two young men
- Week 4: Feedback: a discussion of attitudes and values in response to the film
- Week 5: Theories of homophobia (Young lesbian, gay and bisexual students speak for themselves, Myth and Reality, and 'Straight Talking' handouts)
- Week 6: Video: Young gay, lesbian, bisexual people speak for themselves. Question preparation.
- Week 7: Visiting speakers
- Week 8: Feedback/evaluation – introduction to next topic

Figure 6

Initially the pupils are not aware of their new PSHE topic. This is a deliberate strategy on behalf of the PSHE staff. In the teachers' experience if pupils know in advance their new topic involves sex education or sexuality they will either clam up and refuse to participate or go to the other extreme and refuse to talk about anything else.

The (in)appropriate situations given to the pupils range from a mother breastfeeding her baby on a bus, a teenage girl using the bathroom whilst her father is naked in the bath, to a thirteen-year-old girl masturbating in her room with the door closed. Two 'gay' situations are placed deliberately on the list:

- Two men meet in town, one of them is visibly distressed, when they depart one man kissed the other.
- A head teacher at a school with an equal opportunities policy stops young lesbian and gay students setting up a support group.

The first week of the course uses small and large group discussion forums to discuss all of the (in)appropriate situations and pupils' opinions. The second week then uses the two 'gay' situations for further discussion and to introduce the new topic. At this point the pupils become aware of their new topic.

Throughout the course, as discussed above, a variety of teaching methods are used to elicit responses. By using different and varying teaching methods Judy hopes that all pupils will become involved in discussion, as she explains:

... the way we can address [pupils' non-participation] is by doing small group discussion, where in a group of four you haven't got any choice, you can't drop out, you're expected to give a reaction, you have to contribute to the exercise. And anyway, when it's on an issue that they are interested in, and I think this [sexuality] is an issue that they are interested in, it's not a big effort to contribute within a group of four. Part of the process then is to get the shy kid who was OK in the group of four to be confident enough to express four people's feelings with thirty ...

Judy Fisher

The course therefore uses small and large group discussion to start or enhance debates. Furthermore, pupils are given time to think and develop opinions by using sentence enders (see Fig. C: PSHE Appendix Two), whereby pupils are able to respond individually to the film in a confidential manner. Moreover, the following week responses to the film are discussed by using a collection of the responses that Judy has collated. This is used as a practice of distanciation to avoid the personal being attributed to an individual, thereby guarding against the personal being taken outside the classroom if unwarranted. Sentence enders are also used as a strategy to feedback feelings about the course to pupils and the teachers (see Fig. D: PSHE Appendix Two).

Not only are young people's responses to lesbian, gay and bisexual issues invited into the forum of the classroom for debate, but statistics, stereotypes and myths are also used to question commonly held and discriminatory opinions (see Figures E-H: Appendix Two)<sup>15</sup>. In week six young people then hear the experiences of teenage lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils via a video, which focuses in particular on their experiences at school. Up until week seven the emphasis in the course is on getting young people to air their opinions, get the

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<sup>15</sup> These statistics and experiences are not only passed around the class for pupils to look at or read out by the teacher but all pupils in the circle have to read out one of the experiences. This can be quite compelling if the job of reading out an experience of homophobic bullying falls to a pupil who has just expressed their distaste for homosexuality.

prejudice and falsities 'out there' into the forum of the classroom, to dispel myths and get young people to feel comfortable talking about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. According to Judy this is not as difficult as it may sound:

... we are a bit lucky with the work on sexuality because we're so slow as a society to start to recognise homophobia but we're, we're a bit quick to recognise racism and so what happens in a classroom is all the racism is really suppressed, so children who want to say hateful, spiteful, wicked things about people based on race are very very careful. And yet, I think black people would argue that how can you even begin to start addressing prejudice and discrimination if you don't know what you're dealing with. If it is aaalll under the surface and isn't coming out and you don't know what you're dealing with, whereas in that response to the film all the stuff comes out, it's unnatural, I feel sick, err, they shouldn't be kissing each other. Great, because now you have got all that out in the open, let's vent it and then let's start to discuss.

Judy Fisher

Then in week seven the course culminates in a visit to the school by young lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Volunteers are recruited from the local lesbian, gay and bisexual support groups at educational establishments and youth workers who work specifically around these issues. Pupils are invited to prepare questions in week six and then invited to ask the visitor one question. All pupils are expected to take part in the lesson<sup>16</sup>. Again as pointed out in the previous section there is a contradictory message throughout 'sexuality education' at Hilltop because of the social and political climate in which this education takes place. The epistemology and methodology of PSHE aims to challenge prejudice and discrimination, allowing all young people, no matter their gender, 'race'/ethnicity, class, sexuality or disability to have a voice in the classroom. However, the very fact that young lesbian, gay and bisexual adults have to be recruited from outside of Hilltop in order for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people to find a voice in school immediately highlights the difficulty of 'sexuality education' within the education context<sup>17</sup>. There is an awareness therefore by using material that distances 'sexuality' from the classroom that the school and even the PSHE classroom is an unsafe environment to be anything but heterosexual; moreover to even question the inevitability of heterosexuality is problematic, no matter what your sexual identification.

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<sup>16</sup> Pupils are asked to write down a minimum of three questions. Judy then collates the questions and picks one question from each pupil. She then puts them in order to develop a discussion and then Judy facilitates the discussion by asking each pupil in order to ask the question which has been highlighted on their sheet.

<sup>17</sup> This is not however an explicit aim of the course in the official curriculum documentation.

This is the sexuality course as it stands on paper. I now turn to look at what happens in practice in the classroom, and specifically the pupils' responses to 'sexuality education'.

#### *4.3. Young people's responses to 'sexuality education': the missing discourse of female sexuality*

The written page does not lend itself well to conveying the contradictory feelings I experienced as a researcher in the 'sexuality classroom'. I feared the mayhem, the 'disruptive larking around' (Measor, *et al*, 1996) that appears to be the norm in many research 'stories' concerning teenage boys' responses to formal provision of sex education (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Holland, *et al*, 1998; Jackson, 1999; Mac an Ghail, 1996c; Nayak and Kehily, 1997). Furthermore, informal exchanges in other lessons<sup>18</sup> alerted me to the potential of homophobic and heterosexist name calling where cultures of masculinity allow for little deviation from 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). So I remained anxious no matter how much I assured myself that the teaching methodologies adopted in this lesson would provide a potential space for 'sexuality education'. However, I also felt excited that I was actually going to see 'sexuality education' 'in action'.

#### *(Dis)identifications with male homosexuality: bodily performances of disgust in the 'sexuality education' classroom*

Given the plethora of research on masculinities and schooling (cf. Epstein; Johnson; Mac an Ghail; Nayak and Kehily; Redman) that raise the question "Why are Young Men so Homophobic"? (Nayak and Kehily, 1997), it should come as little surprise that the dominant and most visible observations in the 'sexuality education' classroom are young men's articulations and bodily performances of homophobia. As Nayak and Kehily (1997: 139) suggest "... the pervasiveness of homophobic language within schools cannot be underestimated". Name calling, such as poofster, queer, gay, woman, bender, bent and battye boy are audible within both formal educational spaces of the

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<sup>18</sup> See the example used in chapter three (3.4.) of the History lesson.

classroom (see History example in the previous chapter), including the PSHE classroom, and informal spaces of interaction during break and lunch. Such practices serve to discriminate and feminise some young men and call their masculinity into question, but also, as Wood (1984 in Nayak and Kehily, 1997: 140) points out, the use of misogynistic and homophobic language is often utilised to bolster masculine status and conceal vulnerabilities. After their initial discussions of the (in)appropriate scenarios the main part of the course starts when the class watch an abridged version of a film called 'A Beautiful Thing'. The film explores the developing relationship of two young men who are of a similar age to the pupils:

... for the most part the class is intent on watching the film [Beautiful Thing]. I try to watch the screen but at the same time look around the class to gauge the pupils' reactions. When the boys kiss on screen and rub peppermint foot lotion into the back of the lad with the bruises, some of the boys shift uneasily in their seats. Others are not looking at the screen, Marcus is giggling, others are putting their heads and chins in the top of their jumpers, others are trying to look at their mates to gauge their reaction and make signs of disgust at each other, I notice Colin making sick signs to Altaf and Marcus says that he has a lump in his throat, meaning he feels sick. All the girls watch intently, I notice Olivia tell Conrad to shut up and Abi also tells one of the other lads to pack it in when they start making comments.

research diary

On the occasions when there is close bodily proximity between young men (i.e. in the film) or there is the suggestion that young men could be lovers (i.e. when Judy suggests that the men in the street scenario are more than 'just friends'), there is an immediate and visible bodily reaction from some of 'the lads'. When the boys kiss in the film Marcus, Colin, Altaf and Conrad show their unease through overt bodily displays of disgust and joking. They shift uneasily in their seats, they appear to wriggle, some put their chins in their jumpers and others make faces at their mates across the room. Conrad, who is one of the most popular and confident members of his peer group, appears to slip down in his seat and adopt a stance with his legs open as if to prove his masculine worth.

Immediately therefore, the extent to which pupils (especially boys) are able to express their opinions and feelings in class are curtailed by the bodily displays of hegemonic masculinity. These visible displays of masculinity highlight the difficulty which young men have in identifying with alternative masculinities. The film depicts the developing relationship between two young men of a similar age to the boys in class. The film does not focus specifically on the physicality

of the relationship between the young men, however, it is physical proximity between the boys which engenders the reaction in class. At this stage the boys in class have no way of opting out of the lesson, so the immediate means to (dis)identify with such performances of masculinity is to publicly display their disgust.

Moreover, in the first lesson of the 'sexuality education' course Conrad reminds the group of acceptable masculinity through a display of how men 'should' say goodbye to each other. He rejects any form of close bodily contact which he describes as 'girls being emotional' - thus distancing himself and proper men from the feminine - and suggests an alternative, which is either a quick punch on the shoulder/back or a sign of respect (fist with thumb, little finger and first finger extended). The bodily exchanges that occur in the classroom between 'the lads' reveals that even when the curriculum attempts to give young men the space to think about alternative masculinities the immediate risk is too great. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1996: 54) point out that "peer group networks are one of the most oppressive arenas for the production and regulation of masculinities", and observations from inside the PSHE classroom show that the influence of the peer group does not remain outside the classroom, even when individuals are isolated from their peers by engineered seating arrangements. Through bodily displays of disgust Conrad and his mates attempt to reproduce and regulate acceptable forms of masculinity when confronted with alternative gay masculinities on the screen and in group discussion. Displays of acceptable masculinity at the outset of the course by Conrad potentially restrict responses in class to the material provided. 'Lads' could put themselves and their respectability at risk if they were to respond in a manner that may question masculinity as anything but heterosexual. An alternative response from boys in class remains conspicuous in its absence, although Warren, as I discuss later in this chapter, is a notable exception. Outside the key group of dominant displays of masculinity other boys keep their heads down and refuse to say anything within large group discussion.

Nevertheless, whilst the bodily displays of disgust outlined above are visible they fall short of being overtly disruptive as experienced in other studies (Measor et al, 1996). For the most part they take place in informal spaces of interaction. To

watch the film pupils are allowed to pull-in their chairs around the screen. This momentary lapse of seating control allows strategic shifting of chairs and relocation into friendship groupings. Therefore, Marcus, Colin, Altaf and Conrad's immediate responses are only visible to those close by. Judy, who is preparing for the next part of the lesson, is either oblivious to the interactions or does not deem them sufficiently disruptive to halt the video and the rest of the class. Glances and comments across the room within peer groups are frequently missed, although when seen pupils are pulled up immediately on their inappropriate behaviour. However, Judy also points out that pupils have to take responsibility for themselves:

... I have no doubt at all that when you're sitting in a, with a group of thirty you miss things, I know I miss things. Err, I look up and there has been some exchange, which can be, it might be a sexual exchange, like sexual remark, or a glance, umm, you know, and I'll look up and I'll discover that I've just missed something and I'm not, I'm not there (emphasis) to police students, their, their behaviour is their, responsibility, they must, I expect them to behave and generally they do as you see ... I expect their behaviour to be of a very high standard and the last thing I want to do is, is umm, the Joyce Grenfell model of you know Charlie this ...

Judy Fisher

Judy cannot, as she eludes to above, pick up on every exchange between the pupils, especially when they involve non-verbal means of communication. Furthermore by busying herself away from the video screen and not challenging pupils' immediate responses Judy takes the possibility of didacticism out of the screening of the video, she allows them to develop multiple meanings. Trying to see and challenge every inappropriate look, gesture or comment would result in a power struggle between adult/teacher and child/pupil, which is at odds with the facilitative approach of the curriculum. Everyone in class has the right to express their opinion, even if opinions are homophobic. Nevertheless, pupils are expected to express their thoughts in a responsible manner, without using inappropriate language, offensive behaviour and personalising comments.

*The small group: trying out opinions reflecting normative gender rules?*

The space of the small group discussion is promoted as a space to facilitate group interaction, so that young people can try out their opinions in an attempt to increase their confidence before entering the full circle for discussion. It also

serves as a means to spark discussion on the infrequent occasions when pupils appear unable or unwilling to respond in a larger group. However, this small group discussion also serves as a means of producing and regulating acceptable responses from young men and women, thus potentially defining appropriate responses for pupils in wider group discussion. These small group discussions away from the immediate gaze and regulation of the teacher are frequently where initial responses to material become apparent:

The class were silent when Judy asked for responses from last week's scenarios, so she split them into smaller groups of four, suggesting to me after the lesson that full group discussion was obviously too difficult for them without preparation. I sat with Louisa, Conrad, Rex and Alison. Louisa reads out the scenarios and Conrad responds to most of them. When Louisa reads out the gay scenarios both Conrad and Rex shift in their seats. A list of offensive homophobic comments ensues, Rex says that 'they should be in their own schools' and of course they shouldn't have a LGB support group at school. Conrad starts with 'it's not natural', 'boys don't kiss in the street if they're proper men' ... The boys' body language and comments are defensive, unlike the girls, Louisa and Alison challenge the boys to the best of their ability, even though they don't appear to be listening.

research diary

As the above extract suggests, the small group discussion, even with my presence, allows young people to perform traditional gendered responses to the material provided. These exchanges and the diatribe of homophobic name-calling are similar to those witnessed within peer group culture in other spaces in Hilltop. In this case, and on a number of other occasions, these small groups allow boys to make overtly offensive homophobic comments, giving them the space to use inappropriate language away from teacher regulation. Within the space of the small group therefore the responsibility for challenging young men on their homophobic and inappropriate use of language is transferred from the (female) teacher to the girl pupil. In the small group, and, as I explicate below in greater depth, the 'facilitative PSHE environment' in general it is the girl 'child' who is given the responsibility to nurture and produce (male heterosexual) individuals (Walkerdine, 1990).

*“Blurghhh, that’s disgusting”*: Gendered responses in class, boys and sex

Throughout the ‘sexuality education’ course there appears a polarisation of gendered responses from pupils. As discussed in the previous section the small group is often a space for young men to articulate homophobia and for young women to respond and attempt to challenge their comments. Moreover, when full circle discussion takes place, young men do not silence their homophobia which is glimpsed within peer interaction. Rather they respond and articulate their feelings in another manner. The offensive language is missing, apart from a few slip ups. Those boys who do respond verbally in full group discussion are very careful about how they articulate their homophobia. They keep face with their peers but they do this within the confines of the ‘constructed environment’ where they know that inappropriate language and behaviour is not accepted:

After small group discussion pupils are asked for their opinions in the full circle. Each small group responds, it is amazing, in all the groups there is a gender split. The girls have chosen responses which on the whole are accepting of the gay relationship in the film, whereas the boys say that the relationship is unnatural and unacceptable.

research diary

From the collated list of responses from the film (Fig I: PSHE Appendix Two) pupils are expected to choose two responses they agree with, two responses they disagree with and two they do not understand. They discuss these opinions in small groups and then report back to the larger group. Pupils’ responses are highly gendered, which is noticed by me (see research diary extract), the teachers and the pupils themselves. Girls appear to articulate discourses of acceptance and understanding, choosing responses such as:

‘I learned that people don’t decide to be gay. They’re born with their sexuality’

‘We don’t decide what ‘natural’ is, nature does. Homosexuals are naturally inclined toward one another’

‘I wish people wouldn’t judge people for who they are, gay or straight’

‘There should be more support for gay and lesbians’

Whilst boys tend to choose responses such as:

‘I am concerned that most of the world will turn gay’

‘I believe that homosexuality is wrong, just as sex outside marriage is wrong. The bible states clearly that homosexuality is wrong and I believe that the bible is God’s word and is right’

‘I think that gays are going against the laws of nature’

'They will have to pretend to be straight to please other people'

'I think Jamie forced Steve into it'

'In my personal view gays and lesbians are wrong'

When pupils fill in the sentence enders (see Fig. C: PSHE Appendix Two) confidentiality is assured. Therefore, I cannot tell whether the pupils (dis)agreed with the responses in class are of the same gender as those who wrote the original response. Moreover, there is nothing to say that the person who wrote the response would identify with the same response in full group discussion.

However, in the 'public' space of the full circle discussion it is clear that boys choose responses that allow little discussion concerning the emotions in the relationship between the two boys in the film or concerning the prejudice they face. By agreeing with responses which rely on discourses of nature or religion to justify their homophobia they leave little room to discuss either the relationship between the boys or the emotions the girls are more likely to bring up in discussion. The boys appear unable to get away from the biological and penetrative potential of their relationship as is highlighted in the following extract about the preceding small group discussion:

During the smaller group discussion Conrad and Gemma were talking about Conrad's difficulty with homosexuality and he raised the issues of it not being natural. "If God had wanted us to be gay he wouldn't have made women". Conrad then started making comments about orifices, he leaned over to Gemma and whispered behind his hand something about penetration, he was asking her how it was possible. He then asked what happened to all the shit that was up a man's arse. He was saying this behind his hand, but I could work out what he was saying, he obviously thinks I was born yesterday.

research diary

My presence did not stop Conrad from making these comments, although he appeared sufficiently embarrassed to try to mask them behind his hand. In the full circle discussion Conrad would not have dared use such language. Instead Conrad and other young men in class use the responses on the sheet to agree that homosexuality is not natural, it says so in the Bible, and God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve for procreation purposes. When Conrad and other 'lads' are questioned on such responses by the girls or by Judy herself, they find it very difficult to justify and give further explanation to their opinions:

At the start of the group discussion Ali said that he agreed with statement 7, that is "I believe that homosexuality is wrong, just as any sex outside marriage is wrong. The bible states clearly that homosexuality is wrong and I believe that the bible is

God's word and is right". Judy asked him to explain why he believed this and why the Bible says that it is wrong. Ali had great difficulty following up this statement and justifying his beliefs that others should be treated as inferior, he just kept rephrasing the statement and looking to others for help. Unfortunately or perhaps luckily for Ali, the lesson was coming to the end and Judy had to ask Ali to think about this for next week when they would deal with some of the more controversial issues.

research diary

The boys rely on fixed and essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity to justify their homophobia and (re)enforce 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Such responses based on 'fixed knowledge' allow little space for discussion concerning the emotions and prejudices that surround homosexuality. By focusing on sex, rather than the broader definition of sexuality of which sexual practice is only a part (see Fig. 5), verbal responses from boys reinscribe male sexuality as active. Real boys are not concerned about emotions, they are for girls. Therefore, boys (dis)identify with alternative (gay) masculinities in two ways. Firstly, through the physical act of 'wrong' sexual practice, and secondly, by distancing themselves from any attempt, by staff and female pupils, to discuss emotions between men. A focus on emotions between men is bound to fail because the gendering of emotions leaves limited room for appropriate performances of masculinity. Through their performances of disgust and (dis)identifications with male homosexuality young men reproduce masculinity as heterosexuality (Holland *et al*, 1998), leaving little room for discussions about deviations from the 'norm'.

*'I didn't understand why so many boys have prejudices against lesbians, gays and bisexuals ...': Verbalising the obvious? girls challenging boys on their homophobia*

I read the preceding sections of this chapter and think that the displays of masculinity are nothing new, perhaps they are just being performed in a different space. There are few glimpses of alternative masculinities in the classroom. However, there is something missing from both the above discussion and previous research, and that is the girls' attempts to challenge and question boys on their performances of masculinity. As I (re)read my research diary I am struck by the way in which all my observations concerning boys' homophobia are followed by girl's attempts to challenge them. This is either with a look or a

sharp comment to silence their behaviour during the film or through discourses of acceptance in small and full circle discussion. In most studies it is girls who bear the brunt of heterosexist comments, they sit mute as boys cause mayhem in a lesson, singling girls out for ridicule<sup>19</sup>. Research to date suggests that girls respond constructively to single-sex learning environments, especially in sex-education, away from the regulation of their femininities by boys (Kenway and Willis, 1998; Measor *et al*, 1996). Whereas in mixed sex education lessons, girls are constantly challenged, questioned and teased about their desire to extend their knowledge base (Measor *et al*, 1996). On the surface, however, 'sexuality education' at Hilltop appears to reframe gender rules and put girls in the driving seat and young men on the defensive.

In the above extracts from my research diary the girls police boys on their behaviour when their displays of masculinity become too much. Abi and Olivia tell Conrad, Altaf and Marcus to shut up when they start making comments during the film, and other girls twist in their seats and throw looks of disgust in the direction of the 'lads' in order to silence them. In small group discussions and full circle discussion girls are constantly challenging boys on their opinions, asking them to justify why they think homosexuality is unnatural. Indeed an all out fight nearly broke out when Abi learnt that Robbie and Marcus wanted to know 'when it would be made illegal'. Girls also show signs of dismay when they listen to responses from the boys, they look across the room and roll their eyes at their friends, make loud groaning noises and in some cases laugh at their immaturity. In fact, the 'lads' behaviour in PSHE (re)enforces girls' (dis)identifications with their immature behaviour (see chapter three, 3.1.).

In small group discussion Conrad and Gemma have already discussed Conrad's contradictory behaviour concerning sexuality:

Gemma then questions Conrad about why he can't cope with two men but he is turned on by the thought of two women having sex together. She raises an incident in class the other day where some of the lads were getting off on the idea of girls in the class being together. He looks embarrassed but admits that it is true and it is more accepting for women because "they are more emotional".

research diary

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<sup>19</sup> See as well the discussion of the lesson on anorexia when the usual teacher is absent and the 'constructed' environment is not adhered to.

Later in full circle discussion Gemma exposes Conrad's embarrassment by relaying their conversation to the whole class. Conrad says that it is different for two women, "they hug and stuff, although they don't kiss". There are a few murmurs at this moment from some of the girls who seem to be disagreeing with him. The group then discuss how girls and boys deal differently with emotions. Conrad justifies his contradictory behaviour by suggesting that girls are more emotional and so bodily closeness and emotions between them are more acceptable than they are for men. By using the 'girls are emotional' response Conrad refuses to consider masculinity outside of normative gender constructions or to recognise that close female affiliation could be a rejection of masculinity in itself. It is natural for girls to be emotional, but for boys this threatens their investments in masculinity and therefore any boys who are seen to embrace emotions are emasculated and labelled gay. Whilst Gemma does attempt to challenge his contradictory behaviour his response does not upset normative gender roles. Neither Gemma, nor any of the other girls, appear willing to destabilise further his behaviour. Girls' discourses of acceptance complement performances of hegemonic masculinity, because it is expected and in fact seen as normal for young women to be in touch with their emotional side and therefore more accepting of homosexuality. It is hardly surprising given the holistic approach to 'sexuality education' at Hilltop that young men respond in such gender normative manners. If young men were to do otherwise they would risk challenging masculinity as active and potentially risk marginalisation from their peers. Moreover, through the very activity of challenging boys on their homophobia girls are performing an appropriate and normative form of femininity. They are being good and accepting girls, something that is important within the discourses of individuality and respectability signified in their statement, "we're all friends here", outlined in the previous chapter.

So, whilst girls are vocal in their challenges to the lads' overt homophobia they are restricted in their responses because they appear unable to destabilise gender boundaries too much:

Conrad agrees with the statement "I think Jamie forced Steve into it" [boys in the film]. This brings about much hilarity from Gemma who asks Conrad how anyone can force anyone to kiss them like that. Conrad retorts that Steve said he wasn't queer. Conrad doesn't seem to understand the link between feeling these emotions, voicing them and then having to deal with societal expectations. He

then asks Gemma what she would do if her best friend tried to kiss her. She explains that her best friend is her cousin and that would then be incest. So I ask her to think about if her best friend told her she had feelings for her, how would she react? She said that she would explain that she didn't like women in that way. She turns to Conrad and says "I like penises".

research diary

Conrad gets defensive in the above conversation with Gemma because he does not understand why Steve kisses Jamie in the film after he has just said "I'm not queer". Conrad seems unable or unwilling to make the connection between the subtlety of being labelled gay (and all the negative connotations that go with that) and the practice and feelings which make up gay sexuality. Up until this point Gemma had done a very good job of providing the other point of view in order to challenge Conrad on his homophobia. However, perhaps threatened by her laughter, Conrad asks Gemma how she would react. She attempts at first to avoid the question by being pedantic. But when prompted by me to think about the emotions involved in the relationship rather than the potential for physical contact Gemma replies with the logical response - she would explain that she is heterosexual. And for good measure she (re)enforces this through a display of hypersexuality by explaining to Conrad her penchant for penises. At first I was quite heartened by Gemma's ability to question Conrad and some of the other 'lads' on their homophobia. However, by (re)enforcing her heterosexuality at the end of the conversation the potential for challenging Conrad is lost because she has to maintain her heterosexual performance, and femininity as heterosexuality.

Through the above interaction therefore the disjuncture between theory and practice becomes apparent in 'sexuality education'. Young men are on the defensive in this series of lessons because in order to challenge homophobia within the 'public' space of the classroom young men have to identify with homosexuality which threatens their masculinity. This produces a series of (dis)identifications. Girls on the other hand do not have to identify with the subject matter because, for the most part, the course focuses on male homosexuality (note the material used). It is much easier and in line with expected gender performances for girls to articulate discourses of acceptance in relation to (male) homosexuality. However, when Gemma is asked by Conrad to consider how she might feel in a similar situation her inability to identify as sexual in that situation is made apparent. She (re)enforces herself as a sexual

subject but makes it explicit that she is the right kind of sexual subject by emphasising her heterosexuality. Given the importance in the previous chapter of (dis)identifications in the practices of teenage girls' friendship groups it would be interesting and insightful to see how the dynamics of the classroom change if material that deals with female sexuality and/or bisexuality is used .

As exemplified above the material used during the course on 'sexuality education' invokes very traditional gendered responses. This masculinist use of material creates a polarised discussion that on the surface appears to favour young women. Furthermore, the young person centred approach privileges the voice of the pupil. Therefore, coupled with the use of masculinist material it is young men who shape discussions and (re)enforce normative gender rules around 'compulsory heterosexuality' and hatred of male homosexuality:

The prejudice that, that we're more, that you and I are more likely to hear about and read about and speak to people about, correct me if I'm wrong, suggests that people feel far more emotionally .. emotional .. anger towards men who have sex with men than women who have sex with women. In fact I think there is so much ignorance around women's relationships with women that it's almost not thought about anyway but the very thought of, of penetration ... fills boys, I think young boys with absolute sheer horror, they haven't even, I mean at, at the sort of ages we are talking about they may not even have started thinking about penetration of any partner, never mind, penetrating a partner who, or being penetrated by a partner who is of the same sex. It might just be just too difficult which is why we talk about homosexuality not as sex, but as umm, part of us, the nature, and that, so that homosexuality is not sex. That's difficult, it's difficult for me, all the concepts around the political and the social, relationships without always coming back on sex.

Judy Fisher

In the above quotation Judy argues that sexual penetration between men is so despised in 'Western' (British) society that men, especially young men, cannot get past their abhorrence in order to think about and discuss the emotional aspects of (homo)sexuality. The dominant discourse within the classroom, and this includes bodily as well as discursive responses, is the male pupils' disgust towards the physical act of male (homo)sexuality. This results in the silencing of female sexuality, (re)inscribes a discussion around male homosexuality and leaves little room for a discussion around anti-lesbianism and/or anti-bisexuality. A broadening out of the discussion could prove fruitful in challenging 'compulsory heterosexuality' and queering the classroom.

This chapter deals with ‘public’ performances in the ‘sexuality education’ classroom. The polarised gendered responses come from a few key players and reflect relations of class, race and popularity. These will be discussed briefly before discussing the final few parts of this chapter, which critically reflect on the ability of ‘sexuality education’ to challenge the school as a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’.

*Speaking up in class: popular middle class girls versus working-class boys*

I do not wish to suggest that all young men are homophobic or that all young women are able to challenge young men on their homophobia. However, within the space of the PSHE classroom, and in other spaces in the school (staff room, other classrooms, break and lunch time spaces), “power is differentiated so that particular styles of masculinity become ascendant or dominant in certain situations” (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996, following Connell, 1987). This section shows that the discursive and bodily displays of homophobia within the PSHE classroom are classed as well as gendered. From the above extracts it is possible to glean that group discussion is dominated by a few people, notably, the group of ‘lads’, Conrad, Marcus, Altaf, Ali and Rex whilst Gemma, Abi, Olivia and Warren (discussed below) provide the defence of homosexuality. This is not to say that other members of the class sit there in stunned silence, but these members dominate conversation<sup>20</sup>, through which they are actually using the PSHE classroom and ‘sexuality education’ in particular to make masculinities and (re)enforce hegemonic heterosexual masculinity (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

It is not surprising that the girls who are vocal about their challenges to the boys are also very popular within peer group culture in school. Both Abi (white) and Gemma (‘mixed race’) are popular middle class girls, who have a lot of girlfriends and are equally as popular with ‘the lads’, using the boys as a resource for fun and messing around in school rather than any serious romantic attachment (see chapter three, 3.1.). Both Gemma and Abi’s ability to get on with ‘the lads’

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<sup>20</sup> Further qualitative research needs to look in-depth at young people’s responses to ‘sexuality education’ and to consider the responses given in class and those that would be discussed elsewhere.

seems to allow them the confidence to risk asking 'the lads' questions about their homophobia. Their support of male homosexuality as an emotional relationship, as opposed to a sexual practice, does little to question their position within school culture and they find active support from each other and their peers in PSHE.

Vocal homophobic responses from the 'lads' come from white working-class boys and young 'Asian' men. There is one person within the group who appears to be an anomaly – Warren - who unlike his mates does not respond with disgust to the discussion of homosexuality. In fact, he uses the girls as a means of support to air his views concerning the boys' prejudices:

The group discussion was dominated by the usual players in class, Gemma, Warren and Abi. Warren came out with some very insightful comments concerning accepting people for what they are and allowing people to get on with their own lives without prejudice and constantly making fun of them. Warren doesn't appear to be inhibited to talk about his feelings in front of his mates. When I spoke to Judy after the session she also pointed out how pleased she is with Warren and his maturity, "he would never had done that last year". At one point he recounts the story of a comedian making homophobic comments and one member of the audience got up and hit him. He says he was pleased about this because it was out of order.

research diary

Warren hangs out with 'the lads' who articulate homophobia, but within class he is willing to question the boys on their ignorance and put forward his feelings of dislike for their comments - even though this directly contradicts his peer group. I never once heard any negative remarks made towards Warren. He constantly agreed with the girls, talked about accepting people for what they are and agreed that some people in class need to think about things before they speak and call people names. Warren is particularly eloquent when talking about name calling (see below), which hints at the reason why he is perhaps quick to challenge the homophobia articulated by his peers. Warren recounts in class how he was bullied because of his regional accent when he moved into the area. His experience of this prejudice has made him think about the hurt that such behaviour causes. He has now come to recognise that bullying on the grounds of anything is unacceptable. Perhaps Warren's experience points to where he has found the strength to challenge his peers. Furthermore, Warren is a popular 'lad' in school, he has a girlfriend and is liked and respected within his peer group. These aspects of his school life could partially secure his masculinity, making it

less risky for him to question the behaviour of his male peers within the space of the PSHE classroom.

I mean some of the boys you have listened to are not afraid to say that they umm, that homophobia is wrong, whereas boys are often under immense pressure to say that homosexuality is wrong, because they have to identify as very male at that age because of the amount of bullying that could come their way if they begin to identify, identify with gay people, particularly with gay boys.

Judy Fisher

There are other boys in class who are not vehemently homophobic through verbal or bodily responses. Small group discussion allows them to speak - especially when they are working with a group of girls - but when they return to the full group they remain silent, preferring the girls to report back on their behalf. Those boys who are already threatened outside class because their performances of masculinity do not meet with required expectations are not likely to make themselves visible by speaking out in class. Simon, a middle-class South East Asian mixed 'race' boy, is a case in point. He always appears withdrawn and his body language is closed, knees hunched together, arms in, distinctly uncomfortable. He appears to adopt this stance in most lessons, including form when he is with his 'friendship group'. He is the butt of comments and practical jokes, particularly pertaining his presumed sexuality. According to pupils and some male teachers his mannerisms appear to be "somewhat camp":

In the smaller group discussion Conrad suggested that some people don't even know they are gay when everyone else around them does, he motions with his head to Simon who is sitting across the room from us. In the full circle this is brought up as an issue, Conrad says that some people cannot hide their sexuality because they are so camp and feminine, although Conrad is sure not to mention Simon by name.

research diary

Whilst Conrad is careful not to mention Simon by name he uses the space of the small group discussion to make his point. The class also appears to know to whom Conrad is referring. The ability of Simon to respond to this point in class discussion is debatable when he is the brunt of homophobic comments. On the one occasion I heard Judy ask Simon to respond to a question he answers with a shaky voice even though he was asked only to read something out. I feel uncomfortable attributing his visible uncomfortableness to his sexuality, whatever that may be, but it does appear that his position within his male peers

does not do much for his ability to articulate his feelings in class. Boys such as Simon have a hard time in school because they do not fit the macho image of acceptable masculinity, experiences of social isolation and name calling outside PSHE will not make his ability to cope in sexuality education any easier.

There are girls who say little in class and they mirror notions of respectability outside the classroom. Sally and Sonja, for instance are frequently the butt of boys' jokes, and they adopt a body language which is closed and say little in class apart from to each other when given the chance. They appear to lack self-esteem and the ability to put their opinions across outside the small group setting. Their eyes never lose sight of their feet. In small group discussion however, they have no means of escape and have to say something but, as much as possible, like the quieter 'lads', they leave it up to another member of the group to feedback to class. The ability of girls to respond in class will be discussed further in the next chapter when 'alternative' femininities are discussed.

From the responses discussed so far it appears that young people are only able to respond in the classroom situation in a very prescriptive manner along strict gender lines, which are in practice cut across by class and 'race'/ethnicity. Up to this point in the chapter I have focused on the gendered responses to the material used. In the rest of the chapter I am going to critically question to what extent young women's responses actually challenge the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

*"It's not/only natural" – delete as appropriate depending on whether you are a girl or a boy: invoking the 'nature' discourse in 'sexuality education'*

As discussed above young men invoke a discourse of 'nature' in their homophobia, refusing to discuss the emotions and prejudices surrounding male homosexuality by articulating that such practices are unnatural and/or against the laws of nature and religion. However, the discourse of 'nature' is also used to argue the opposite within the girls' articulations of acceptance. Girls frequently use the nature discourse to defend homosexuality: 'We don't decide what is 'natural', nature does'; 'Homosexuals are naturally inclined toward one another'; 'gays are born that way, it's not their fault'. These statements are used

by girls to articulate a discourse of acceptance by framing their arguments 'out there': the boys in the film are gay, people in EastEnders and Hollyoaks (television soap-operas) are gay, even people in here or in their family may be gay. Invoking the nature discourse appears to be used by girls as a mode of distanciation. By arguing that it is natural for gay people to be attracted to the same-sex allows young women through this very statement to subtly (re)enforce that they are not gay.

Pupils therefore use the nature discourse for two purposes, the boys to suggest it's not natural and the girls to justify it is natural because gays are just born that way. The majority of the pupils in the class do not deviate from this polarised discussion. Abi, however, attempts to discuss an alternative:

In the small group Conrad and Gemma were talking about gayness being in your genes, Gemma explained 'you can't help it, it's just in your genes', she put it down to nature. Later in the group discussion this is brought up for discussion by one of the girls. Most of the responses suggest that the young people believe you are born gay. But Abi suggests that it could be because some women reject men because of their behaviour and because of the way they have been treated, thus choosing to be with a woman instead. Rob then says that the statement "I am concerned most of the world will turn gay" could hold true and another lad adds this would mean that we would cease to exist. Gemma suggests that there are other ways of having kids you know, listing artificial insemination, sperm donation etc. Judy adds that some people get married, have kids and then realise that they are gay, but got married because they were expected to, that is what society expects.

research diary

Unfortunately nobody appears to want to either engage with Abi in this conversation or follow up the comment made by Judy at the end. Most girls probably fear the reaction Irie got when she attempted to defend lesbianism: a hushed silence and the whisper of lesbian from one of the 'lads'. As Richard Johnson (1996: 181) suggests invoking the 'it's natural' discourse does little to unsettle the dominance of heterosexuality, rather it serves to hide the dominance of heterosexuality within institutions such as the school:

The argument from nature undermines the claim that education or social policy can influence how the sexual is lived: that sexuality for instance, is more than a matter of natural urges, controlled or uncontrolled, or that homophobic discrimination can be ended. It perpetuates reductive versions of the sexual itself, models of penetration and procreation, that cut out central points of growth in sexual experience – sexuality as pleasure and identity for example. The elisions of the natural with the procreative, and the procreative with fucking, and fucking with heterosexuality are so embedded, it is hard to legitimate other forms of sex by naturalising them.

There is an attempt however on behalf of the PSHE staff to raise awareness concerning the social and political power of heterosexuality, which will be discussed below. Nevertheless, already through an initial discussion of young women's use of the 'nature' discourse it is possible to see that invoking the idea that it's natural for some does little to challenge widespread societal discrimination.

### *Challenging 'compulsory heterosexuality'?: bringing the 'Other' into the PSHE classroom*

This final section of the chapter aims to do two things - to explicate both how the social and political debates concerning '(homo)sexuality' are brought into the classroom, and to clarify young people's responses to an attempt to question the inevitability of heterosexuality.

Conrad was shocked to see the two boys kiss on the film. Gemma says 'haven't you seen that before?'. By the look on his face this concept obviously appears completely alien to him. He then asks Gemma whether she has seen it? Gemma replies, 'of course I've got friends who are gay'. He looks even more stunned now. In the whole group discussion afterwards Abi brings up that her group (Marcus and Rex) had said they found 'the kiss' strange, they didn't like it. Abi says you never see this on television. You get older same sex couples and there is now a younger lesbian couple on Hollyoaks, but they are not confronted on a day to day basis with this issue.

research diary

For many of the pupils, the 'lads' in particular, this was probably their first experience of seeing two boys kiss. As Abi suggests it will not be part of their everyday experience. The lack of positive gay characters/ role models in mainstream (heterosexual) culture means that young people often have to talk about homosexuality in the abstract or use the potentially negative and misinformed stereotypes that surround them to form opinions. By bringing these issues into the classroom therefore, the PSHE programme at Hilltop aims to dispense with young people's ignorance and bring real life issues and experiences into the classroom. Furthermore, there is an attempt on behalf of the PSHE staff to make pupils aware that (homo)sexuality is not just an issue that affects people 'out there', rather there ARE gay, lesbian, bisexual people in here, in the classroom, in school:

At the start of the lesson Judy reminded the pupils to be respectful of people in the room and for people with different views, “remember 10% of the population are gay, therefore there is likely to be three people in the room who are, including some adults”. I immediately noticed pupils scanning the room again as if to question who it could be and when Judy said adults they looked at her at first and then you could see them calculate who else in the room was an adult, all of a sudden it appeared that they realised I too fell into this category ...

research diary

Using the 1 in 10 statistic is an attempt to challenge the school as a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ and to make young people aware that they cannot presume that everyone in the class, pupil or adult, is straight. I recognise however, that this implies a problematic dichotomy, an either you are or you are not notion of sexuality<sup>21</sup>. The immediate reaction from the pupils is to survey the classroom to try to locate a person’s deviant sexuality from his/her body (Skeggs, 1997). Every time Judy made this comment in an attempt to get young people to realise that gay, lesbian and bisexual people do go to school, pupils in class begin a visible calculation. Heads start to shift and eyes dart around the circle, stopping at anyone who they think could potentially fit the category. Judy says that raising this statistic in pupils’ minds should serve as a reminder to them that their stereotypes and comments are prejudiced and unfounded:

And then that arrogance around well you know, ‘I wouldn’t sit next to a gay person because they might want to have sex with me’, you know, to what, you know, what, you can’t say it but (laughter), ‘why might they be interested in you?’, ‘what’s so special about you that they might...?’, that awful assumption, the promiscuity argument that we were raising this morning ...

Judy Fisher

In theory Judy’s exemplar potentially provides young people with a means to think about sexuality in wider terms than sexual practice as the physical act of sex. However, it is on the body, through bodily performance, dress and style that young people try to locate an individual’s sexuality: by looking around a class of thirty young people they are trying to visibly calculate which three may identify now or in the future as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

‘Coming out’ in school is what scandals are made of at all levels, from peer/teacher culture to the media and political discourses of sexuality (Epstein

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<sup>21</sup> Invoking the 1 in 10 statistic implies a simplistic binary notion of sexuality and a means to challenge homophobia with an equally dichotomous view of homosexuality. I recognise that this chapter could have explored the “queering” of the classroom and whether there is any potential for sexuality to be expressed as pleasure, identity, play etc. However, this was not a strong theme throughout my analysis and therefore remains unexplored.

and Johnson, 1998). Hilltop is no different, even within a relatively liberal school environment where openness and diversity are actively sought. In school documentation 'coming out' as gay, lesbian or bisexual is discouraged:

We [Hilltop] are only as supportive as the people who are in it and the people who are in it is a moving population. The population of this school in five years time will be completely different to the population of this school now, so every, so you have to reinvent yourself everytime, like that thing said, you know we get tired of keep explaining ourselves. You know, for how long can you keep, I mean yes OK, we can, we can work on a culture in the school that says that we won't umm behave in particular ways and we won't tolerate behaviours in certain ways but that has to be reinforced over and over and over, cos it is not a static population .... (end of tape) ... there is a gay teacher in school, I don't know whether he has come out to kids, but they know that he's gay ... and there is a lot of graffiti ... lower school, I don't see it up here

Judy Fisher

There are a number of gay (male) teachers in school, one is out to staff and pupils and others are strategically out to members of staff. The environment at lower school, as discussed in the previous chapter, is less tolerant than upper school. Lower school is visibly strewn with homophobic graffiti and younger (male) pupils are not shy about using homophobic abuse liberally to pupils and on occasions towards (male) teachers. In the next chapter I discuss the ramifications of questionable female (hetero)sexuality for young women in the group of 'alternatives'. But suffice to say at this stage that even within a relatively forward thinking school lesbian, gay, bisexual teachers and young people or anyone questioning their sexuality have to think carefully before coming out.

There is therefore a major fissure in 'sexuality education' at Hilltop. Whilst there is space for 'sexuality education' on the curriculum which is from all accounts very innovative in relation to other educational practice in schools, there is an inherent problem faced by staff when raising awareness concerning lesbian, gay and bisexual prejudice. The dominance of heterosexuality as an institution in schools means that even when schools are doing innovative, challenging and risky work in relation to sexuality it is still dangerous for young people and adults to come out. By staying in the closet however, there are never any role models for young people questioning their sexuality to identify with or to challenge the prejudiced and stereotypical views that pervade school life.

Because of the inability in practice for people to have the right to express their sexual identities in school or in the PSHE classroom without the fear of reprisal, strategies are used to make gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers and their concerns visible. The worksheets (Figures E-H: PSHE Appendix Two) and the video 'Gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers speak for themselves' provide a medium for the voices and experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers to enter the heterosexual classroom. This is a necessary abstraction to maintain confidentiality and distance from pupils who could otherwise feel/be threatened. Nevertheless, all the worksheets are read out in class by pupils. Nobody has the ability to withdraw from speaking the prejudice that teenage lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils face, because they have to speak it. All of these mediums are used to raise the prejudice that teenagers like the pupils in class feel because they are lesbian, gay and bisexual. So that the visitor day will run smoothly for pupils and visitors all of the weeks preceding week seven - when the visitors come into school to answer questions - are used to raise issues and start to chip away at some of the intolerance voiced in the first couple of weeks.

Work in week five and six is used specifically to link the micro and the macro: to link the prejudice young people express with the structures in which they live, school, family, friendships etc. The aim is to raise awareness and get young people to think about their prejudices and how they articulate them, and the affect they may have on people who are questioning their sexuality. Perhaps obviously the main issues young people pick up during these discussions are the prejudice reflected in the statistics, and the difficulties of finding support within the school environment:

Judy asks pupils to consider some of the harm teenagers express when they are bullied and verbally abused. Gemma raises her hand and suggests that people just have to learn to cope with it, people get called loads of things whether it is because of their 'weight, ginger hair, glasses', Warren adds 'accent' ... Gemma says it is just part of school and people need to learn to cope. Judy is visibly a little perturbed, I think about saying something but Abi sticks her hand up forcibly, the anger is visible in her face. She argues against Gemma and says that even though things are said as a joke it doesn't mean that the person takes it as such. Gemma says that when 'gay' is used it doesn't mean anything, like it might at other schools, it is just said as a laugh, people should get used to it, everyone is called it. Judy says that they need to think about how that might affect someone if they are gay and the pressure it will put on them.

research diary

Gemma's support of name-calling is somewhat contradictory given her willingness to challenge Conrad on his homophobia. According to Gemma name-calling does not mean anything, but as Abi points out, 'it may not mean anything to you, but this isn't to say that it doesn't mean anything to the person on the receiving end':

... it's quickly picked up on and then gay becomes currency and it doesn't mean gay, it's a ... it's, necessarily, and when they are challenged on it, which I hope they are, certainly they are by me, I would hope that my colleagues would challenge homophobic as well as any other (emphasis) type of bullying that might be going on in school, and not allow that to happen. But when they do that, very often the children say, well you know, it's just a word, I didn't mean (emphasis) anything by it, I was only messing, which is the stock phrase.

Judy Fisher

Name calling making references to gender and sexuality is the most common form of bullying at Hilltop. In fact Judy suggests that because the school is so quick to recognise racism and racist slurs pupils either do not know them, or - which is more likely - they are not willing to discuss them. Perhaps because the school is visibly multicultural and has a policy which actively celebrates this diversity, this means that such prejudice is swept under the carpet and name calling in relation to gender and sexuality surfaces.

The lessons when the experiences of prejudice are discussed are fairly quiet and subdued, most of the lesson involves reading and raising awareness from the handouts. At the end of the lesson however Ali suggests that "... if gays face so much prejudice then they should hide their sexuality". Not coming out and telling the world that you are gay is Ali's attempt at justifying homophobic abuse and name calling. Gemma and Abi both take issue with this, questioning whether gay, lesbian and bisexual people should or in fact could hide their sexuality, when it is people who are intolerant who have the problem.

However, Gemma's ability to question Ali on this occasion is contradictory to her response previously when she suggested that homophobia was not as bad as racism because gay people could hide their sexuality whereas it is very difficult to hide your blackness:

Gemma then disagreed with statement number 21, that is "I believe being gay is fine and prejudice against gays is on a par with racism as an evil in society". She disagreed with the fact that homophobia is on a par with racism, because she said that gay people can hide their sexuality, whereas you can't hide your blackness.

Visibility was obviously an important concept for her, she then said laughing, "it must be even worse being a black lesbian" ...

research diary

Gemma obviously has difficulty with thinking through the conflicting experiences she has of wanting to be open and accepting and perhaps her own experiences of being visibly mixed race. Here, she privatises sexuality because it is less visibly marked on the body than 'race'/ethnicity. In the main a person cannot make a choice about disclosing their 'race'/ethnicity because it is marked on their body through their physicality, and is therefore for 'public' consumption, whereas sexuality, if different from the norm, can be hidden. According to Gemma whilst you should not have to hide your sexuality, it is possible to do so if need be, i.e. if the environment you are in means that you could suffer bullying. If you don't, and you do decide to come out, just put up with it, it does not mean anything.

All these responses do nothing to really challenge 'compulsory heterosexuality'. There is a glimpse when Gemma questions Conrad and Ali, but she appears to reject this line of questioning preferring instead to transfer the responsibility onto gay, lesbian and bisexual pupils, who should not take it personally. Coming out for lesbian, gay and bisexual people necessarily means putting yourself forward as different in a society which is based on heterosexuality. By staying in the closet there is no challenge to prejudice based on heterosexuality, where heterosexuality remains normative and never up for question.

#### *4.4. Conclusion: the missing discourse of female desire*

[Teacher] ... attempts to educate students about sexuality take place in a context complicated by the homophobia of many students, the macho performances of many boys, the wish of many girls (and boys) to be desired, the official taboos on talking about sexuality in school, and the need to make the sex[uality] education classroom a (relatively) safe space in which all their students can talk about sexuality. For sex education teachers, even more than for teachers in general, they are 'damned if you do and damned if you don't'.

Epstein and Johnson, 1998: 174

'Sexuality education' in schools is unusual, and Hilltop's commitment to a comprehensive provision of PSHE to all pupils from the age of eleven to sixteen is even rarer. Given the potentially explosive nature of press coverage (to the school, young people and parents) it could even be described as risky and radical

(Epstein and Johnson, 1998). This chapter argues that 'sexuality education' provision still takes place in a traditionally gendered and homophobic environment, no matter how innovative and heartening young women's responses to 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998) first appear.

Michelle Fine (1988) suggests that there is a missing discourse of female desire in sex education coupled, as Epstein and Johnson (1998: 180) suggest, with a discourse of childhood innocence which often results in the expulsion of sexuality and desire from many educational contexts. This chapter, although dealing with 'sexuality' rather than sex education, highlights that even though it appears that (some) young women are challenging the dominance of young men in the classroom and speaking out against homophobia, there is still a missing discourse of female desire. In fact, I go as far to suggest that young women's discourses of acceptance articulated in responses to overt bodily and discursive displays of male homophobia actually cause a (re)entrenchment of normative gender roles through the regulation of heterosexuality as masculinity (Holland *et al*, 1998). By opposing young men's homophobia and unfounded prejudice against a naturalisation of homosexuality, young women (re)enforce the construction of masculinity as powerful and active and femininity as accepting, nurturing and passive (Walkerdine, 1990). When there is an attempt on behalf of young women or the female teacher to discuss female sexuality the girls are met with either silence or murmurs of lesbianism. Moreover, the use of masculinist material and young people's (men's) voices and opinions to open up discussion further isolates the discussion of sexuality as masculinity, leaving little room to frame discussions around female sexuality. Attempts to do such work in the past within PSHE at Hilltop have met with problems. A poster put on the wall to raise awareness about young women questioning their sexuality had to be removed because of young men's disruptive behaviour. Therefore, female sexuality is marginalised from the 'sexuality education' agenda (Judy Fisher).

On the surface it does not appear that young women are at risk in 'sexuality education' from male desire and power which captures young women as victims. As other research shows (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Fine, 1988; Holland *et al*, 1998) however, the dominance and divisiveness of heterosexual male power is far more subtle. Young women, although physically present in the classroom

and providing a discourse of acceptance in relation to (male) homosexuality, are completely missing from the discussion. Following Janet Holland and her colleagues' (1998) ethnographic work on young people, heterosexuality and power, I suggest that within the space of the 'sexuality' classroom young women are actively used in discussion by young men to actually reaffirm the centrality and dominance of male heterosexuality. Through questioning, although never actually challenging their macho performances, young women are never given the possibility to escape from normative constructions of femininity. Ethnographic research in 'sexuality education' at Hilltop creates an illusion of powerful femininity. This unfortunately masks young women's collusion in male dominance of heterosexuality and the 'male-in-the-head' which, according to Janet Holland *et al* (1998: 190), "... is entrenched and institutionalised and also a master of disguise, reappearing in new forms in changed circumstances". Janet Holland and her colleagues (1998) go on to argue that "[t]he resilience of the 'male-in-the-head' is due in large part to its mirror trick of appearing as a natural dualism. It supports the notion that male and female desire exist in opposition to each other, at each others expense ..." (190/191). Hence, part of the power in 'the-male-in-the-head' is to trick young women, teachers, policy makers and researchers into believing that masculinity and heterosexuality are under threat, and that it is women who are now succeeding; see for instance the debates concerning young women's achievement levels in schools and failing boys (Epstein *et al*, 1998; Francis, 1999; Reay, 2001). Furthermore, it is often high achieving white, middle class and popular girls who are used as vectors for this social change (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001), which leads some researchers to argue that "whilst there is a global subordination of women by men there can still exist a hierarchy of femininities which exerts dominance over some masculinities some of the time, as well as oppressing other forms of femininity" (Duncan, 1999: 137). That should however, not lead educational practitioners, policy makers, politicians and academics to believe that the power relations between men and women are any less secure. Indeed, the 'public' performances of masculinity and femininity in the 'sexuality education' classroom at Hilltop reflect a representation of very traditional and unitary subjects.

Recent policy debates (DfEE, 1999; *DfEE*, 2000 – see PSHE Appendix Two Figure J; *Ofsted*, 2002) and professionals working within the sphere of sex education (Sex Education Forum in Epstein and Johnson, 1998: 184) suggest that the particular requirements of young men need to be taken into account when conducting sex education. However, in this chapter I have endeavoured to point out that even though PSHE appears on the surface a feminised space, in which young women are controlling young men and are more comfortable with the adopted methodologies, it is still young men, and heterosexual masculinity in particular, that controls, shapes and fashions the roles open to particular young women. The result - lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, although mainly male homosexuality, are discussed in the classroom. However, the dominance and inevitability of heterosexuality is never challenged. In fact, heterosexuality is produced by young men and young women because of the socio-spatial power relations of the school environment, of which the PSHE classroom and the 'sexuality education' classroom is a part.

Being part of 'sexuality education' at Hilltop is memorable and to some extent allows the "... two worlds of adolescent sexuality and the institutional authority of school culture to confront one another" (Holland *et al*, 1998: 60). However, for the experience to be transformed into one which has the potential to question the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality', practical and policy interventions need to radically challenge the potency of the 'male-in-the-head'<sup>22</sup>. The illusionary discourses of acceptance which emanate from some young women during 'sexuality education' need to be radically transformed through critical pedagogy so that heterosexual femininity as well as masculinity is called into question.

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<sup>22</sup> There is evidence from the Australian educational context that single sex classes are more productive when conducting 'sex education' (see Kenway and Willis, 1998). Sex segregated work is beginning to be considered in the UK context (see *DfEE*, 2000). This could be one way to approach the missing discourse of female sexuality in the classroom context and avoid heterosexism, however, I am not convinced that this would work or challenge heterosexuality as masculinity. To date sex segregation has not been discussed at Hilltop and I am reticent to conclude with a list of ways in which the criticisms discussed in this chapter can be challenged and potentially overcome, that would be the beginnings of another chapter.

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## **Chapter Five. ‘Alternative’ femininities, ‘distinctive individuality’ and spatial practices of (dis)identification**

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... I think the other reason that they don't really like us is that we're very individual, I mean, we're a group, but we're, we're very, we know what we like and what we don't like and if we don't like something we'll say so ...

Ruth

... kids are like pissing cats or burrowing moles, marking off land within land, each section with its own rules, beliefs, laws of engagement ... There were no maps, but common sense told you ...

Zadie Smith (2000: 290)

This third and final empirical chapter aims to bring together some of the arguments made in the preceding two chapters (three and four) by using the experiences of a group of young women who are loosely defined by themselves, teachers, peers and myself as ‘alternative’. Through a discussion of their friendship group this chapter seeks to explain how their articulations of ‘distinctive individuality’ (Muggleton, 2000) serve to mask power relations of gender, sexuality and class both between femininities at school and within the group itself. The girls define their friendship as based on territory, such spatial practices of (dis)identification and distanciation are used by the group to embrace all girl friendship and non-mainstream performances of femininity and sexuality. The chapter concludes by arguing that whilst such spatial practices of (dis)identification serve to produce ‘alternative’ performances of femininity, this process of self-marginalisation does little to challenge normative constructions of classed femininity and (hetero)sexuality within school spaces.

The chapter consists of four main sections. Part one (5.1.) introduces the young women who make up the ‘alternatives’ and whose experiences comprise this chapter, and their wider mixed gender friendship nexus. This section focuses in particular on their differences in style, music and fashion which make them

visually stand out from the crowd. Secondly, section 5.2., following a theme developed throughout this thesis, looks at how these 'alternative' young women are involved in complex practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997). The 'alternatives', like other young women at Hilltop discussed in chapter three, have investments in producing themselves as individual. They do this through (dis)identifications with their so-called arch-enemies the 'Townies'. Moreover, they emphasise these differences - significantly their tastes in music and fashion - through embracing the very internal group differences that serve to marginalise them from wider school culture. Here I argue that the young women are involved in discourses and practices of what David Muggleton (2000) calls 'distinctive individuality'. Moreover, in this section I use three examples to briefly explore micro-spatialities of power within the friendship group.

The third section of this chapter (5.3.) looks at the meaning attributed to the 'alternative' girls, specifically in relation to their gender, sexuality and class. These power relations are literally written on their body (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) through the meanings attributed to their style. However, whilst the 'alternative' girls distance themselves from exclusionary practices, arguing that it is their 'alternative' femininities that are marginalised, this chapter shows how they too are involved in a necessary objectification of white working-class young women in order to produce themselves as different - what Skeggs (1997) calls a dialogical form of recognition. Significantly, this chapter shows that young women who do not aspire to dominant performances of femininity actually (dis)identify themselves from narrow definitions of girlhood through embracing a form of 'laddish femininity'. Furthermore, these 'laddish' performances of gender and sexuality serve to highlight spaces of contradiction in terms of female sexuality experienced in the 'sexuality education' classroom and wider heterosexual school culture. Throughout this chapter class underpins the 'alternative' young women's discourses and practices of friendship. Following other feminist researchers (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) however, I find class impossible to articulate, because the young women never speak it. Nevertheless, class is weaved through the 'alternative' girls practices and discourses of femininity, sexuality, individuality and friendship.

The focus of the final section of this chapter (5.4.) is on how these young women come to terms with the peripheralisation of their femininities in school. The girls describe their friendship as based on territory rather than the identities of people within their friendship group. Therefore this chapter concludes with a consideration of the use of the park as a lunchtime social space for 'alternative' girls. The girls describe the park as a "safe haven". It is not a site which they are marginalised into because of their non-conformity but a space which they choose in order to explore their femininities. Space, therefore, is central to an understanding of how 'alternative' girls come to understand and perform their femininities which may not be widely accepted or embraced within dominant (hetero)sexualised performances of femininity at school. I finish this chapter with a summary of the main points (5.5.).

### *5.1. 'Alternative' girls?*

Recent research with young women has focused in particular on their everyday experiences (Griffin, 1985; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; Holland *et al*, 1998; Sharpe, 1976; Skelton, 2000; Weiner, 1985). Although from different classed and sometimes racialised backgrounds (Dwyer, 1998; Mirza, 1992; Shain, 1996; Wulff, 1995), young women in these studies are not involved in subcultural activities akin to seminal research conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) or the Chicago School (see Gelder and Thornton, 1997). Feminist research in sociology and criminology however, has considered the American experience of girl gangs (Campbell, 1984; Chesney-Lind, 1993; Laidler and Hunt, 2001; Venkatesh, 1998). Feminist research (McRobbie, 1991; 2000) remains less concerned with the spectacular, which is often left to masculinist studies of skins, mods and rockers. One noteworthy exception to this is Shane Blackman's (1995; 1998) ethnographic account of the 'New Wave Girls' as a resistant form of female youth culture<sup>1</sup>. Therefore apart from Blackman's ethnographic research on young women has retained its focus on their normative classed and gendered subjectivities rather than their involvement in potentially spectacular and resistant practices. The 'alternative' girls at Hilltop

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<sup>1</sup> For a further discussion of this piece of ethnographic research see chapter one (1.4.).

are in no way comparable to the often violent accounts of young men and subculture. The aim of this chapter is not to consider whether the 'alternative' girls at Hilltop are countercultural or whether they constitute a subculture or a microculture (Wulff, 1995a), rather it seeks to explore the girls' everyday experience of being an 'alternative' girl at Hilltop: their experiences of friendship and how they understand, explain and respond to the meanings attributed to their friendship in the context of their school day<sup>2</sup>. This initial section introduces the girls and their wider friendship group and explores how they literally stand out from the crowd.

### *'Alternative girls' and their wider friendship group nexus*

I first met Faith, Ani, Ruth and Jo in a top set Maths lesson, where pupils are expected to be working towards A\* or A grades. Anything else, according to Mr Lenton (Maths teacher), is unacceptable. After a number of months of being a distraction in Maths and learning about their friendships Faith, Ruth and Ani introduce me to their wider mixed gender friendship nexus. These pupils are commonly known as the 'alternatives' around Hilltop because of either their tastes in 'alternative' (read non-mainstream) style, i.e. fashion and music, or their affiliation to pupils who have such tastes, i.e. they hang around with them. However, as I describe below, within this fairly fluid group there are complexities of allegiance and differences in style which serve to emphasise the importance of individuality within their group.

The wider friendship nexus is made up of approximately thirty year ten pupils at Hilltop, although the exact number is difficult to identify because the group fluctuates in size. At the time of research however, the group members and their affiliations can be explained through Figure 1 below. The interlocking circles denote the importance of cross identifications with other group members and (dis)affiliations which are discussed later in the chapter. Furthermore, the dashed lines show that these are never bounded groups because interaction occurs in different spaces and at different intensities over time. Moreover, throughout the different year groups in Hilltop there are noticeable groups of 'alternative'

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the limitations of using the school day as a focus see chapter two (2.2.).

pupils. Therefore, it is important to point out from the outset that this is not a group that is significant to this particular year group or cohort of pupils. The majority of the young people who are involved in the ‘alternative’ friendship nexus are from middle-class professional backgrounds (although, Rowan, Daria, Maggie and Kerri are an exception, as I will discuss later in the chapter).

This chapter focuses in particular on the young women’s explanations and practices of friendship rather than that of the boys. The mixed gender status of their friendship group is important in the girls’ discourses of friendship. However, in practice it is usually the girls who spend most of their time together, both within and outside the classroom context. Even within the park where both the boys and the girls ‘hang out’ there are spatially distinct groups of young people separated by gender. Furthermore, in order to explore their (dis)identifications, I use my initial affiliation with Faith, Ruth, Ani and Jo to focus specifically on a limited, although I suggest significant, section of this group. I recognise that this imposes limitations on my research, but as my research was gender specific from the outset, I retain this focus.

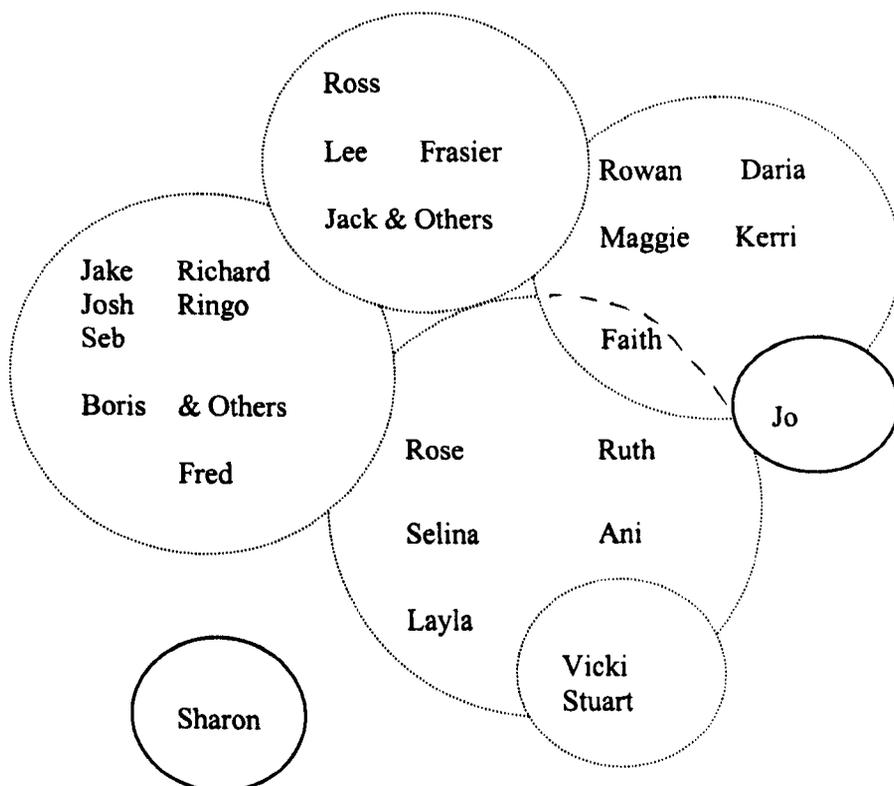


Figure 1. ‘Alternative’ friendship group nexus

### *'Alternative' fashion, style and music*

The 'alternative' girls literally stand out from the crowd in two ways. Firstly because of their style and taste in fashion and music in relation to wider schoolgirl culture; and secondly because they literally choose to sit, stand and spend time away from other groups of pupils at Hilltop, whether this be in the formal spaces of the classroom or during break and lunchtime. The significance of being spatially separate from other groups in school will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. But first I want to give a brief introduction to the girls' tastes in fashion and style.

Within the group there are wide differences in fashion, style and taste in music. This is a self-defining characteristic within the group, which is supported by subcultural research that suggests that subcultural groups often reject an acceptance of single group identification (Muggleton, 2000: 62) contrary to seminal research done at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (Gelder and Thornton, 1997). However, even with these within-group inconsistencies and hybridity of fashion, style and taste in music, the 'alternative' girls at Hilltop are an immediately recognisable and visible group in school. Their fashion, although diverse within the group (grunge, punk, Goth, skater, eclectic and indistinct), is immediately distinguishable from mainstream performances of high street fashion and branded sports wear. Selina is described as the most different from which assumptions about alternativeness seem to be made. She is immediately recognisable by her sometimes heavy black eye-liner, black nails, baggy jeans - which are usually being held up by a chain - and a Rock T-Shirt which is frequently tight and cut high exposing some of her midriff. She often has a BITCH sticker plastered onto her bag or T-Shirt, which raised concern with some of the teachers, and on at least one occasion the head-teacher asked her to remove it because it was inappropriate dress for school. The other girls wear similar fashion, baggy jeans, T-shirts sometimes with band names like Nirvana or Rage Against the Machine on them (Ani) and chain belts - but to a lesser extent than Selina. The group's 'alternative' status appears to be measured against Selina and her outward performance of fashion, even though her closest friends do not wear her extreme of fashion which, according to Faith, Ani and Ruth, has been influenced by her older boyfriend and his friends.

Selina, Ani, Faith and Rose's outward appearance is more 'alternative' than mainstream pupil fashion culture at Hilltop and their taste in music follows. They are into rock, grunge, indie and sometimes heavy metal music. This is in complete contrast to many girls in school who enjoy chart music and especially R&B. The fashion and music taste of the girls are shared by the boys in the group, although there is a difference between the two groups of boys. Faith walks home with from school with Ross, Lee, Jack and Frasier who are skaters and wear skater clothes: cut off trousers, baggy shirts and T-shirts and usually accompanied by a skateboard. The other group, who Selina and Ani get on with, are into the rock and heavy metal scene (Jake, Richard, Josh, Seb, Boris, Ringo, Fred). Furthermore, the inclusion of Maggie, Rowan, Kerri and Daria into the group who visually could be labelled 'Townie', Ruth, Jo and Sharon who do not share any of the 'alternative' taste in music and fashion, adds to the internal group complexities. The significance of these internal group complexities is discussed next.

### *5.2. 'Alternative' girls' (dis)identifications and 'distinctive individuality'*

The discourse of acceptance signified through the statement "we're all friends here" articulated by young women in chapter three remains striking. However, it is in direct contrast to the experiences expressed by the 'alternative' young women at upper school. Their experiences suggest that, if anything, since moving to upper school their feelings of exclusion and marginalisation have magnified:

Umm, well, I think it's, the people, my group sort of get on, don't get on as well with the other kids as we used to because ... because I think this year I'd say that we are sort of more individual now that [sic] we were in lower school because in lower school, I mean to begin with you don't know anyone, well I didn't except Sharon, so you sort of, you don't know where you stand with anybody or what they are like or anything. So, for the first sort of year you just talk to anyone, I mean you get, you do get an idea of who you prefer to hang around with but you are comfortable to sit next to most people and you work with them and whatever, it's not really very strongly set. And then, it's sort of, I don't know, you just get, I think there is more of a divide the further you go along, umm, in school, because, this year particularly, I don't know, my group just don't sort of conform to the rules of the other one. I mean I don't, it's not like you don't have set rules you know that people sort of talk about or anything but it is sort of, you know you can generally tell at this, at this stage you can generally tell

what group a person is in by the way they dress, which sounds really, a really bad way of of [sic] grouping people but it is, it is actually possible ...

Ruth

The girls recognise that reading people's identities off their clothed bodies and taste in music is both problematic and in direct contrast to the internal group differences they embrace. However, they realise that visible differences signified on the body serve as a marker of exclusion and boundary making between groups at upper school. It is this distancing, both through discourse and spatial practice that serves as the 'alternative' girls' first (dis)identification in their friendship construction. The 'alternative' girls (and boys) tell 'stories' of being marginalised in one way or another from mainstream school culture through their recollections of education. It was not until Hilltop, and in particular upper school, that the girls describe the significance of their friendship. That is not to say that they were socially isolated until upper school but that their narratives of friendship suggest that until this point in time their friendships were lacking in authenticity and meaning<sup>3</sup>. Ruth and Ani in particular reflect on their experience of being seen in primary, junior and lower school as "good for a laugh" because they were always messing around and making other young people laugh. They were treated as honorary boys and 'Tomboys', and their experiences suggest therefore that until upper school such performances of 'alternative' femininities were more acceptable. However, since moving to a space of maturity, i.e. upper school, more sanctions on acceptable performances of femininity have been imposed and the 'alternative' girls have become spatially more marginalised within and outside the classroom context.

Unlike the girls in chapter three who mask their distaste for other groups of femininities in school through a discourse of acceptance signified through the statement "we're all friends here", the 'alternative' girls overtly distance themselves from the 'Townies', who they describe as their "arch enemies":

Ani: It's, it's, I, I, I don't, I call people 'Townies' not because of the way they dress, well it's partly because of the way they dress, it's their attitude towards us, because they pretty much despise us.

K: In what way?

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<sup>3</sup> I recognise that these are problematic terms. However, when the girls talk about the differences in their friendships between lower and upper school they suggest that their friendships at upper school are more supportive, well meaning, built on trust, as opposed to those at lower school which they explain were shallow.

Ani: Well, I don't know, it's like (sigh), they just have [a go] at us all the time about stuff

Faith: For being different

Ani: Yeah, for being different, they have all these little saying like 'You're different' (very high mimicked voice) and 'Hadn't seen you for time' and 'Abaaat' ...

Faith: Yeah

Ani: ... 'Abaaat'

K: What?

Ani: That's 'About'(emphasis), I think it's 'About' (emphasis) what you are saying to me, (voice lowers) you're disrespecting me, what are doing and all this (laughter). But, and they kind of don't like us and we don't like them and we're pretty happy with [that] until like these these [sic], the perfect hair patrol come along ...

Faith: Yeah

Ani: ... which is like these other girls in Purple and Green, who hate us, because, umm, I don't know why they hate us (laughter)

Faith: They seem to have to walk in the exact same shape every time, one at the front, two over to the side and two behind them ...

Ani: ... and just they have a go at us constantly ...

Faith: ...and they are not really standing together, but they are all together in this big group thing

Ani: ... and they just have a go at us constantly when we walk past them and stuff ... it's like immaculate hair, all tied back really tightly ...

Faith: Yeah

Ani: ... not like one hair is out of place, so like, hair spray, so you like, bang, bang, bang

Faith: Yeah, like three cans for one day (laughter)

Through their descriptions of their "arch enemies", the 'Townies', the girls homogenise mainstream girls' taste in fashion, music and performances of femininity. The girls explain that they do not get on with the 'Townie' girls because they are always making judgements about their 'alternative' femininities through comments about their tastes in fashion and music. Ironically the 'alternative' girls criticise the 'Townies' for being fearful of their differences from mainstream school culture but they use the very same homogenising strategies to (dis)identify themselves from 'Townie' culture and femininity. They describe 'Townie' girls as bitchy and concerned with traditional performances of femininity centred on fashion, make-up, hair and boys. A performance of femininity that has never, and will never speak to them. The meanings attributable to clothed bodies in terms of gender, class and sexuality

have been discussed in chapter three, and will be explored in greater depth in the next section. It is important however before doing this to make explicit the dual process of (dis)identification which serves to produce 'alternative' girls as engaged in 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000)<sup>4</sup>.

The first process of making themselves distinctively individual is to homogenise a group against which their individuality can be measured, i.e. the 'Townies'. The 'alternatives' therefore are engaged in a process whereby they define themselves just as much through what or who they are not as what or who they are (Widdicombe and Wooffit, 1995 in Muggleton, 2000: 62). Their second process of (dis)identification is linked to the first. Much like the girls discussed in chapter three, they (dis)identify with their internal group consistency in order to reject being labelled homogenous in character themselves - which would attribute them a similar status to the 'Townies'. However, the 'alternative' girls' discourses of (dis)identification diverge from those stipulated by girls in chapter three. The 'alternative' girls use their different tastes in fashion and music as an external and visible factor in naming and (re)enforcing their individuality, rather than denying its significance as girls in chapter three are shown to do:

K: How do they [the 'Townies'] think you're different then?

Faith: Well we are

Ani: 'Cos we dress different, we act differently

Faith: We like to be different

Ani: Yeah

Faith: Weird, we like to be weird

Ani: The thing is, we're individuals, but they're just kind of all the same ...

Faith: like ...

Ani: ... like a big group of people ...

Faith: I've called a friend of mine a freak<sup>5</sup> and I called someone else a freak, but I go 'a freak's a good thing' and they go 'no, it's not', 'yes it is, you're a freak' (laughter), 'you're a freak, get over it' (laughter)

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<sup>4</sup> The context and the concept of 'distinctive individuality' are discussed in greater depth in chapter one (see section 1.1). The concept of 'distinctive individuality' was developed by Muggleton (2000) through ethnographic work with men and women who in their younger lives (late teens, early twenties) had been involved in a number of subcultural groupings. Whilst I recognise that my research participants are different in age and style to Muggleton's research participants, the theory is relevant to the young women's discourses of friendship.

<sup>5</sup> 'Freak style' is identified by Gottschalk (1993: 368 in Muggleton, 2000: 77) as 'Unwilling to embrace any recognizable (sub)cultural style, Freaks subverted them all by combining them without centre, logic or order ... [This group] resists identification and classification'. From

Ani: (laughter) it's weird, we don't like them though and they don't like us and we're quite happy to stay like that

K: So you choose, you're quite happy being different from them?

Ani: Yeah

Faith: It's who we are

Ani: We don't, we don't ...

Faith: We don't choose to be who we are, it's just who we are

Ani: But they kind of have to be, if one of them is like different than the other then they have to all be the same, and I hate that. I hate not being an individual, it really bugs me.

Faith: It's like, if you go to our group, none of us are really exactly the same

Ani: No, we've all got our own individualism, but ...

... We have different characters, but they pretty much act all the same and we ...

Faith: And we didn't start wearing the same sort of clothes when we met each other, we've always, we like wore them before then

Ani: And umm, some of us are mad and bouncy and some of us, and we don't like mind if we like different music from each other and umm ... (laughter) yeah, and we just like, like to have our own character instead of all doing the same things and ...

The girls' internal group differences are a dominant narrative in their discourses of friendship. They describe themselves as a "kind of stuck together group" (Faith) of interlinking friendships. It is these visible internal group differences and tastes which serve to highlight the fact that underneath the clothed bodies of all group members and their tastes in music are differences in identity and character which are natural. Unlike 'Townies' who they describe as being all the same and involved in practices of conformity:

...[W]e have seen a connection, in terms of dress, attitudes and lifestyle, between individuality and nonconformity. We can refer to this as 'distinctive individuality', the way that subculturalists highlight their individuality through a distinction from a collective reference group

Muggleton, 2000: 63

David Muggleton's (2000) research participants used conventionally dressed people as their yardstick to produce themselves as individual, whereas the 'alternatives' use the 'Townies'. However, Beattie, one participant in Muggleton's study (2000: 63) does mention 'Townies' as a group who she measures herself against. A group she describes as conforming to mainstream

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Faith's perspective calling someone a 'freak' would be a compliment because it highlights individuality and a bricolage of styles, whereas from a position of conformity it would be seen as a negative attribute.

fashion and who all “buy the same old boring blazer from Next” (ibid.) Whilst the cultural references by the ‘alternatives’ concerning ‘Townies’ are different from those made by Beattie the use of them as a marker of group conformity as opposed to their preferred discourse of individuality is the same. Moreover, Muggleton (2000) in his otherwise in-depth discussion of the complexities of group identification fails to discuss the gendered and classed dynamics of the concept of ‘distinctive individuality’, which this chapter will go onto discuss in the third part. Before that however, I consider some of the internal group differences within the wider friendship nexus of the ‘alternatives’.

Engaging in the process of ‘distinctive individuality’ could result in the ‘alternatives’ being labelled as exclusionary, as naming and shaming other femininities as lacking in style and not recognising internal group differentiation. Such a practice would go against their discourses of acceptance signified through their open group policy based on territory rather than identity (see 5.4 for further discussion). Therefore, in order to (re)enforce their fluid boundaries of friendship I briefly highlight three internal group fissures which add further complexity to group dynamics and their practices of ‘distinctive individuality’.

#### *Maggie, Rowan, Daria and Kerri*

Central to the ‘alternative’ girls’ discourses of acceptance is the diversity of their friendship group. It is, as David Muggleton (2000: 67) suggests, “the diversity of this group that enables it to accommodate a range of looks and tastes, allowing each member to maintain a sense of simultaneous similarity and difference”. The inclusion, albeit marginal (see Fig.1), of Maggie, Daria, Rowan and Kerri into the wider ‘alternative’ friendship nexus serves to (re)enforce the accommodation of difference within their friendship group. Outward appearances would suggest that Maggie, Rowan, Daria and Kerri would be excluded from the friendship nexus of the ‘alternatives’ because of their taste in ‘Townie’ fashion and style. Furthermore, they hang around with the ‘Townie’ troupe and the perfect hair group<sup>6</sup>, groups of girls who Faith, Ani and Ruth

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<sup>6</sup> The girls describe ‘The Perfect Hair Group’ as extreme ‘Townies’. The ‘alternative’ girls have labelled these girls as such because they are always fiddling with their hair and ‘grooming’ each other. They never want to have a hair out of place or for their make-up and clothing to be flawed.

suggest they stay well clear of because of their bitchiness, bullying practices and performances of hyper-femininity. However, Faith struck up a friendship with Maggie, Rowan and Kerri through her registration group and has been trying to merge the groups so that her friendships are not so fractured:

Faith: yeah ... but that makes my life really weird, 'cos, I've got friends like Maggie and Rowan

Ani: Yeah, but they're not the perfect 'Townies' troupe though

Faith: All people, everyone thinks that Maggie is a major 'Townie' and yeah she is ...

Ani: She's not ...

Faith: ... but she's not that much of it, 'cos she sits at the bottom of the bus, and she's friends with me and she's nice to people, well sometimes.

Ani: Yeah (laughter)

Faith: She likes you

Ani: She doesn't

Faith: I know

Ani: I hear all this stuff about her bitching about me though

Faith: I know ...

Ani: Behind my back

Faith: ... she bitches about everyone, they all do

Ani: I guess

Through this dual process of acceptance and (dis)identification Maggie and her group gain partial access to the friendship group of the 'alternatives', but their participation is spatially peripheral and time contingent. In the classroom context Maggie, Rowan, Daria and Kerri sit separately from the 'alternatives', apart from Faith who explains that she often has to choose who to sit with. It appears that in the classroom context Maggie, Rowan, Daria and Kerri do not want to be seen to be with the 'alternative' girls. Whereas when the group is in a context away from the rest of the pupils at Hilltop Maggie, Daria, Rowan and Kerri will sit with the 'alternative' girls, as the following observation from an inter-form rounder match suggests:

I go outside at the end of morning break ... I see Ruth and some of the others sitting on a patch of grass near the tennis courts away from the rounders pitches, I go and join them. Ruth, Ani, Layla, Selina, Stuart, Maggie, Daria, Kerri and Rose are sat in a group, although Maggie, Daria and Kerri are slightly further forward and sitting with their backs towards the group, facing the rounders pitch, unlike the others who are all grouped inwards ... Then Faith, Rowan, Jo and Vicki arrive, Vicki and Jo sit down next to me whilst Faith and Rowan

move around quite a lot, chatting with Maggie and some of the lads when they arrive ... The rest of year ten are sitting further down the field in rows bordering the rounders pitches ... Not many people in this group are involved in playing rounders, Maggie has apparently been roped into it, as have some of the boys. Ruth and Selina explain that they weren't asked to play, "it's the core group of boys and girls", they tell me, adding that they wouldn't have wanted to play even if they'd been asked ...

research diary

This group of pupils are sat well away from the rounders pitch and the other spectators. In fact they get reprimanded by the head of year ten for not participating and supporting their team because they are sitting spatially away from the rest of the pupils. Furthermore, within the group as the extract shows, there are allegiances of friendship which are spatially observable through their seating pattern, position and interactions. Faith and Rowan<sup>7</sup> move between both groups, but there is a discernable gap between Maggie, Daria and Kerri who are sat at the front of the group facing forwards. There is little interaction between Selina, Rose, Ani and Maggie, Rowan, Daria and Kerri. In fact, Ruth and Selina both distance themselves from Maggie *et al* by saying that they would never participate in rounders even if, like Maggie suggests, she were forced into it. Through observations at this rounders match subtle practices of internal group (dis)identification become apparent through both comments concerning taking part in the 'compulsory' team sport and the subtlety of the seating patterns and ensuing interactions. Whilst the 'alternative' girls suggest that everyone and anyone are welcome in their group in practice their discourses of inclusion are far more complex and spatially contingent.

*Jo*

Jo sits with Faith, Ruth and Ani in Maths and this is how I first met her. Her presence in the group is often silent, especially in class because as an academic high achiever she likes to get on with her work and not be reprimanded for talking. Faith, Ruth and Ani spend most of Maths chatting, writing notes and/or 'hypos' (hypothetical scenarios). Unlike Maggie, Daria, Rowan and Kerri whose time with the group is limited, Jo spends most of her time sitting with Faith, Ruth

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<sup>7</sup> Rowan is afforded some movement within the group because she has recently started going out with one of the 'alternative' boys.

and Ani in lessons, or hanging around with them at lunch or break. When asked about her friends in an individual interview context Jo says that she “has all these friends” and appears to think that she is a central group member of the ‘alternative’ group, even though she recognises that her style, taste in music and fashion are nowhere near ‘alternative’ or different. However, from interactions in class and during lunch and break it became increasingly obvious that the girls’ inclusion of Jo into their friendship is limited:

Jo is asking Faith about Layla’s party tonight, Jo hasn’t been given an invite, Faith got a phone call. Faith tries to convince Jo that it is just a turn up and non invite party, but she isn’t convinced. Faith brings Ruth and Ani into the conversation, Ani manages to change the conversation slightly by saying that she is gate crashing because she hasn’t been invited because of the mess she made last time! Ani just tells her to crash the party ...

research diary

Jo seems to be particularly excluded from taking part in activities the girls do outside school, going to the cinema, meeting up in town on Saturday or being invited to parties. Faith, Ruth and Ani try to shield Jo from the exclusionary practices of some of the girls towards Jo, notably Selina, Rose and Layla.

There are other girls who appear to be more peripheral members of the group, Vicki is very quiet but she is included in discussions and her presence is felt even if this is done in a silent way. Jo tries to join in but the girls do not seem to want her. Jo asks for Selina’s mobile phone number so that she can go home after school and then call them to find out where they are so that she can join them later. Selina looks at Rose, as if for help, whispers something in her ear and grins. Selina gives her the number but she takes Jo’s number as well. I immediately think that this may be a strategy to avoid the call from Jo because her number will flash up on Selina’s mobile and she can ignore the call.

research diary

I have no way of telling whether Selina and Rose screened their mobile phone calls later in the evening, or indeed whether Jo actually tried to ring them. But from their reactions, exchanged glances, reluctance to give the number and then conspiratorial giggling, it appears obvious that they did not want Jo to accompany the group to the cinema. Even though the group actively engage with a discourse of individuality that embraces difference, it appears that Jo is not, for some group members, individual or different enough to participate in activities outside school. It is the subtlety of stigmatising practices (James, 1993: 97) that at once allows Jo’s silent participation during the school day, but excludes her from taking part in social activities during the evening and at weekends. Her

conformity during the school day to school rules, her academic commitment and attainment and her practice of doing her homework at lunch in the park serves to marginalise and label Jo as problematic without actually overtly excluding her from all spaces at all times<sup>8</sup>. For some then a discourse of individuality is in practice based on sameness or difference within set parameters of non-conformity. Jo therefore appears useful to (re)enforce the group's commitment to individuality or shared non-conformity whilst in practice she features little in their friendship.

### *Sharon*

The final example I want to give in this section relates to the 'alternative' girls' reaction to Sharon. Before the following incident on inter-form rounders day Sharon featured marginally in the girls' discussions. Ruth had been friends with Sharon in junior school and Sharon used to hang around with them in lower school but now tends to go to the library. From my observations over the year Sharon spent most lunch and break times in the school library on her own, or with a small group of year ten and eleven boys, all of whom suffer social isolation from their peers because of bodily differences. Though Sharon would often try to help the school librarian with her duties, it appeared that her attempts to be of assistance were accepted with belligerence. Allison James (1993) argues convincingly that the body is an important aspect in making or breaking the sociality of children. She stipulates that bodily webs of significance for children are set around three interlinking aspects: fixed features, such as skin colour and gender; transient features such as appearance, size, smell and feel of body; and dynamic features, such as actions and movements (James, 1993: 109). Bodily differences therefore are as much to do with what the body does as appearance. Sharon is noticeably taller and larger than other girls in her year and is fairly clumsy with it, in that she always seems to be knocking into things. Furthermore, as the girls explain Sharon has a tendency to overuse her body in interactions which has served to marginalise her from group activity:

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<sup>8</sup> For a further discussion of Jo and in particular the ethics of doing participatory research between and within friendship groups see chapter 3.

At the end of lunch Ruth says 'Oh God', I twist to see what she is looking at "Selina, don't look now, but your favourite person has arrived". Ruth is referring to Sharon who has just gone into the main building through the side entrance. Ruth explains that they all used to be friends at the beginning of year seven but Sharon gets quite violent and she set on Ruth and more so on Selina, kicking and hitting them with some force. Ruth recognises that it is horrible not to like her but they can't trust her anymore. They try to tolerate her, she's not as bad as she used to be, but they can't bear being around someone that they can't relax in front of, she could turn aggressive at any moment.

research diary

On most occasions Sharon no longer spends any time with the 'alternative' girls inside school or outside. However, on this occasion, the last day of term, everyone is sitting outside and Sharon attempts to join the group:

When Sharon does come out of school and comes over to the group you can feel the atmosphere change and an uncomfortable edge arrives, girls exchange looks with each other and people seem to shift into more cohesive, physically close groups, this appears to be a means of protection and exclusion. This seems to affect my position in the group, before I was included because people were quite spread out, relaxed and conversation was open. Whereas, as soon as Sharon arrives groups move to sit in huddles and tight rows ... I too end up watching from the periphery ...

research diary

The written page does not lend itself well to exploring the changed dynamics in the group when Sharon arrives. The group shifts from being open and fluid with movement between Maggie, Daria, Kerri and Rowan at the front and the larger group of 'alternatives' behind, to being closed off and insular, incorporating all girls apart from Sharon and myself<sup>9</sup> in order to avoid conversation and interaction with Sharon. The girls however never verbally abuse Sharon in order to exclude her, their practices of marginalisation are far more subtle through a spatial shifting of their bodies.

Such subtle spatial practices of marginalisation allow 'alternative' girls to marginalise some girls from their group activities without overtly getting involved in practices of exclusion, which would contradict their commitment to individuality and openness in their friendship.

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<sup>9</sup> I chose to stay seated where I was rather than attempt to incorporate myself into the closely-knit mass of bodies.

### 5.3. 'Laddish femininities' – 'alternative' performances of gender and sexuality

As discussed above the 'alternative' girls' different tastes in clothes and fashion signify their difference from mainstream girlhood at Hilltop. Unlike girls in chapter three however, the significance of their clothed and styled bodies is acknowledged and embraced as a site of difference. As Beverley Skeggs (1997: 84) suggests "the surface of their bodies is the site upon which distinctions can be drawn". Skeggs (1997: 85) goes on to argue, following Finkelstein (1991), that "a sense of self is the embodiment of the representational fiction of a self. It is a stylised self which enables the women to display how different they are from others". Above I have shown how the girls use their clothed bodies to distance themselves from mainstream femininity at Hilltop, whilst this section looks more specifically at the meanings they attribute to judgements made by others through a dialogic form of recognition:

[T]hey recognize the recognition of others. Recognitions do not occur without value judgements of real and imaginary others. Recognition of how one is positioned is central to the *processes* of subjective construction

Beverley Skeggs, 1997: 4

The 'alternative' girls' discourses of friendship have as much to do with their judgements of girls labelled 'Townie' as their recognition that they are labelled and judged by other girls as 'alternative'. My observations and conversations with the 'girls' suggest that judgements concerning the group are filtered through perceptions pertaining to Selina and her extreme fashion sense:

Kathryn: Yeah, this is Selina? (pointing at a photograph)

Faith: Yeah

Kathryn: Why do people think she's different?

Ani: Well I don't know

Faith: Because she lets them call her a witch ...

Ani: Yeah

Faith: ... she wears different clothes ...

Ani: ... she goes out with an eighteen year old ...

Faith: ... she goes out with an eighteen year old, isn't he like nineteen now?

Selina bears the brunt of comments from other girls in school because of the clothes she wears. Her use of black eyeliner, nail varnish, baggy trousers and chain belts distances her from mainstream girl fashion and de-humanises her

performance of femininity. Furthermore, her relatively long-term relationship with a young man four years her senior makes suspect her respectable sexuality and labels her as potentially involved in a sexual relationship.

The 'alternative' girls' constructions of friendship are complex and it is here that the complexity arises. From the outset of my research the girls denied that their friendship was gender specific and at every given opportunity reminded me that they did not desire an all-girl friendship:

Faith: ... girls are bitches and they argue all the time

Ani: Yeah, actually the girls tend to argue more than the boys, because they have these, I don't know why, girls just have to do this ...

Faith: 'cos girls ...

Ani: ... I don't do it, but they do this fally out thing ...

Faith: Yeah

Ani: ... and they are always kind of in these little groups and one of them says something about the other ... and they all wee wee wee wee, and all, wee wee wee wee (laughter), but we don't do that, because *we're more lads than girls to be honest*

To be involved in an all-girl friendship is to align themselves with practices labelled bitchy and exclusionary. Furthermore, it also emphasises that all girls do is chase after boys and have romantic relationships with them, rather than friendships. All-girl friendship and the practices which this engender allows Faith, Ruth and Ani to suggest that definitions of mainstream femininity at school are so narrow that they have to distance themselves from femininity altogether and label themselves "more lads than girls". The 'alternative' girls' performances of 'laddish femininities' are not that suggested in recent media representations and reflected in magazines such as *More!*, *Minx*, and *Bliss* (Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks, 2001) of girls engaging in behaviour labelled masculine (drinking, smoking, swearing and brawling)<sup>10</sup>. The 'alternative' girls' 'laddish femininities' appear to be a response to narrow definitions of femininity based on hyper-femininity and heterosexuality. Moreover, this narrow definition of femininity is based on their perceptions of white working-class performances

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<sup>10</sup> According to Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks (2001: 41) magazines such as *More!*, *Minx* and *Bliss* are supposed to reflect the new 90's girl attitude of 'girl power' and post-feminist utopia. Bad girls such as Paula Yates, Fergie and Barbara Winsor proliferate, as do tales of hedonistic girls who love to party, drink as much as men and then throw up. These magazines are aimed at a slightly older age-group, rather than the 'teen market', but the term 'laddish' girls or 'ladettes' is being used more widely to discuss changing femininities, especially within the media.

of hyperfemininity and (hetero)sexuality, even though it is never named as such. The 'alternative' girls see only one response, they have to (dis)identify from such a performance of femininity and therefore they label themselves "more lads than girls", thereby, distancing themselves from femininity and girlhood altogether. In practice however, it is in an all-girl group that the girls spend the majority of their time, both inside and outside the classroom context. Nonetheless, even though the girls deny their gender-specific friendship it is their bodily closeness that stands out and their commitment to an 'alternative' way of being a girl which further adds to their process of marginalisation from mainstream performances of (heterosexual) schoolgirl femininity.

*Female sexuality and close all-girl friendship: displays of lesbian sexuality?*

Girl friendships at Hilltop are close. As other research has shown (Blackman, 1998; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997) this is not only in knowledge and secrets but also through tactility and physicality. Like the 'New Wave Girls' (Blackman, 1998), for the 'alternative' girls at Hilltop "physical closeness was part of their internal group relations, it was also used as a promenade of resistance to promote particular messages" (Blackman, 1998: 213). The 'alternative' young women's performances of all-girl closeness however, were not merely a display of resistance to their male or female peers in school. Rather their all-girl closeness is central to their attempts to (dis)identify with mainstream schoolgirl culture and the narrow definitions of heterosexual classed femininity discussed above.

Closeness, touching and physicality nevertheless, does not limit itself to one group at Hilltop. My research diary is strewn with examples of girl on girl closeness, whether this is holding hands, playing with each others' hair, hugging, touching arms, sitting with legs on one another and kissing. All-girl closeness happens in all contexts, in the classroom where it is frequently subtler, i.e. girls touch hands when they are passing notes, writing in each other's books, leaning over each other when they are sharing and copying work. When girls are outside the classroom or the teaching context they show their affiliations by linking arms, sitting on the same chair, sitting outside enveloped in each other and holding each other. Most of the time bodily closeness between girls goes

unnoticed and unspoken, accepted as part of growing up and the emotional side of femininity (note Conrad's comment in chapter five) as long as touching does not go too far so that it is mistaken for lesbian sexuality (Epstein and Johnson, 1998).

The 'alternative' girls are no exception to this rule, in that they are involved in close bodily contact. However, their closeness is central to their narratives of friendship. They are open and name the importance of their physical closeness:

They [Townies] think we're really strange and, (pause) and I don't know if you've noticed my friends, the girls are very, very close, you know, physically close, they hold hands sometimes, they kiss and things like that. And that's something that the 'Townies' just can't deal with at all they, I mean, they think that we're all lesbians because we're that close with each other and I don't know, I mean, it's confusing, 'cos you know in PSE you discuss things like homophobia and they all say how you know gay people are just you know ordinary people who have feelings blah, blah, blah, and then the second they get out of the classroom they are sort of yelling across the yard, you know, "oh you gay" whatever, so (sigh) I mean and you, you, they know that people should be treated equally, they say it all the time, but they don't do it, they don't do that themselves, and just, I don't know, just the idea that we might be lesbian and they just can't cope with that at all, so I think that is one of the things that they hate about us because we're that close ...

The naming of their close female friendships and their public displays of female affection problematise their femininity as heterosexual and further adds to them being labelled different and potentially problematic. Rather than passing off their all-girl affection as the emotional side of femininity, which chapter four (4.3.) shows to be acceptable, the 'alternative' girls refuse to deny or name their sexuality as either hetero, homo or bi-sexual. The 'alternative' girls neither hype up their heterosexuality nor deny lesbianism, so their femininity is immediately called into question.

As Ruth suggests above and is highlighted in chapter four (4.3.) the girls' experiences and narratives of friendship are in direct contrast to discourse of acceptance articulated by girls in the PSHE and 'sexuality education' classroom. Ruth and her friends identify the space of the PSHE classroom as a site of contradiction. Their response is to remain silent in class:

Ani: I don't have any friends in my PSHE group, so I tend to just shut up

Faith: But I do, but I just can't be bothered

Ani: I have really strong views about tons of stuff and usually I'm like always talking, but I'm like really quiet

Faith: And it's just like everyone says what Miss wants to hear anyway

Ani: Yeah

Faith: Yeah, sure I agree with the PC [politically correct] term, but I don't have to tell you (laughter)

The girls refuse to identify with female sexuality in the space of the classroom even though their experiences of friendship suggest otherwise. There is a further inconsistency as the majority of girls engage in close bodily contact, but it is the 'alternatives' who are labelled as having a suspect sexuality:

Ruth points to two girls who she calls 'Townies', they are walking along the path holding hands, she says that if that were her and one of her friends they would get loads of name calling now, but because it is them they get away with it, 'they're it'. However, when they are all sitting down on the grass in their groups there is a lot of close bodily contact between the girls, they are leaning on each others' knees, brushing hair out of each others' faces etc.

research diary

It appears a combination of the close bodily contact and the deviation from mainstream performances of femininity through fashion that marginalises the 'alternative' girls from mainstream performances of femininity. I ask Ruth during a later interview to explain the contradictory behaviour between groups of girls:

K: Then why are the girls who are 'Townies', they're linking arms and stuff, but they're slagging you off for doing the same thing?

Ruth: It's because we're not in their group, because we're not, you know, they don't like us they don't want, they're not interested in our opinions or anything like that they just, I don't know, I think they like to, it probably makes them feel powerful or something I don't know. It's like double values, they're allowed to hold hands and link arms but the second we do that it's oh they're all lesbians. It's just, I don't know, just the way they are.

K: How do people in your group deal with that, being called lesbians?

Ruth: (laughter) They encourage it, they know the 'Townies' hate it so that they, they, so if someone comes up to you and asks umm "are you lesbian"? then they'll say yes because why explain the truth they don't deserve it, I mean they're not prepared, they're not even interested so just tell them what they wanna hear, it's just, it makes them hate you more, who cares? We don't want anything to do with them and they hate us, big deal. I mean, in a year's time half of them will leave and we won't have to put up with it anymore, well hopefully anyway. So most of them encourage it. I mean I don't think it is a particularly good idea because you're just, I don't know you're always inviting more hassle than you get already but you know there comes a point when you can't be bothered any more and you just think "oh to hell with it", "let them think what they want", "let them say what they like". I mean you want them to leave you alone but at the same time you sort of you don't want them to know the truth about you because it almost gives like the power back over them if they don't know anything about

you, because you can't help but find things out about the 'Townies' because they scream it across the classroom ...

Rather than becoming involved in practices of (dis)identification in relation to their sexuality and denying their potential sexual deviation the girls do completely the opposite in a form of power play. Outside the PSHE classroom, when challenged on their gendered and sexualised performances, the girls hype up their presumed lesbian sexuality in order to annoy and gain knowledge and power over 'Townie' girls. They identify with same-sex desire rather than giving the expected reading of a (dis)identification and even display forms of female love in classroom contexts. The girls delighted in telling me that Faith had once married and divorced Vicki in the space of one Art lesson, much to the disgust of on-looking 'Townies'. On the whole however, unless challenged on their sexuality, the 'alternative' girls' performances of all-girl closeness do not differ from other girls at Hilltop. Whether the girls identify as lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual does not matter here, it is their refusal to name their sexuality as hetero or homo and give the information to girls outside their friendship group which further marginalises the group in school. Unlike Olivia and Jayne (in chapter three, 3.4.) who successfully negotiate being labelled lesbian by Larry and Adam by identifying with lesbian sexuality through joking, the 'alternative' girls play on other girls' fears and distance themselves further from mainstream femininity. In their refusal to deny or accept the charges of lesbianism made against them the 'alternative' girls blur the boundaries between acceptable all-girl emotional femininity and lesbian sexuality.

It is a challenge to femininity that the 'alternative' girls pose. The girls are labelled lesbian by boys, but their 'lesbian displays' are not primarily and directly concerned with challenging masculinity by rendering their masculine sexual bravado pointless - as Shane Blackman (1998: 215) suggests in his ethnographic research. Rather their 'lesbian displays' are aimed at girls who embody a narrow definition of femininity, the girls labelled 'Townie'. Indirectly, through the 'male in the head' (Holland *et al*, 1995), this may pose a challenge to dominant performances of masculinity as heterosexuality, but it is through resistance to white working-class performances of femininity that 'lesbian displays' of 'alternative' femininity are made.

The fine line between girl friendship and lesbian sexuality is used to challenge and question mainstream performances of femininity as heterosexuality. From the outset of my research I found it disconcerting and challenging for girls to deny the significance of all girl friendship (see chapter three). The 'alternative' girls were no different. Their (dis)identification with a gender specific friendship and performance of a 'laddish' femininity appears to deny the importance of girlhood. But it is this fear of naming the importance of friendship which poses the challenge to gender relations. In the following extract from my individual interview with Ruth, she talks openly about her friendship with Ani:

... So, it wasn't an immediate click but when we actually got to know each other there was you know definitely something that umm made me like her more than anyone else. And now it's, I don't know, we call ourselves soul mates as opposed to best friends because it really does feel like umm, I don't know, almost like another part of yourself. I mean it sounds really weird and some people I have tried to explain it to think that I'm insane or a witch or whatever, because, it's, some people just don't ever find that I don't think, but umm, some, it can feel like another part of yourself, but just another person walking around. So almost like, I don't know you're part of the same being and it's really cool because it's, I don't know because then you never feel sort of lonely ... So it's, I mean it sounds really weird but it does feel like you're almost the same person sometimes, and I really like that ...

There is nothing to suggest that Ruth is involved in a sexual relationship with Ani, but their friendship is such that other girls (and boys) label them lesbian, even though at different times they have both had boyfriends. It appears that for the 'alternative' girls it is their dual embracing of female closeness and naming their female friendships that questions and makes problematic their performances of femininity as heterosexual.

Naming and embracing their girl-closeness is a defining feature of the 'alternative' girls' friendship, even though this further marginalises them from inclusion in mainstream femininity at school. The final section of this chapter considers how young women cope with being marginalised because of their performances of 'alternative' femininities.

#### *5.4. Territorial girls and spatial practices of distancing*

I'm sitting next to Faith, Jo is behind getting on with her work and Ruth and Ani are sat in front. Ani turns around and joins in the conversation I am having with Faith. We are talking about where they hang around, who with, when, whether it is an all girl group. Ani says that their group is very territorial, they have to have a place to go. Faith says that one day someone was sitting on their wall and she got really mad. However, she adds that it had more to do with them occupying their space than the actual person, because they will allow anyone into their group.

research diary

The 'alternative' girls invoke a discourse of territoriality in order to sustain a distance between conflicting friendship groups in school and (re)enforce their discourses of acceptance and individuality. According to them, the people they hang out have more to do with the place than the people themselves. As Faith suggests in the above quotation, the group has an inclusion policy that is open and (re)enforces the girls' discourses of individuality predicated on acceptance and diversity rather than sameness. From the outset it appeared as if the girls were telling me that anyone could join their friendship group if they wanted to hang out in that particular place. However, continued participant observation suggests that the girls' initial and simple suggestion concerning their practices of friendship inclusion based on territory hides a wealth of complexity (see for instance the discussion of Maggie, Rowan, Daria, Kerri, Jo and Sharon earlier in this chapter).

The importance of spatial practices of distancing first came to my attention when sitting with Faith, Ruth, Ani and Jo in Maths:

I'm sitting between two groups, there is Ani, Ruth, Jo and Faith on my right hand side and on my left there is Julie, Samantha, Lauren and Tasha, there are boys separating the girls in rows down the middle. The contrast between the groups is great. The girls on my left are being loud, laughing, shouting over at the boys and asking them what they got for Valentine's Day and comparing their roses [flowers] which they all have on display sticking out of their bags. They then start on Mr Lenton "What did you get for Valentine's Day sir?" ... Faith says, 'Townies', slappers. She says this quietly whilst leaning into me to avoid being overheard and glances over her shoulder and motions over to where Julie, Lauren, Tasha and Samantha are sitting. They wear designer labels and in the future will hang around pubs in town like Berlins, they always hang around in huge groups, are very intimidating and it is preferable to walk past a man with a Rottweiler than a group of 'Townies', she explains.

research diary

The physical distance between these two groups in Maths is noticeable, even more so because the boys appear to provide the gender divide. Moreover, in

other classroom contexts and in other school spaces during break there is always physical distance between 'alternative' and 'Townie' girls. They keep themselves to themselves. This is even prevalent in the micro-spatialities of group interaction in Drama when Faith and Ani are assigned to work with girls they describe as 'Townie'. Both groups of girls do their best to work separately until the final performance of their collaborative piece.

It is their lunchtime activities which provide the best example of their practices of distancing from other girls at school. Over the year the places in which Faith, Ruth, Ani, Jo and their wider friendship nexus hung out at lunchtime changed. At first the girls would meet at lunchtime and go up to Birchley where they would meet up with other friends. The size of the group made meeting in a small, built-up, busy and commercial area difficult. The group therefore fluctuated in size and composition. At first the girls used to sit on a wall outside a solicitor's office in the local area, a convenient location between the school and the shops so that they could chat to other friends going past and still go to buy food from nearby shops. However, as other youth research has shown (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith, 1998; Sibley, 1995; Skelton, 2002; Tucker, 2002; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000), there are often conflicts over local use of space. The Director of the firm of solicitors complained to the head teacher that the young people were creating such noise that they disrupted meetings in the boardroom and caused a hazard outside the office. Luckily for the group they were not identified and the school blamed pupils in the year above. The group (re)located to another wall in Birchley outside a pizza shop where there was more room for them to manoeuvre. Just before the Easter break however, the girls were introduced to the park which became the place to go from that point on, as Ruth explains:

I don't know how exactly [why we started going there], someone had come across the park. I mean it is very near Selina's house so she knew about it and a couple of them had gone to hang around there and they'd invite people who'd invite people who'd invite people and eventually we just sort of all went down there, but I don't, I mean there is this lad called Boris who is not actually in our group, but has recently started hanging around with us, umm apparently he was one of the first kids who came along umm to the park and went with Ringo and Seb and then they sort of invited people who were like friends of ours as well, so then we went down as well and so now there is all of us. But, I mean before we just used to sort of wander around because we didn't have any like, well territory we call it. 'Cos

it sort of, we are the only ones who go there no-one else bothers, 'cos they, I don't know where they go but they do different things

Even though the girls did not 'discover' the park for themselves, as a place which is away from other lunchtime hangouts, it became very important in their narratives of friendship. The park is located five to ten minutes walk from school in the opposite direction to Birchley. The distance however is such that pupils can still go to Birchley shops or local sandwich shops to buy food if they have not brought lunch from home. The park is surrounded by dense trees on three sides and is not visible from the main road. So, it proves a particularly important site for a number of reasons: firstly, the park accommodates a group which is at times large; secondly their presence is not noticed by passers by or other pupils from school; and finally the activities of some go unnoticed and the park is large enough to accommodate groups of people who want to use it as both a space to chat and an isolated site in which to smoke dope (see chapter two, 2.4. for a further discussion of this).

A dominant theme in geographies of youth culture research is the conflict that arises over use of space. Young people are often vilified in media representations for their use of spaces which are coded as 'adult' or 'child' and their bodies and activities are read as in-between (Sibley, 1995). The park is one such site, where children and their activities are said to be peripheralised (James, 1993), but also where conflict between children, young people and parents arises because the dominant and normative reading of a park is as a play space for young children and not teenagers (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith, 1998; Sibley, 1995). In this case however, because the 'alternatives' only use the park during school lunch time - when from my observations and their reflections nobody else is there - conflict between the group and 'Outsiders' is to my knowledge non-existent. The 'alternative' girls therefore, actively describe the space of the park as a site where their clothed bodies and performances of gender and femininity are not excluded and peripheralised. In other research the park is described as a peripheralised site for children and young people. However, for the 'alternative' girls at Hilltop the use of the park at lunchtime is embraced as a site of marginality, even though their use of the park is a direct consequence of their bodies and activities being marginalised in wider school culture:

And you just, basically avoid them ['Townies'] as much as possible, because if you, if you're constantly in their faces then it's going to be really difficult to come to school everyday. And I don't think the teachers have any idea about how bad it is because there's so many kids they don't have the time to take care of every individual, so you just. I think, I think that's also a reason that people make, make friendship groups so you're sort of, you know safety in numbers. And it is, I guess it is a kind of defence really and that's why we go down to the park as well because it's well out of the way, there's just us there, there's not the problem of there being any fights or even disagreements because everyone there is friends and there is hardly any umm sort of pedestrians who walk by so you, there is not going to be any problem from them either. *So, it's like, it's like a little safe haven where we can go for an hour each day and just sort of relax really and not have to be on our guard.*

K: So, at break time you have to be on your guard?

Ruth: Yeah, you do, I mean, we sort of will, we meet outside school, but we'll move to where the 'Townies' aren't because, well, I think partly from habit, but also because it's much easier if you don't interact with them at all and you do, I mean I feel it personally, I don't know what the others think but when I'm walking around the corridors if there's a group of 'Townies' blocking the stairs then I'll go the long way around as opposed to walk through them. Because if you stand on someone's foot or on someone's bag or knock into someone that, I mean some of them will go absolutely ballistic at you and when there's that many of them there is nothing really you can do to defend yourself except run away and if they catch you then you're sort of in trouble. So, I avoid them as much as possible.

K: Is that physically or verbally in trouble?

Ruth: Both, it depends on the group, umm, how they are feeling that day whatever, they, I don't know, they're very, they're not very consistent, I mean some days they can just brush it off as if nothing has happened, other days they'll try and beat the hell out of you and it just, it really does just depend on how they are feeling, or who they are with, that changes their attitude towards you.

As Ruth suggests in the preceding interview extract, both within school spaces and at lunch her and her friends like to spend as much time away from girls they label as 'Townie' in order to avoid confrontation. The space of the park therefore, is described as a safe space, a place where they can go to be with their friends without constant surveillance or risk of confrontation between groups. The 'alternative' girls discursively produce the park as a space of 'radical openness' (hooks, 1991), and as such for the girls the park holds some form of resistance whilst it is also a site of repression (hooks, 1991: 151). The girls' use of the park at lunchtime is a direct response to their feelings of marginality from mainstream schoolgirl culture and as such is a site of repression. But at the same time the girls discursively produce the park as a site of resistance, a place where they can be themselves and where their friendships and all-girl closeness are not called into question. The girls' marginalisation is complex because at the same

time as their discourses of friendship reflect being peripheralised from mainstream schoolgirl culture, they also embrace a form of self-marginality:

marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation: in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this site that I was naming as a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

bell hooks, 1991: 149

As discussed above, central to the girls' narratives of friendship is territory and the park which they use at lunch to sustain distance between themselves and girls they label as 'Townie'. Using territory as a dominant discourse in their construction of friendship provides the girls with a means to (re)articulate their friendship group as predicated on individuality and acceptance. They explore this individuality through embracing their marginality and the site of the park as a space of potential radical openness. By actively distancing themselves from other pupils in school in response to being marginalised themselves they do not appear engaged in exclusionary activity. Going to the park appears to be a coping strategy rather than a practice that is exclusionary. This adds weight to Faith's initial stipulation that it is the space that matters in their friendship and therefore anyone can join, there are no barriers.

However, there is a disjuncture and complexity in their discourses of territory and acceptance of all. To be part of the 'alternative' girls' friendship therefore is to hang out with them, to be invited to the park and accompany them. Inclusion therefore in the 'alternative' group relies on tacit knowledge that can only be gained from a member of the group. The girls do not have to engage in exclusionary activity per se, which would discredit their discourses of acceptance, just be careful who they divulge the location to. Furthermore, anyone who does get invited to the park is tested, not in any formal way through such a practice as an initiation ceremony, but to stay in the park and be accepted into the 'alternative' group is to acknowledge and accept activities that they themselves may choose not to take part in. That is not to say that everyone has to smoke a spliff, but that the person has to be accepting enough to acknowledge

the diversity of activity within the group for which the “safe haven” of the park is used.

### *5.5. Summary*

Ideally at this point I would like to provide another section of this thesis, or even another chapter. Here I would explore the young women’s use of the park at lunchtime and the gendered power relations between group members. I would also look at the ways in which the girls’ discursive production of the park as a space of ‘radical openness’ (hooks, 1991) transfers into practice. However, my inclusion in the group was thwarted by my feelings of responsibility to the school as an ‘adult’ researcher (for a specific discussion of the ethics of doing research with young people see chapter two). Anecdotal evidence from the handful of times I spent at the park would not give the depth of analysis which such a study should provide. However, working with young people raises ethical issues which have to be taken into account when doing research. This chapter finishes therefore where I would have liked to have started.

This chapter shows that the girls’ means of expressing their ‘distinctive individuality’ (Muggleton, 2000) is through their use of territory, in particular the space of the park as a “little safe haven” at lunch time. Their feelings of marginalisation in school, even within the space of the ‘sexuality education’ classroom, are such that they identify with a ‘laddish’ form of femininity which risks their girlhood altogether and finds them seeking spaces outside the school during the school day to explore their femininities. In this chapter I show how the ‘alternative’ girls’ focus on ‘distinctive individuality’ relies on a dual process of (dis)identification. The production of the ‘Townies’ as a homogenous category forms the first part of this dual process of (dis)identification. This process allows the ‘alternative’ girls to produce themselves as accepting, individual and above all different. Furthermore, they (dis)identify with each other and with any within-group similarities in order to both make their dual process of (dis)identification complete and (re)affirm their individuality, which is central to their construction of friendship and femininity.

Initially it is their taste in fashion, music and style which makes the girls literally stand out from the crowd. However, the meanings attributed to their clothed bodies are significant in this chapter, in particular their 'alternative' performances of femininity and all-girl closeness. Whilst at first it appears, like the girls in chapter three, that the 'alternatives' (dis)identify with all-girl friendship because this would label them bitchy, in practice it is their bodily closeness and refusal to deny their closeness which further marginalises their femininities in school.

The 'alternative' girls' performances of femininity are potentially resistant because they question the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. By refusing to deny their all-girl closeness or hype up their heterosexuality the 'alternative' girls problematise femininity as heterosexuality through their discourses and practices of friendship. In so doing the 'alternative' girls blur the boundaries between acceptable heterosexual femininity which accommodates all-girl close friendship and the potential for potentially problematic performances of young lesbian sexuality.

However, whilst the 'alternative' girls' narratives of friendship are shaped around individuality and an acceptance of difference this dominant discourse serves to silence the marginalisation of some group members such as Jo, Sharon, Rowan, Daria, Kerri and Maggie. Furthermore, a focus on acceptance derived through discourses of individuality removes the significance of class in the construction of friendship and femininities. As Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001: 215) argue the power of class is (re)enforced through its silence:

Class is not something that is just produced economically. It is performed, marked, written on bodies and minds. We can 'spot it a mile off' even in the midst of our wish for it no longer to be there. It is there in the discourses and practices through which difference is made.

Relations of power written and performed across classed bodies underpin all the discussion of femininity and sexuality even if it is never named as such. It is white working-class girls whose femininity is subsumed and homogenised through the label 'Townie' and it is the 'alternative' young women who are able to put into practice the discourse of 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000) through their clothed bodies and performances of physicality between girls. This

chapter shows how these class distinctions occur by labelling femininities both between groups and within the group itself in order to produce the 'alternative' girls' discourses of 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000).

Finally, the 'alternative' girls' discourses of friendship engender a marginalisation of their femininities outside the space of the school during the school day. However it is their symbolic and cultural capital derived through their middle-classness that allows them to use this space as a "little safe haven" and put up with the spaces of contradiction highlighted at Hilltop. Faith, Ruth and Ani discursively produce the park as a space of 'radical openness' (hooks, 1991), where their femininities and friendships can be explored. Nevertheless, using territory as a means to distance themselves from dominant performances of classed femininity reduces the potential for challenging femininity as heterosexuality and finding new ways and possibilities for 'alternative' practices of femininity and girlhood at school.

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## Conclusion

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The aim of this final chapter is to draw together some conclusions before discussing possible policy and practice implications, as well as suggesting potential ways forward for future research. The ‘conclusions’ section comprises four parts. Firstly, I make some conclusions concerning research with young women’s friendship groups at Hilltop school. Secondly, I draw together some ideas concerning the actual research process. Thirdly, I consider my contributions to existing social theory. The final part of this ‘conclusions’ section focuses on the particularities and specificities of my research at Hilltop school. I then move from the ‘conclusions’ section of this chapter to look at future research areas, as well as practice and policy implications for my research. I finish with some thoughts on complicity ...

### *Conclusions ... Discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification in young women’s friendship groups at school*

I began my thesis with the suggestion that young women’s insistence on individuality proved confusing, especially when observations of their everyday interactions across multiple locations at Hilltop implied otherwise. My own memories of being a girl at school were to some extent updated through spending hours with research participants. Recollections of whispering secretly, laughing hysterically, sitting, standing, and ‘hanging out’ together were all brought to the fore by spending time with young women at Hilltop. My friends and I would spend as much time together as possible, just like the young women in this study. For us all, school is as much about social interaction as it is about learning the curriculum. However, it was the young women’s discourses of individuality, signified through the assertion “we’re all friends here”, which challenged my own schoolgirl memories and allowed me to try to understand the complexity suggested by this apparent denial of collective friendship. At the outset this

thesis had five aims: to contribute to the development of social theory in relation to young women's everyday experiences of school and friendship; to consider contemporary constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality; to consider the role the school plays in the reproduction of 'compulsory heterosexuality'; to further develop participatory research methods when working with young people; and finally to contribute to public policy debates in the sphere of female 'youth' and to formulate a wider understanding of multiple subjectivities, specifically constructions of femininity and (hetero)sexuality.

It has been argued (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) that for young people in contemporary Western societies collective identities and social categories are less significant at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their lives and biographies are becoming increasingly individualised. In chapters three and five individuality is imperative in understanding the discursive construction of young women's friendship groups at Hilltop. However, whilst individuality is important in the production of young women's friendships, to follow Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001: 19) the construction of "girls and women as subjects is far more complex and problematic" than the individualization literature at first suggests.

In chapters three and five I show how the contradictions that are engendered through young women's discourses of individuality are explained throughout this thesis through practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997). Practices of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997), both between and within young women's friendship groups, enable young women to produce their friendships through discourses of individuality. Unlike the research participants in Skeggs' (1997) study however, young women at Hilltop are not engaged in processes of (dis)identification in order to 'fit in'. Young women in both chapters three and five, albeit in different ways, hold investments in producing their friendships through discourses of individuality. Young women in chapter three are involved in complex practices of (dis)identification with age/maturity, their male peers, and each other in order to distance themselves from the significance of external markers of difference (fashion/styled bodies) in the construction of their friendship. In order to avoid their identities being fixed, upper school is

symbolically constructed as a space of maturity where individuality as opposed to collective sameness matters.

The 'alternative' young women in chapter five however, do completely the opposite in order to produce their 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000). Unlike girls who embrace discourses of individuality to signify that "we're all friends here", the 'alternative' girls' experiences of friendship suggest that it is their individuality, symbolised through their tastes in fashion, music and in particular their performances of all-girl friendship and bodily closeness that marginalise their femininities at Hilltop. The 'alternative' young women are engaged in a dual process of (dis)identification in order to produce their 'distinctive individuality'. They (dis)identify with young women labelled 'Townie', who according to the 'alternatives' are engaged in practices of sameness, and actively embrace internal group differences in order to reject within group similarities. On the surface it appears, therefore, that young women's practices of (dis)identification in chapter three and five are not invoked in order to 'fit in' (Skeggs, 1997), but to produce themselves as appropriately individual. Paradoxically however, young women's discourses of individuality in chapters three and five do potentially allow them to 'fit in' because it is the ability to invoke the discourse of individuality which produces respectable heterosexual femininity.

The cultural suppression of young women's friendships (Hey, 1997) is central to an understanding of the empirical material encountered in this thesis. Perhaps what is more frightening in this research is that it is the young women themselves who appear culpable in the silencing of friendship between women. Throughout this thesis I have shown that denials of all-girl friendship actually disguise relations of power, both between and within young women's friendship groups at Hilltop school. The use of the three case-studies in chapter three (Rachel and Kat; Ahliya, Nita, Noreen and Sonali; Abi, Olivia, Jayne and Zoë) exposed how discourses of individuality create what Furlong and Cartmel have called an 'epistemological fallacy'. According to Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel the great paradox of late modernity is that life revolves around an 'epistemological fallacy' (1997: 109). Individual responsibilities are promoted whilst collectivist traditions appear weakened, thus obscuring the material and lived realities which

still structure and constrain young people's everyday experiences and life chances. An empirical understanding of the contradictions and complexities of young women's discourses and practices of friendship allow for traditional relations of power to be partially exposed. All young women in chapter three attempt to invoke discourses of individuality, however, they are not all successful at transferring these into practice. The complexities and contradictions of this are discussed in relation to these case-studies. The girls' focus on (dis)identification and difference within their friendship group means that power relations between groups of girls at Hilltop are rarely discussed. To do so, I suggest, would go against their investments in individuality and acceptance. Focusing on within-group differences allow the girls to produce their friendship as based on difference and acceptance. However, it is in the complexity of their (dis)identifications that their contradictions become apparent. Relations of difference are literally written on the body (Skeggs, 1997), and whilst the girls distance themselves from this when they discuss between group friendship, it is these factors of external representation that are required to name and express their group's individuality. It is shown in chapter three that the ability of young women to successfully negotiate discourses of individuality in practice is dependent upon relations of heterosexual femininity, class and 'race'/ethnicity, which are all masked through the discursive construction of young women's friendship as based on individuality.

I have shown throughout this thesis, specifically in chapter five, that it is through subtle practices of (dis)identification that the significance of young women's clothed and styled bodies ('Townies'/'Alternatives') become apparent in the reproduction of classed heterosexual femininities. Throughout this thesis class is significant in its absence, as Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001: 212) argue:

We do not believe that class has been rendered unworkable as a category, but we do insist that how it is understood needs to shift dramatically. Classification operates in and through subjects: it is marked on bodies and minds, it ruptures the smooth surfaces of the discourses of classlessness, it can be spotted a mile off in the way it inscribes subjects. As we have explored, that subjectification works not only on complex conscious and rational processes but also on desires, wishes and anxieties, and creates defensive organisations through which participants live their inscription into the discursive practices that make up current sociality. Unlike accounts of class processes of old, we argue that regulative discourses and practices and unconscious processes are central to understanding how class functions and is lived today

Therefore, central to an understanding of the significance of individuality in the construction of young women's friendships, is its role in making young women respectable (Skeggs, 1997). For young women at Hilltop upper school to be involved in overt practices of social categorisation and to name exclusion is to be involved in processes of identification that signify sameness. Their investments in respectable femininity are to produce themselves and their peers at school as individual and accepting. This thesis shows however, that it is by drawing subtle distinctions within friendship groups through the process of (dis)identification that the significance of class, gender, 'race'/ethnicity and (hetero)sexuality become apparent in the construction of friendship and the (re)production of heterosexual femininities at school. Indeed, it is young women's investments in discourses of individuality which require them to draw, and (re)produce traditional performances of classed femininities and heterosexualities to create their practices of (dis)identification.

Beverley Skeggs (1997: 24) argues that individuality is a bourgeois construct. Usually in the possession of middle-class white heterosexual men. Not only therefore, do young women's discourses of individuality serve to create an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), but they also serve as a means to control the (re)production of heterosexual femininities through the process of the 'male-in-the-head' and the hegemonic male gaze (Holland *et al*, 1998). Young women's investments in individuality at upper school appear to be in direct response to their identities being fixed at lower school by young men and other young women. Young women's attempts to invoke individuality as central to friendship construction obscures power relations within school, through which the significance of female friendship is suppressed for fear of appearing to embrace sameness rather than difference. Power relations are shrouded in confusion in order to disguise the fact that difference and social categorisation cannot actually be named, but have to be hidden behind discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification. Responsibility therefore for sustaining individuality, respectability and heterosexual femininity lies with the individual (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). Discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification leave power relations and exclusionary practices both between and within young women's friendships at Hilltop

unnamed and unproblematic. If this is the case, I am left questioning who benefits from these discourses of individuality which result in the suppression of all-girl female friendship and the dismissal of power relations. Young women's responses to 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998) in the 'sexuality education' classroom (see chapter four) may provide some answers to this question.

In chapter four I argue that at first glance the 'sexuality education' classroom appears to be a feminised space where young women are able to respond through discourses of acceptance in relation to verbal and bodily displays of 'heterosexual laddism' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). However, further explorations suggest otherwise. The process of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) is again integral to the arguments posited in chapter four. Young women's discourses of acceptance in relation to (male) homosexuality are made possible because, unlike the young men in the classroom, young women do not have to actively (dis)identify with the masculinist material being used in the classroom. We see in this chapter, therefore, how young women are able to further promote their investments in individuality to argue for acceptance of (male) homosexuality through the use of a nature discourse. However, young people's 'public' responses to 'sexuality education' (re)produce polarised discussions between young women and men enabling limited 'public' performances of classed heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Moreover, young people's responses in the 'sexuality education' classroom are limited in their ability either to challenge the school as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality' or question the (re)production of masculinity as heterosexuality (Holland *et al.*, 1998). In fact, to conclude chapter four I argue that there is a missing discourse of female sexuality in the 'sexuality education' classroom because of the way in which young women's discourses of acceptance in relation to (male) homosexuality actually (re)affirm the centrality and dominance of masculinity as heterosexuality through "the male-in-the-head" (Holland *et al.*, 1998).

In all three empirical chapters relations of power are masked through discourses of individuality, either in relation to young women's friendships or in relation to (male) homosexuality in the 'sexuality education' classroom. I return therefore, to the question of who benefits from young women's investments in discourses

of individuality which suppress the significance of all-girl female friendship. The material encountered in this thesis suggests that it is heterosexuality as masculinity (Holland *et al*, 1998) which benefits from young women's investments in discourses of individuality. Young women's attempts to produce their friendships and their femininities through discourses of individuality unwittingly mask relations of power which produce femininity as a mere extension of heterosexual masculinity (Holland *et al*, 1998). To do otherwise could potentially threaten the dominance of heterosexual masculinity.

However, the 'alternative' young women in chapter five attempt to come to terms with the contradictions they identify within the space of the 'sexuality education' classroom. The 'alternative' girls' experiences of friendship and femininity at Hilltop are in direct contrast to the discourses of acceptance and individuality promoted by other young women at Hilltop. Chapter five explicates how the 'alternative' girls express their friendship through a process of self-marginalisation and the use of the park at lunch time to create space for the exploration of their femininities and friendships. Whilst the 'alternative' young women discursively produce the park as a space of 'radical openness' (hooks, 1991), this masks relations of power between girls at school and also within the 'alternative' girls' friendship group itself. It does appear, as I argue in chapter five, that 'alternative' young women are using space to (re)produce their expressions of femininities elsewhere (i.e. the park). However, what this spatial coping strategy actually does is remove the visibility of power relations and social categorisation from the school, specifically in relation to the on-going significance of class in the (re)production of heterosexual femininities. Therefore, the contradictions within the concept of individuality are neither questioned nor made problematic within the 'sexuality education' classroom or within and between young women's friendship groups at school. Hence, space may allow for the exploration of identities within the space of the 'sexuality education' classroom, the park and friendship itself. However, it fails to problematise the concept of individuality and the relations of power which this term conceals.

### *Conclusions ... Participatory research process and 'feminist research praxis'*

Vital to the production of this thesis and to the 'conclusions' presented here, was the use of participatory research methods 'in the field'. The use of multi-locational participant observation (curriculum classrooms, PSHE classroom, dining room, staff room, school corridors, 'playground', local area and 'hang out' areas), self-directed photography and in-depth semi-structured interviews (individual young women and friendship groups) allowed me to put young women's experiences at the forefront of my research. Furthermore, this multi-method participatory approach was complicit in understanding the complexity of young women's constructions of friendship and, specifically, the contradictions between their discourses of individuality and their actual practices of friendship. As Beverley Skeggs (1999: 217) suggests "... ethical dilemmas ... were part of understanding the processes by which the women produced themselves". Moreover, my attempt to put 'feminist research praxis' into action, in particular a feminist 'politics of intervention', proved problematic and fraught with ethical dilemmas. However, the practical and ethical dilemmas discussed in chapter two allowed me to further develop participatory research methods when working between and within young women's friendship groups at school. Through my research I have reformulated my feminist research politics, towards a politics that is emergent and contingent upon daily ethical experiences rather than fixed and trans-situational (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

In this thesis I endeavour to situate young women's everyday experiences of friendship, femininities and heterosexualities at the centre of my research. But throughout the course of writing I have found that by doing this I potentially risk young women's investments in discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification. By which I mean that in order to challenge oppressive and exclusionary behaviour it is necessary to attempt to make explicit the very processes which are integral to the constitution of young women's friendships. In this research such processes are so subtle and contradictory that they question the applicability of a 'feminist research praxis' and, specifically, a feminist 'politics of intervention'. If as critical academic and feminist researchers we are going to take seriously the ethical and moral responsibilities of working *with* children and young people in a non-oppressive manner, then we also need to

consider whether this transfers into our own personal commitments to challenging oppressive behaviour during the research process. As I have shown in this thesis, however, this often raises more questions and ethical dilemmas than it answers. I firmly believe, though, that critical researchers need to create a space for dialogue and enactment which opens up the place and 'politics of intervention' in geographies of children and youth. Even if that means critical researchers have to find new ways of creating space for young women's voices to be heard. Sometimes this may mean that their voices and experiences are not immediately recognisable because their investments are shrouded in confusion. Nevertheless, there are ways in which critical researchers can and should attempt to influence policy decisions and practice.

### *Conclusions ... Contributions to social theory*

In the introduction to this thesis I outlined that one of my main aims was to contribute to the development of social theory in relation to young women's (aged 14/15) everyday experiences of school and friendship. In this third 'conclusions' section I draw together the ways in which I believe that I have contributed to debates in existing social theory. I want to begin by re-stating however, that my contributions to debates within the social sciences have been refracted through my empirical understandings of young women's discourses and practices of friendship. By retaining the focus on young women's experiences I believe that I have contributed to four key areas of social theory: processes of identification/(dis)identification; individuality; power; space and the production of young people's identities.

As discussed throughout this thesis and summarised above the theory of (dis)identification (Skeggs, 1997) became central to understanding young women's discourses and practices of friendship at Hilltop school. In the same way as my research prioritised young women's experiences of friendship, Skeggs (1997) developed her theory of (dis)identification through an empirical understanding of her research participants. Skeggs shows in her ethnographic study of white working-class women how their formations of class and gender interweave in a complex strive for respectability. The women of Skeggs' study

produce themselves as respectable and attempt to 'fit in' through a series of (dis)identifications based on class, 'race', gender and sexuality (for a more in-depth discussion of this process see 1.3.).

In order to take this discussion of (dis)identification further and to clarify my contribution to the theory I think it is useful here to make comparisons with existing studies of schoolgirl friendships and femininities. To date the studies of young women, femininities and friendship at school have focused on young women's practices of inclusion and exclusion (see Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997 and see 1.4.) which are often based on relations of power (class/gender/sexuality/'race'). Young women in these studies rely on constructions of Self/Other to identify a group that they distance themselves from in order to produce their own femininities and friendships, i.e. the non-boffin and non-slaggy distinctions discussed in Valerie Hey's (1997) ethnography of schoolgirl friendships.

This process of Self/Other categorisation which permeates much of the identity literature across the social sciences is similar to the first process of (dis)identification identified throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis, i.e. the use of the 'Townie' concept by 'alternative' young women in chapter five to produce themselves through a discourse of 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton, 2000). However, through this thesis and the empirical material gathered I contend that I have made the theory of (dis)identification more complex and thus added to existing theories of schoolgirl friendship which are based on constructions of Self/Other. I have shown in this thesis that for young women to only take part in this first process of (dis)identification - identified by Skeggs (1997) and reflected in other schoolgirl friendship ethnographies - would contradict their investments in discourses of individuality (discussed below) which are imperative to the production of their friendships and respectable individual femininities. So, the young women's dual process of (dis)identification (significantly their second process of (dis)identification within their own friendship group) has allowed me to add further complexity to social theories of identification and (dis)identification used in sociological studies of femininities and friendship. Furthermore, the significance of this theory to the discipline of social geography is reflected in my discussion of the 'alternative'

young women's use of territory in chapter five (5.4.) and the middle-class young women's spatial practices of (dis)identification in chapter three (3.4.).

Another key area that has featured in this thesis is the significance of young women's investments in discourses of individuality. As discussed in chapter one the theory of individualization (Beck, 1992; 2001), and specifically the individualization of youth literature (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; and see 1.1.), plays a key role in theoretical debates concerning 'Western' young people in late modernity. However, to date this research lacks empirical grounding (Walkerline, Lucey and Melody, 2001) and fails to understand the complexity of this theory in everyday life. I suggest therefore, that my research begins to make a contribution to the empirical grounding of this theory. In particular, this thesis has explicated how young women are able to produce their friendships through discourses of individuality. However, when I began to investigate this empirically I found that the process is far more complex than the theory at first suggests. As I have discussed above all young women in this thesis are able to produce their friendships through discourses of individuality, however, only some young women are able to transfer this individuality into practice. The ability to transfer discourses of individuality into practice depends on young women's access to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986 in Skeggs, 1997).

Furthermore, I found David Muggleton's (2000) concept of 'distinctive individuality' useful to further understand how the 'alternative' young women were able to transfer their discourses of individuality into practice. However, the theory of 'distinctive individuality' posited by Muggleton (2000) fails to recognise the inherent power relations that are used within this process. This thesis has taken this theory further by showing how relations of class, gender, 'race' and sexuality are used to construct distinctions between and within friendship groups even when their investments in individuality suggest otherwise. Nevertheless, further investigation in this area from a geographical perspective would be fruitful in order to consider whether the process of 'distinctive individuality' is spatially contingent and contested within and beyond other school spaces.

In this section thus far I have argued that I have contributed to two social theories through empirical investigation. Moreover, throughout my thesis the

significance of power and relations of class, 'race', gender and sexuality remain paramount. Even if, as I have argued, they sometimes become so obscure that they are difficult to recognise. Throughout the research, analysis and writing of this thesis it is the young women's constant strive not to be fixed and socially categorised that alerted me to the ongoing significance of this very process. This is therefore, another area where I consider my contributions to social theory to lie. In the past decade within Human Geography and across other social-science disciplines the everyday realities of class, gender, 'race' and sexuality in the production of social identities has not been central to research agendas. I have shown through my thesis however, that relations of power retain significance to the construction of friendship and contemporary femininities. Therefore, a significant contribution to social geographies would be to further investigate how social relations are affected by space and how space is affected by the continual denial of the significance of social categorisation. This thesis has started to consider these questions by looking at spaces of friendship, PSHE and to some extent the park. Nevertheless, I think there are further areas where such studies could ameliorate the social relations of the workplace/home etc.

Finally in this section I think my other main contribution to social theory has been in the area of space and the production of young people's identities. I have contributed significantly to the body of critical education literature by providing an empirically grounded investigation of the formal space of the PSHE classroom and specifically the 'sexuality education' classroom. Few studies exist in this area and this will become increasingly paramount in the British context as government and educational professionals attempt to provide comprehensive sex and relationships education in order to reduce teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. This research has contributed in particular to social geography where educational spaces and the impact social relations have on producing these spaces and identities remain a relatively under-researched area. My thesis shows that researching educational spaces can contribute to empirical understandings of how young people's identities affect and are affected by space. This realisation further contributes to social theory in Human Geography, but also adds a spatial dimension to critical education studies

(and praxis) where many innovative studies take place concerning the production of young people's masculinities, femininities and sexualities.

I now move to the final part of this 'conclusions' section to consider the particularities and specificities of my research.

### *Conclusions ... Particularities and specificities - research at Hilltop school*

Throughout this thesis research, analysis and writing has focused on young women's discourses and practices of friendship, often to the exclusion of young men. That is not to say that the production of masculinities and male sexualities in school spaces are any less important. Rather, that the focus of the research lay elsewhere. Space therefore, for the exploration of young men's identities has been limited for the following theoretical and methodological reasons.

Empirical and theoretical research in critical education explores the production of hegemonic and alternative masculinities in schools (cf. Mac an Ghail). These theories, as I explored in chapter one (see 1.3.), have proved imperative to the development of my research on the production of schoolgirl femininities. However, I decided to develop and maintain a single-gender focus in my research because of the marginalisation of young women in these accounts. This is especially the case given the dominant verbal displays of 'heterosexual laddism' displayed in the PSHE classroom and other school spaces (see chapter four).

My commitment to 'feminist research praxis' also led me to focus on young women, even when their initial discourses of friendship denied the significance of all-girl collectives. At the time I realised that my research could have developed in different ways if I had included the young men that young women discursively incorporated into their friendship groups, i.e. the 'alternative' young men in chapter five, or the young men in chapter three who are 'good for a laff'. However, I maintain that the success of my field research hinged upon the time and research relationships that I built up with young women in the field (see chapter two). I question whether these relationships would have been possible if I had spent time also trying to gain access to young men's friendship groups. Especially as I found through my study that in practice there was often spatial

distanciation between groups of young men and women, contrary to their discursive constructions. Furthermore, in order to get at the subtleties and complexities that produce young women's friendship groups at Hilltop I suggest that the same amount of time and commitment would be necessary to work with young men.

I recognise that there is little space in this thesis therefore for the examination of unstable or resistant forms of masculinities. However, that is not to say that they do not exist. My research diary documents such performances. They are glimpsed in chapter four through Warren and Simon's reactions to the material used in PSHE. Furthermore, I found examples of the production of non-hegemonic masculinities in other school spaces such as the library. However, as I suggest above given dominant performances of 'heterosexual laddism' the investigation of alternative masculinities would have required a specific focus on young men in order to build successful research relationships.

Locating my research within the institutional structures of a school has shaped my research in specific ways. Specifically, in relation to access to young women and the institutional constraints that limited and restricted the spaces I spent with pupils. This is perhaps most evident in my research with the 'alternative' young women where my commitment and affiliation to the institution restricted my ability to further investigate the 'alternative' young women's use of space in the production of their friendships (see 2.4. and 5.4.). However, if I had recruited young women for my research from another context, i.e. youth group or detached outreach work, then similar commitments to the youth service/organisation would have also influenced my actions. Using a youth group as a starting point would have allowed me to negotiate access to other spaces that are significant in the production of friendship. Although gaining access to multiple schools could have proved impossible and therefore limited my access to a site that has proved significant for the production of young people's identities. Furthermore, my research allowed me to focus on the school day and therefore gave me access to a number of school spaces that included both informal and formal spaces of education.

Moreover, social relations and the institutional structures of Hilltop have shaped the research in distinctive ways. These have however, been implicit in my thesis

because of my commitment to the focus on young women's experiences. To explore the extent to which Hilltop as an institution affects the production of schoolgirl friendships and femininities would have required a much more focused study of educational policy, Hilltop's structures and policies, as well as an investigation of the social and spatial relations between teachers themselves and teachers and pupils. There is no doubt however, that young women's commitment to discourses of individuality are filtered through institutional discourses of acceptance reflected in the Hilltop prospectus and the PSHE curriculum.

In addition, the findings of my research would have been different if I had based my research in a school which drew from a socially cohesive or polarised catchment area. This could be the reason why constructions of Self/Other were significant in other studies of friendship (Hey, 1997). By basing my research in a mixed (gender, class, 'race'/ethnicity) over-subscribed comprehensive I have been able to develop studies of schoolgirl friendship in new ways not at first envisaged.

As I have outlined in this section my research located at Hilltop school has particularities and specificities. Nevertheless, I believe that there are two main issues that still retain significance with other studies of schoolgirl femininities. Firstly, I suggest that there is an ongoing significance of young women's friendships as a site for the production and contestation of social relations. Even though in my research this is complicated through the complex and often contradictory discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification. If research continues to ignore the sites and spaces of friendship as significant in the production of socio-spatial relations then there will be missed opportunities to investigate social theory and to enact change through praxis. Secondly, the research methodologies and the 'feminist research praxis' adopted in this study shows that this approach can lead to a productive means to investigate young people's identities from an empirically grounded theoretical perspective. The experiences documented in this thesis show that in order to explore the everyday complexities and contradictions of young people's identities it is essential to work *with* young people through methodologies that allow researchers access to young people's spaces of friendship. An agenda that places young people and

their experiences at the core of research will enable the development of theoretically grounded empirical investigations across a wide variety of research sites and spaces. I now turn to consider the policy and practice implications of my research.

### *Policy and practice implications*

There are a number of ways this research impacts on health and education policy and practice. Most obvious is the arena of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and 'sexuality education'. Recent initiatives by the New Labour government (*DfEE, 2000; Ofsted, 2002*) are in the process of making sex and relationships education statutory in British schools. This research has implications for its content, as well as the way in which teachers put these initiatives into practice in the space of the classroom. Hilltop can, and is, used by local agencies and schools as a model of progressive educational practice in relation to PSHE. The way in which staff develop the curriculum over time, the range of topics covered, the use of outside agencies, and the setting up of the classroom to enact dialogue are all innovative initiatives. However, as I have shown in this thesis there is still room for the development of pedagogical practice and policy. As it stands policy suggests that sex and relationships education are often seen as the domain of young women, to the exclusion of young men. However, I have shown in this research that in the case of Hilltop and the eight-week course on 'sexuality education' the opposite is true if gender dynamics and young people's responses are considered in-depth. Moreover, concerns about 'sexuality education' are often framed around a fear that homosexuality will be 'promoted' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998). However, observations from the Hilltop 'sexuality education' classroom show that in fact, the opposite is true: it is heterosexual masculinity and femininity which serve to (re)produce the space of the classroom as a site of 'compulsory heterosexuality', to the exclusion of female sexuality. There is much scope, therefore, to consider at both national policy and local practice level ways in which pedagogy can be developed to challenge gender relations and normative performances of classed heterosexual masculinity and femininity (Holland, *et al*, 1998). It is imperative, therefore, that teachers are provided with on-going training to deliver PSHE and

'sex and relationships' education in a non-judgemental and supportive manner. Furthermore, critical research needs to investigate in greater depth the limited subject positions which are available within educational spaces, and the influence these have on the (re)production of classed heterosexual femininities and masculinities.

Through this thesis I have shown how young women suppress their friendships in order to produce themselves and their friendships through discourses of individuality. I hope to use these ideas in conjunction with the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health to develop a training package. This package will be used by health and educational professionals to promote self-esteem and support young women in sustaining and developing friendships which promote diversity and acceptance.

#### *Future research*

This research could be used to posit future research questions in a number of different ways. I have shown in this research how the use of participatory research methods by the researcher affects the research process, the material collected, the process of working with research participants and the ethical dilemmas that are created concerning a feminist 'politics of intervention'. Further research could develop innovative participatory research methods (video, drama, photography) for working *with* young people, specifically in conjunction with agencies that have political agendas and transformative policies and practices. Moreover, it would be interesting to consider the way in which organisations and institutions (youth support groups and schools) use new methods of educational practice (drama, workshops etc) to impact on young people's learning. In addition, such research could consider how young people's identities are (re)produced through alternative learning strategies and whether such practices hold any potential for radical change.

The experiences of 'alternative' young women need more attention in a number of areas. Firstly, the research outlined in chapter five is limited because it failed to consider young women's relationships with their wider friendship nexus and specifically, the 'alternative' boys. Furthermore, a separate research topic needs

to explore if young people described as 'alternative' are using places such as the park as spaces of 'radical openness' (hooks, 1991). Such a research topic could further explore young people's attitudes towards gender and sexuality and their ability to challenge the heterosexual presumption. In such a research topic 'alternative' young women's descriptions of their styled femininities as "laddish" could be further examined.

In this thesis class remains pernicious in the construction of heterosexual femininity, even though girls' discourses of individuality mask such overt practices of social categorisation. Further research needs to consider how discourses of individuality pervade young people's lives and affect everyday experiences of social categorisation (gender, class, 'race'/ethnicity, sexuality, age, (dis)ability). This research shows that in practice not everyone had access to the discourse of individuality even though their attempts at practices of (dis)identification suggest otherwise. This research is pertinent in the UK context where individualism remains central to the rhetoric of the New Labour government (Walkderdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001).

An other area that could be developed fruitfully is the research which comprises chapter four. The sexual behaviour of young people in the UK continues to be of concern to policy makers and health and education professionals, and is frequently the focus of media representations of young people, especially young women. The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, the number of young people with STI's (including HIV/AIDS) continues to rise and often affects the most vulnerable and excluded members of society (*DfEE*, 2000; *DoH*, 2001). There is much scope to develop an empirical understanding of how dynamics between groups of young people, as well as relations between young people and health/education professionals affect, and are affected by, educational practice. Yet, academic research in Geography has paid little attention to this topic and research across the social sciences is predominantly theoretical. This research argues for a more holistic approach to sex and relationships education which moves away from a biological focus on sex and reproduction towards a person-centred approach. An holistic approach prioritises the concerns and desires of all young people in relation to their lived experiences and identities (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Holland *et al*, 1998). The New Labour government

has recently brought in sex and relationships education guidance for schools (DfEE, 2000; Ofsted, 2002), but provision remains limited and sporadic nevertheless. It has been documented that young people are far more likely to gain much needed information on sex and relationships from friends and magazines (Holland *et al*, 1998). Provision which focuses specifically on the needs of young people is however increasing, and the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health is at the forefront of developing this work in the UK in conjunction with government policy advisors. The Centre supports and develops person-centred approaches to sex and relationships education, such as PSHE education in schools, mobile bus clinics, health clinics attached to schools, drama and youth projects. There is a need therefore, to consider how sex and relationships education is *implemented* in practice by professionals across a variety of contexts and to examine in-depth young people's *responses* to sex and relationships education across a number of spatial contexts and modes of provision. Further research could use participatory techniques (multi-locational participant observation, in-depth interviews with health and education professionals and young people) to explore the practice of sex and relationships education across a number of educational spaces (PSHE classroom, mobile health clinic, drama project and youth project). This project could also investigate how young people's social identities (gender, class, 'race'/ethnicity and sexuality) both affect and are affected by other young people, health/education professionals and the educational space.

### *Final thoughts ... Complicity*

Through the research and writing of this thesis I have come to the conclusion that there are two processes of complicity in this study. Firstly, I have argued in this thesis that through discourses of individuality and practices of (dis)identification young women appear complicit in the silencing of their own all-girl friendships. That is not to say that friendship is no longer important - because daily observations and encounters during field research refute this - or that the silencing of friendship is their own fault. However, in order to (re)produce themselves as respectable young women the significance of girls' friendships are masked through discourses of individuality and the obscuration of power

relations. Secondly, through the research process I feel, as the researcher, that I have become complicit in the very practices that I investigate. In this final written thesis I have tried to reflect the complexities and contradictions that emerged throughout the research encounter. Yet, I too became embroiled in practices of (dis)identification because I felt unable to transfer my 'feminist research praxis', and specifically a feminist 'politics of intervention', into practice as first envisaged. Nevertheless, in an attempt not to produce 'irresponsible knowledge' (Skeggs, 1997) I have endeavoured to explore young women's experiences of friendship at Hilltop even when they appeared confusing, complex and contradictory.

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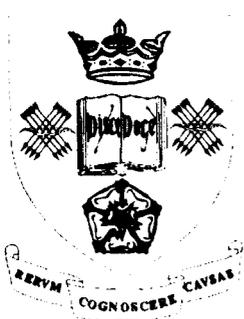
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# **Methodology and Ethics**

## **Appendix One**

## Sample Letter to School



**University of Sheffield.**

Kathryn Morris-Roberts  
Department of Geography  
University of Sheffield  
Winter Street  
Sheffield S10 2TN

Email: [k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Tel: (0114) 222 7942  
Fax: (0114) 279 7912

1<sup>st</sup> June, 1999

Mr John Turner  
Hilltop School,  
Hill Lane,  
North of England.

Dear Mr Turner,

I am currently undertaking a three year research project on the formation of girls' friendship groups for a PhD in the Geography department at the University of Sheffield, this research is funded by the Economic Social Research Council. The research is concerned with changing gender identities in girls' lives and the importance girls place on friendship, how they choose their friends, on what basis they exclude others and how friendship affects girls' social identities.

One of the main issues in this research project is the school as a site for young women to form their friendships. Further research will then consider how these friendships change over different spatial locations, i.e. the home and the street. Through a period of participant observation in a school I hope to identify a number of friendship groups who would then be willing to conduct further research with me, such as group interviews and possibly some self directed photography work.

I would like to base my research in Sheffield, and would be very grateful if you would consider the possibility of Hilltop School becoming involved. I would be happy to adapt my research design to meet the needs of the school, but some preliminary thoughts are as follows:

End of summer term 1999 - meet with teachers and classes who will be involved in the study in order to introduce myself.

- September 1999 - ongoing participant observation in school, particularly with one or two classes.
- March 2000 - a short self-directed photography project with identified friendship groups.
- April/May 2000 - a series of group interviews with identified friendship groups.

I am particularly interested in working with girls in year 10. I understand that time pressures in school make outside involvement very consuming, however, in order to conduct research of this nature I feel a period of in-depth research, as outlined above, is necessary. Nevertheless, I must stress that this is a provisional proposal and I would be very willing to discuss changes with you and other teachers involved in the study in order to develop a feasible project.

I enclose a copy of my curriculum vitae which shows my experience as a classroom teacher and as a teaching assistant which I would be happy to put into use.

If you would like to discuss the research further, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0114 2227942 and perhaps we can arrange a time for me to visit the school to discuss my research project with you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Morris-Roberts

## **Photography Project**

---

Thanks for agreeing to take part in this photography project.

You have the camera for one week, when the camera is returned to me, I will get it developed, with one copy for me and one copy for you.

My research is on teenage girls and their experiences. I would like you to take some photos for me using the camera and tell me about **who** you enjoy spending time with, **where** and **what** you do. So, really the choice of what you take is up to you, I want you to tell me about your experiences of being a young woman. Some suggestions to get you started:

- your friends and people you spend time with
- places you hang out, during the day/evening
- things you enjoy doing
- anything you like/dislike

The one thing I ask is that you don't take photos during lessons, because you might get yourself and me into trouble for disrupting class - thanks.

All the photos and anything you tell me will remain confidential. I ask you to sign the consent line below to say that you understand that you have chosen to be involved in the research and that whatever you tell me can be used for research purposes (including research publications and reports) only with the preservation of anonymity, this means that your names will be changed.

I consent to contribute to the research project with anonymity:

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

If you or anyone else have any questions or problems please contact me:

**Kathryn Morris-Roberts**, The Geography Department, University of Sheffield, Winter Street, Sheffield, S10 2TN. Telephone (0114) 2227968.  
E-mail: [k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Interview Consent Form**

***Friendship Group Interview***



Thanks for agreeing to take part in this interview.

My research is on teenage girls and their experiences and it is part of my PhD. I am particularly interested in issues around friendship, such as who you hang out with, where and what you enjoy doing. This interview is to talk to you about these issues but also for you to tell me about your experiences of being a young person.

Everything you tell me in the interview will remain confidential, this means that I will not tell anyone, teachers, other young people, what you have told me in the interview. However, if at any point you tell me something that may be placing you or somebody else in danger I will inform you of my duty to tell another person. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable about a question or you want to leave please tell me.

I ask you to sign the consent line below to say that you understand that you have chosen to be involved in the research and that whatever you tell me can be used for research purposes (including research publications and reports) only with the preservation of anonymity, this means that your names and anybody else's names mentioned will be changed.

I agree to contribute to the research project with anonymity:

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

If you or anyone else have any questions or problems please contact me:

**Kathryn Morris-Roberts:** The Geography Department, University of Sheffield, Winter Street, Sheffield, S10 2TN.

Telephone: (0114) 2227968. E-mail: [k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:k.morris-roberts@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Consent form for research participants over 18.**

**Statement of Informed Consent**

---

**Research Project:** Young women’s friendship groups and the production of new femininities.  
**Institution:** The University of Sheffield, Geography Department, Winter Street, Sheffield, S10 2TN.  
**Principle Investigator:** Kathryn Morris-Roberts

---

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure that your contribution to the above research project is in strict accordance with your wishes.

Please tick either:

I give my permission for the interview which I am about to give/have given for the above project to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **without** preservation of anonymity.

**OR**

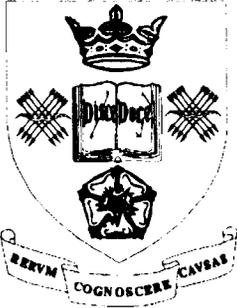
I give my permission for the interview which I am about to give/have given for the above project to be used for research purposes only (including research publications and reports) **with** strict preservation of anonymity.

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to Kathryn Morris-Roberts (the research investigator).

**Signed** ..... **Date** .....  
**Address** .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Signed** .....**(Research Investigator)**  
**Date** .....

## Letter to Mrs Carrington, concerned parent



**University of Sheffield.**

Kathryn Morris-Roberts  
Department of Geography  
University of Sheffield  
Winter Street  
Sheffield S10 2TN

E-mail: [ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Tel: (0114) 222 7968  
Fax: (0114) 279 7912

Wednesday, 10 May, 2000

Address

Dear Mrs Carrington,

I spoke to Mrs Sarah Whittingham this morning about your concerns about my research project and the involvement of your daughter Jayne. I was really sorry to hear about your concerns and I wanted to write to you personally to explain my research and to try and allay any fears you have about my research ethics and commitment to the young women involved.

I have been working at Hilltop school since November, 1999, access to the school was gained in discussion with Mr Geoff Livingstone and Mrs Sarah Whittingham. This research is part of a three year PhD research project on the formation of girls' friendship groups, the outline of my research at Hilltop is as follows:

- November 1999 - ongoing participant observation in school with Year 10 classes
- March 2000 - a short self-directed photography project with identified friendship groups
- May/June/July 2000 - a series of group interviews with identified friendship groups regarding their friendship formation

As you know Jayne is one of the young women who has agreed to take part in this project for which I am very grateful. I have always been very concerned about the ethics of my research; I want the safety and well being of all research participants to be at the forefront of my research project, and I do this by providing the utmost confidentiality for the young women involved and continually checking their ongoing consent. In hindsight, I should have provided parents'/guardians' of the young women interested in getting involved with a letter outlining my research and the opportunity to discuss in greater depth any concerns about my research, from now on I will be doing this to avoid any further anxiety.

With regards the film project the girls are undertaking with Tara Samson I want to assure you that I did not mean to give the girls the impression that our projects

were competing, or for in any way for this to have affected the friendship that Jayne has with the other girls. Over the last week I have been in contact with Tara and we are both concerned that the young women are happy being involved in both projects and that we do not impose our interests on their already busy lives. In discussion with Tara, and with the consent of the girls, we thought it might be interesting if I assisted Tara with some of the filming, hence it was suggested that I accompany them on Saturday shopping.

Since talking to Mrs Whittingham this morning I am very concerned that you are happy with Jayne being involved in my research project, that Jayne still wants to take an active role, and that you or Jayne have no objection to me accompanying Tara on some of her filming. Therefore, if you would like to discuss the research further, please do not hesitate to contact me and perhaps we could talk on the phone or arrange to meet. I have enclosed a copy of my CV to give you some further information about my background, furthermore, if you would like to discuss my research with my academic supervisor, Professor Gill Valentine, she will be happy to do so, her contact number is (0114) 2227952. If you or Jayne are still not completely satisfied with my research then I will understand fully if Jayne withdraws from the project and I can assure you that any material collected to date will not be used in my thesis.

I hope this reassures you in some way and that you will contact me if you have any further queries,

Yours sincerely,

Kathryn Morris-Roberts

## Sample letter to parents/guardians for photography project and interviews



Kathryn Morris-Roberts  
Department of Geography  
University of Sheffield  
Winter Street  
Sheffield S10 2TN

E-mail: [ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Tel: (0114) 222 7968 (W)  
Fax: (0114) 279 7912

**University of Sheffield.**

Dear Parent/Guardian

Hello, my name is Kathryn Morris-Roberts and I have been doing some research at Hilltop with Year 10 pupils as part of my three year PhD postgraduate research at the University of Sheffield. Access to the school was gained in conjunction with Mrs Sarah Whittingham (Head of Year 10). My research is on the formation of teenage girls' friendship groups, the outline of my research is as follows:

- November 1999 - ongoing participant observation in school with Year 10 classes
- March 2000 - a short self-directed photography project using disposable cameras with identified friendship groups
- May/June/July 2000 - a series of group/individual interviews with identified friendship groups regarding their friendship formation

I have asked your daughter if she would be willing to take part in the photography project and a subsequent interview about her friendship group and she has expressed a willingness to do so. Using disposable cameras I ask the young women to take photos of things that are important in their lives, their friends, what they enjoy doing and where they enjoy going. In the following interview I ask them to explain the photos to me, whilst talking about wider friendship issues. All interviews take place during lunch time at school.

I can assure you that I will ask your daughter to give written self-consent to take part in the project and that the confidentiality of all participants will be honoured.

I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know about my research and offer you the opportunity to contact me if you have any queries, would like to discuss my research further or if you are not happy, withdraw her from my research project.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Mrs Sarah Whittingham at Hilltop, if you have any further questions or concerns.

Yours Sincerely,

Kathryn Morris-Roberts

## Sample letter to parents/guardians for interviews



**University of Sheffield.**

Kathryn Morris-Roberts  
Department of Geography  
University of Sheffield  
Winter Street  
Sheffield S10 2TN

E-mail: [ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:ggp98klm@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Tel: (0114) 222 7968 (W)  
Fax: (0114) 279 7912

Dear Parent/Guardian

Hello, my name is Kathryn Morris-Roberts and I have been doing some research at Hilltop with Year 10 pupils as part of my three year PhD postgraduate research at the University of Sheffield. Access to the school was gained in conjunction with Mrs Sarah Whittingham (Head of Year 10). My research is on the formation of teenage girls' friendship groups, the outline of my research is as follows:

- November 1999 - ongoing participant observation in school with Year 10 classes
- March 2000 - a short self-directed photography project using disposable cameras with identified friendship groups
- May/June/July 2000 - a series of group/individual interviews with identified friendship groups regarding their friendship formation

I have asked your daughter if she would be interested in taking part in a group/individual interview for my project and she has expressed a willingness to do so. The interview will take place at lunch time in school and will involve the participants telling me about the importance of friendship in their lives, why they are friends and what they enjoy doing with their friends.

I can assure you that I will ask your daughter to give written self-consent to take part in the project and that the confidentiality of all participants will be honoured.

I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you about my research and offer you the opportunity to contact me if you have any queries, would like to discuss my research further or if you are not happy, withdraw your daughter from my research project.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Mrs Sarah Whittingham at Hilltop if you have any further questions or concerns.

Yours Sincerely,

Kathryn Morris-Roberts

## **Hilltop Daily Schedule**

		8.50 a.m.	Briefing for Staff in Staff rooms
9.00	–	9.15 a.m.	Registration or Assembly
9.15	–	10.15 a.m.	Period 1
10.15	–	10.20 a.m.	Movement between lessons
10.20	–	11.15 a.m.	Period 2
11.15	–	11.35 a.m.	Break
11.35	–	12.30 p.m.	Period 3
12.30	–	1.30 p.m.	Lunch
1.30	–	1.35 p.m.	Registration
1.35	–	2.30 p.m.	Period 4
2.30	–	2.45 p.m.	Break
2.45	–	3.40 p.m.	Period 5

## My Initial School Timetable

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>8.50 am</b>	Staff Briefing		Staff Briefing		Staff Briefing
<b>Registration</b>	10 Red		10 Red		10 Red
<b>Period 1</b>	English (lower set)		PSHE (10 Red)		Geography (mixed ability)
<b>Period 2</b>			PSHE		Science (mixed ability)
<b>Break</b>					
<b>Period 3</b>	History (mixed ability)				Religious Education (10 Red)
<b>Lunch</b>					
<b>Registration</b>	10 Red		10 Red		10 Red
<b>Period 4</b>	Science (mixed ability)		Drama		
<b>Break</b>					
<b>Period 5</b>	Maths (top set)				Sport/PE

# **Personal Social and Health Education**

## **Appendix Two**

**Figure A: PSHE at Hilltop**

<b>Aims</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Concepts</b>
Develop rational thinking skills to make informed decisions	Develop self awareness, positive self esteem and confidence	Personal Development Skills	Active participation as good citizens	Cause, consequence, change and transition
Promote responsible attitudes to lead a healthy lifestyle	Develop a healthy lifestyle	Social Skills	Appreciation of diversity	Citizenship and democracy
Develop interpersonal relationships	Learn to keep themselves and others safe	Communication Skills	Appreciation of a Healthy Lifestyle	Cultural awareness
Develop knowledge and positive attitude to continued learning	Develop effective and satisfying relationships	Problem Solving Skills	Awe, Wonder and Curiosity	Effective relationship
Develop communication skills and opinions to influence social change	Learn to respect the differences between people	Practical Skills (including study skills)	Commitment to Equality	Equal opportunities, inequality, fairness, justice
Opportunity to understand different beliefs, faiths and cultures	Develop independence and responsibility		Concern for Justice and Democracy	Healthy lifestyles
Develop skills of self assessment	Play an active role as members of society		Empathy	Independence, responsibility, duties, needs, rights

Develop understanding of sexual development and sexuality in relationships	Make the most of their abilities		Environmental Concern	Keeping safe
Promote self respect and respect for others and environment			Respect for others	Peace and conflict
Encourage participation in society as responsible citizens			Rights and Responsibilities	Personal abilities – school, work, careers, leisure
			Self Esteem	Power
				Prejudice and discrimination
				Role of the media
				Self awareness
				Self esteem
				Sexuality
				Values and beliefs

## Figure B

### PSHE: Knowledge (Topics Outline)

#### *Year Seven:*

- Introductory team building - listening, ground rule setting, conflict resolution, self esteem. Transition to a new school.
- Peer groups – being assertive, keeping safe, solving conflict. Health Education – solvent abuse and tobacco.
- Child Abuse – the right to say ‘no’.
- Bullying. Non violent resolution of conflict. Visiting speakers from the Samaritans.
- Puberty. Menstruation, wet dreams. What we know, what we want to know. Relationships between young people at puberty.

#### *Year Eight*

- Families: relationships between parents and children. Conflict resolution. Divorce – parents and other adults eg. Dawn Project, invited into discussion groups.
- Marriage – including arranged marriages and mixed race marriages.
- Sex Education – contraception/family planning.
- Human Rights – needs, wants, rights, duties, responsibilities. United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Human Rights abuses.
- School students rights – assertiveness and self-esteem – and responsibilities.
- Amnesty International – ordinary people working for human rights. Visiting speakers from Sheffield University Students Amnesty group. Rights, Responsibilities. Conflict resolution.
- Health Education – Alcohol. Cannabis. Assertiveness and self esteem, alternatives.
- Multi-cultural/anti racist education.
- Refugees – visiting speaker is a survivor from the holocaust.

#### *Year Nine*

- Health Education – illegal drugs. Self-esteem, assertiveness. Visiting speakers from SHED to answer questions.
- Equal opportunities/anti-sexist education – especially in relation to careers guidance. IT and careers opportunities. If I Can You Can visitors.
- Gender issues in school. Non-violent resolution to conflict.
- Sex Education: relationships. Names of parts – appropriate language. Body image.

Self esteem. HIV/AIDS. Negotiating safer sex. Assertiveness, saying 'no'. Condom practice. Visiting speakers from the Youth Clinic etc. Love, commitment. Thoughts before first sexual encounters. Child sexual abuse.

- Preparing for the transition from Lower to Upper School. Assertiveness. Non violent conflict resolution.

### *Year Ten*

- Co-operative group work, team building, building trust and self-esteem. Careers guidance education.
- Peace and War including speakers – a major and colonel from the army careers office, representation from At Ease and a religious peace campaigner who worked in Bosnia and in the Gulf Peace Team.
- Health education/environmental education. Healthy eating relating to vegetarianism, meat eating and animal rights/animal testing.
- Sex Education. Sex and the law – revision from Y9. Sexually transmitted infections (including speakers from local GUM clinic). Appropriate and inappropriate situations. Homosexuality, heterosexual, bisexuality, assertiveness, self esteem.
- Prejudice and disability – visiting speaker on living with cerebral palsy.

### *Year Eleven*

- Co-operative group work – general values clarification. Team building.
- Global Futures – how can we work towards the world we want?
- Coping with stress, and stress management, especially during exams.
- The Citizen and the Law. Courts, magistrates, sentencing. Visit to court and magistrate as visiting speaker. Capital punishment, computer files, data protection. Prisons.
- Sex Education – families, relationships, babies, parenthood. Parents from National Childbirth Trust (bringing their babies into class) talk about parenthood. Gender roles in the family. Sexual harassment and rape – including 'date' rape: saying 'no', assertiveness and legal aspects.
- Leaving home and the possibility of homelessness. Speaker from organisations which try to help homeless teenagers.

Figure B: PSE documentation Hilltop

## Figure C

### Sentence Enders for 'A Beautiful Thing'

I feel...

I learned that...

I didn't know that...

I didn't understand...

I wonder...

I am concerned that...

I now understand...

I was shocked...

I am glad...

I think...

I believe...

Figure C

## Figure D

### Reflections on module: sentence enders ...

I feel that the work ...

I learned that ...

I liked

I think that the aim of the work was ...

I didn't understand

I was surprised that ...

In future, I hope ...

Figure D: PSE documentation

## Figure E

### What is it like to be a Gay or Lesbian Teenager?

London Lesbian and Gay Teenage Group Research Project: Some Findings

416 individuals under the age of 21 completed a questionnaire about aspects of their lives as young people who identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

OF THESE:

6 in 10 had been VERBALLY ABUSED because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 5 had been BEATEN UP because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 7 had been SENT TO A PSYCHIATRIST because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 10 had been THROWN OUT OF HOME because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 10 had been SENT TO THE DOCTOR because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 5 ATTEMPTED SUICIDE because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 5 had had CONTACT WITH THE POLICE because they were lesbian or gay

1 in 2 had had PROBLEMS AT SCHOOLS because they were lesbian or gay

Only 1 in 38 said that homosexuality was mentioned in sex education lessons at school.

However, despite the pressures which the above figures indicate, the young people were positive about their sexuality.

93% had told someone that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual.

70% had told at least one member of their family that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual.

57% defined themselves as 'completely lesbian or gay'.

84% had had sex with someone of the same sex.

59% had, or had had, 'a long term homosexual lover'.

57% said that their school friends knew that they were lesbian or gay.

32% said that at least one teacher knew they were lesbian or gay.

Taken from Warren, H. and Trenchard, L. (1984) *Something to Tell You: The Experiences and Needs of Young Lesbian and Gay Men in London* London: London Gay Teenage Group

Figure E: Hilltop PSE documentation

## Figure F

### Lesbian and Gay Teenagers Speak for Themselves (extracts from)

The sex education talks at school never mentioned homosexuality and I assumed that it was so uncommon that it wasn't worth mentioning (Peter, 19).

Every boy at school calls me 'poof' or a 'queer' and some say things like 'Hallo, love' and 'How's your bum, love?' I feel like throwing myself under a bus sometimes (Stephen, 15).

No one talked to me for a year, I nearly got beaten up and all the girls thought I'd jump them (Female, 17).

Taken from Warren, H. (1984) *Talking About School* London: Gay Teenager's Group and Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (1980) *I know what I am: Gay teenagers and the law*.

Figure F: PSE documentation

## Figure G

### Myth and Reality (extracts from)

**Myth:** Lesbian and gays make up only a very small proportion of the population at large.

**Fact:** A large minority of the population is lesbian or gay. Ten per cent is one estimate which is widely quoted. On this basis, it has been calculated that one in every four families has a member (child or parent) who is lesbian or gay.

**Myth:** It is 'unnatural' to be lesbian or gay.

**Fact:** It is not 'unnatural' to have sexual relations with members of one's own sex; this behaviour is found in every race and culture, and has been recorded throughout history. To someone who is lesbian or gay, making love with a member of one's own sex feels just as 'natural' and 'right' as making love with a member of the opposite sex feels to someone who is heterosexual.

**Myth:** Lesbians and gays lead miserable, unfulfilled lives.

**Fact:** Just because lesbians and gays experience discrimination and prejudice does not mean that they would prefer to be heterosexual. Most lesbians and gays lead happy successful lives, at ease with their sexual identities and enjoying the support of their lesbian and gay communities. That some – particularly the young – may be isolated and lonely is something we should all be concerned about and try to put right.

Taken from Lesbian and Gay Rights Working Party: City of Leicester Teachers' Association (NUT)

Figure G: PSE documentation

## Figure H

### Straight Talking

The following statements were written by a group of lesbians and gay men, in answer to the question 'What do straight people need to know about lesbians and gays?'

1. It is not a choice to be lesbian or gay.
2. We do not conform to a stereotype: we are a diverse group.
3. We are less frequently child molesters than you are (10/90%).
4. We experience the world in general differently from you – and we feel less welcome in it.
5. It gets tiring to keep explaining ourselves.
6. We were all brought up to be heterosexual.
7. Think carefully about the power of language you use around us – 'homosexual', 'normal' – and about us. We are *lesbians* and *gay men*.
8. Our relationships are just as important and serious and relevant as heterosexual ones.
9. You have all been brought up to think negatively about homosexuality.
10. It has taken each of us a lot of work to achieve an identity as a lesbian or gay man, and to feel good about it.
11. We are proud of who we are and what we have achieved in overcoming the pressures on us.
12. We are not necessarily promiscious.
13. We know that a significant section of mainstream society is happy to let us die, think this would be right, and even wishes it to happen.

Figure H: PSE documentation

## Figure I

Y10 PSE

February 2000

### Thoughts After Watching Beautiful Thing

1. I am concerned about the boys' age, not because I think they're too young, but because if it gets out that they're gay they'll get a lot of stick and hassle about it.
2. I think they're very lucky to be together and not alone because it would be much harder for them.
3. I was shocked to see them kiss at first.
4. I now understand how difficult it can be for young gay people.
5. I believe that people shouldn't persecute anyone whether they're black, female, gay.
6. I am concerned that most of the world may turn gay.
7. 'I believe that homosexuality is wrong, just as sex outside marriage is wrong. The bible states clearly that homosexuality is wrong and I believe that the bible is God's word and is right'.
8. I am concerned that people who are gay often feel that they won't be accepted because they're different.
9. People need to be themselves, not who others want them to be.
10. Gays have their own rights and should be allowed to express those rights freely.
11. I am concerned that people might think that they're gay when they're not.
12. I learned how upsetting being teased about your sexuality can be.
13. I wish homosexuals weren't persecuted for being gay.
14. I am concerned that the two boys will get bullied a lot and Steve's Dad and brother will beat them up when it's not their fault.
15. I now understand the pressure of telling friends you're gay/lesbian.
16. I wish people wouldn't judge people for who they are, gay or straight.
17. I think that gays are going against the laws of nature.
18. We don't decide what 'natural' is, nature does. Homosexuals are naturally inclined toward one another.
19. They will have to pretend to be straight to please other people.
20. I now understand that gay people have the same feelings for each other as straight people do.
21. I believe being gay is fine and prejudice against gays is on a par with racism as an evil in society.
22. I am concerned that so much bullying and abuse is going on and no one is doing anything about it.
23. I think Jamie forced Steve into it.
24. There should be more support for gays and lesbians.
25. I wonder if it's just a stage the boys are going through.
26. I learned that people don't decide to be gay. They're born with their sexuality.
27. In my personal view gays and lesbians are wrong.
28. I didn't understand how they started being gay.
29. I wonder when it will be made illegal.

30. I wonder how I would feel if my own son was gay.

31. I think that the government should repeal Section 28 and add homosexuality to topics about bullying.

Figure I: PSE documentation

### **Figure J: DfEE Sex and Relationship Guidance (2000: 11)**

- 1.22 Traditionally the focus has been on girls. Boys may have felt that sex education is not relevant to them and are unable or too embarrassed to ask questions about relationships or sex. Boys are also less likely to talk to their parents about sex and relationships. For these reasons, programmes should focus on boys as much as girls at primary level as well as secondary.
- 1.23 Teachers will need to plan a variety of activities which will help to engage boys as well as girls, matching their different learning styles. Single sex groups may be particularly important for pupils who come from cultures where it is only acceptable to speak about the body in single gender groups.