

Gender, Sexualities, and Primary Education:
Equalities Pedagogy and the Conceivability of 'Otherness'

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Abstract

Of the increasing number of initiatives setting out in recent years to challenge heteronormativity in education, the 2006-2009 *No Outsiders* project has arguably been one of the most influential. Conducted across 15 primary schools in England, *No Outsiders* was an action research project that sought to disrupt heteronormativity through critical pedagogy, gaining widespread academic and media attention in the process. In spite of its prominence, though, there has been a lack of research exploring the ways in which children have incorporated this work into their everyday understandings and doings of gender and sexuality.

This thesis draws on data from a year-long ethnography conducted across two primary schools in the North East of England – one that was and one that was not involved in *No Outsiders* – to explore the extent to which children's negotiations of gender and sexuality differed across these sites. Informed by feminist poststructuralist, queer and symbolic interactionist theory, alongside Francis' (2012) concepts of 'gender monoglossia and heteroglossia', it reveals doings of gender across both schools to be broadly similar, with almost all children working to maintain an impression of gender's 'fixity' in the face of evident transgression. Regarding 'sexualities', however, attitudes are revealed as differing markedly across these sites, with the perceived conceivability of non-heterosexualities informed profoundly by the presence, or otherwise, of a formal school ethos on 'equalities'.

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Key to Transcripts

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| DG | Discussion group |
| SB | Story group |
| CA: | Interviewer (author) speaking |
| :: | Indicates a drawn out/prolonged sound |
| (Comment) | Background information – body movement, tone of voice, emotion etc. |
| <u>Underlined</u> | Speaker emphasizes a word or phrase |
| CAPITALS | Speaker shouting |
| / | Speaker is interrupted by another speaker |
| Dash- | Speaker cuts themselves off |
| [...] | Material edited out |
| ... | Pause |
| . . . | Excerpt from later in same group |
| .hh | Notable outbreath |

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References. Over the course of my PhD I have used parts of my research in public lectures, and in papers given at academic conferences. The second half of Chapter 3 – ‘The Least Adult Role’ – was presented in part at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference 2017 in Manchester, and at the Gender and Education Association Annual Conference 2017 in London. Aspects of Chapters 5 and 6 (‘Doing Boyhood’ and ‘Doing Girlhood’) were presented during the Pint of Science Festival 2018 in Singapore.

PART I.

1. Introduction

Everyone is an insider, there are no outsiders – whatever their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender, or sexuality. (Tutu, 2004, cited in DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a: vii)

From 2006 to 2009 – and led jointly by Elizabeth Atkinson¹ and Renee DePalma – the *No Outsiders* project was conducted across 15 primary schools in England. Informed by a participatory action research methodology and led by both academic- and teacher-researchers, the project set out ‘not only to interrogate the heteronormativity implicit in schools but to explore how these processes might be interrupted through critical pedagogic practices’ (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a: viii). With the use of various non-traditional and otherwise ‘troubling’ (Butler, 1990) resources, *No Outsiders* posed a direct challenge to both common-sense notions of ‘schooling’ and ‘sexuality’, and to the still prevalent legacy of Section 28², seeking fundamentally to disrupt the heteronormative structures and logics of primary education.

Inspired by this work, I conducted a small-scale ethnographic research project in June-July 2013 that investigated the ways in which children ‘did’ gender and sexuality in two *No Outsiders* schools (see Atkinson, 2013). The findings from this research revealed children to be negotiating their schools’ ‘equalities’ ethos broadly via the production of ‘pro-equality’ and ‘pro-normativity’ subject positions in formal and informal spaces respectively, resisting formal school culture through the recuperation of heteronormativity in the playground and peer group. As a result of this project, I became concerned to investigate what I saw as two key research problems arising from its findings. First, I wondered how, or whether, children’s negotiations of gender and sexuality might differ in schools where no comparable equalities work was taking place. And second, I was interested in the form that equalities work in *No Outsiders*

¹ Elizabeth Atkinson is my mother. However, this research was conducted entirely independently of any personal connection to *No Outsiders*, with no assistance provided in relation to access or analysis. This is discussed in some more detail below.

² Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 (repealed in 2003) stated that ‘[a] local authority shall not - (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ (see Local Government Act 1988, Section 28).

schools took; the related tensions in practical/political approach; and the attitudes of teachers and project members towards 'effective' gender and sexualities pedagogy. The crucial questions that arose for me were: what was the impact, or otherwise, of *No Outsiders* on children's understandings and 'doings' of gender and sexuality? And how do teachers and project members conceptualise, enact and experience gender and sexualities pedagogy and practice?

Drawing on data from a year-long ethnography in two UK primary schools – one involved in *No Outsiders*, the other not – this thesis seeks to answer some of these questions. It is important for me to note here that despite having a personal relationship to *No Outsiders'* principal investigator (see footnote 1, above), this was incidental to my research and is thus not expanded on in the coming pages. Much like any other researcher interested in issues around gender, sexuality, and education, my interest in *No Outsiders* developed through academic study and a political concern with educational inequalities, with the current research conducted independently of any personal connection to the *No Outsiders* project (indeed, if there had been a significance to this connection, I would have been profoundly interested to reflect on this in my methodology, as I do in relation to other aspects of my personal 'self'). Rather, this relationship exists separately to my research, and my criticality towards *No Outsiders* – and openness to both 'positive' and 'negative' findings in the field – can be seen throughout my thesis, as well as in my pilot study (Atkinson, 2013).

The remainder of Part I (Chapters 2 and 3) situates the research in relation to empirical/theoretical and methodological frameworks, beginning in Chapter 2 with a discussion of the broader field of childhood-gender-sexuality research. I then move in this chapter to a more in-depth discussion of *No Outsiders* – looking in particular at the epistemological and ontological tensions that suffused this work – before outlining my own theoretical framework, which is informed by poststructuralist/queer and symbolic interactionist thinking, alongside Francis' (2008; 2010; 2012) concepts of 'gender monoglossia and heteroglossia'.

Chapter 3 details the methodological framework of the project, beginning with a discussion of research design. Following a consideration of some of my early fieldwork

experiences and the impact of these on my shifting methodological approach, I move to an exploration of my methods (participant observation, discussion groups, story groups, and interviews), and consider the value of these for in-depth, comparative research around gender, sexuality and childhood. The second half of this chapter then focuses in some depth on issues around power and positionality in childhood research, and considers in particular the value of Nancy Mandell's (1988) 'least adult role' for ethnographic research with children.

Part II focuses on my research findings, beginning in Chapter 4 with an introduction to analysis that positions the 'gender binary' as central to children's understandings and doings of gender/sexuality in school. Key to this discussion, though, is a recognition of gendered and sexual doings as fundamentally fluid and contradictory, and of children as working to maintain an impression of 'fixity' in the face of (their own) evident transgression. It is this understanding of gender's 'heteroglossic' (see Chapter 2) reality that shapes the analytical discussion of the following chapters.

Chapter 5 opens by exploring the various ways in which 'boyhood' was understood across my two research schools, with boys' productions recognised as working simultaneously to define 'masculinity', and repudiate abject, feminine 'girlhood'. I begin here with a discussion of boyhood's 'material' constructions – both normative and subversive – before moving to an exploration of boyhood as produced, policed, and transgressed through various forms of (counter/normative) friendship and play. Chapter 6 then investigates productions of 'girlhood', beginning with a consideration of the perceived inextricability of 'femininity' and 'looks'. Following a discussion of girlhood communities as informed largely by (albeit contested) gendered understandings of looks and 'beauty', I then move to a consideration of girls' (inter)actions more broadly, considering in particular the complex relationship between friendships, play, and (looks-based) 'communities of practice' (Paechter, 2007).

Following this focus on gender, Chapter 7 moves to an exploration of sexualities, and their constructions across my two research sites. I begin here with a discussion of heterosexualities, and in particular their centrality to productions and regulations of

gender. Following this, I consider how *non*-heterosexualities were conceptualised, negotiated and policed, and demonstrate that whilst homophobia permeated peer group culture across both schools, its perceived *acceptability* differed markedly according to formal school discourse on ‘equalities’.

Finally, Chapter 8 draws on interview data to explore teachers’ conceptualisations of gender, sexualities, and equalities pedagogy, beginning with a consideration of the ways in which ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ were understood and regulated by teachers across both schools. Following this, I consider the ways in which teachers characterised and enacted ‘equalities pedagogies’ in particular, and highlight their comparative ‘conceivability’ for those involved – or otherwise – in *No Outsiders*.

The findings from this research reveal productions of *gender* as having been broadly similar across my research sites, with children working to maintain an impression of gender’s ‘fixity’ in the face of their own, and others’, evident transgression. However, productions of *sexuality* are revealed as differing markedly according to involvement or otherwise in *No Outsiders*, with non-heterosexualities revealed as significantly more conceivable for children involved in formal school ‘equalities work’. My conclusion (Chapter 9) thus highlights the significance of these findings for future research and praxis³, particularly in relation to arguments around the ‘relevance’, or otherwise, of gender/sexualities pedagogy (see Payne and Smith, 2017). Indeed, with complaints around ‘LGBT curricula’ and inclusive education appearing almost as rife now as they were ten years ago (see BBC News, 2017; Weale, 2017; Bloom, 2018), findings that reveal the comparatively damaging effects of silence are as vital as ever.

³ That is, justice-oriented practice informed by both experience and research. In Stanley’s (2001: 12) words: ‘understand[ing] the world and then chang[ing] it’ (see also Cullen, 2009).

2. Gender-Sexuality-Childhood

Having introduced *No Outsiders* as a project that sought to disrupt normative constructions of schooling (and thus childhood) and gender/sexuality, I begin this chapter with an exploration of the particular ways in which Western societies have constituted and reified understandings of ‘the Child’. Following a discussion of ‘childhood innocence’ discourses, and their contribution to children’s continued disempowerment, I identify some key theoretical and empirical works that have revealed children as active and competent ‘gendered’ and ‘sexual’ beings. I then move to a more in-depth exploration of *No Outsiders*, before delineating the theoretical framework of my own research, which is informed by poststructuralist/queer and symbolic interactionist thinking, as well as by Becky Francis’ concepts of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia.

I. Empirical Works

The relationship of childhood to sexuality is fraught with difficulties, controversies, and complexities; it is one openly and officially based on exclusion, with children constituted as requiring *protection* from sexuality, considered an ‘adults’ only’ domain. (Robinson, 2012: 257)

In recent years, an increasing number of theorists have challenged the enduring discourses of childhood innocence that have for over three centuries positioned children as fundamentally ‘innocent, vulnerable, immature and irrational’ (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015: 148) and in need of protection from the ‘dangerous knowledges’ of adult life (Epstein and Sears, 1999; see also Jackson, 1982; Thorne, 1993; Renold, 2002; Surtees, 2005; Robinson, 2013). As well as revealing such discourses to be fundamentally historically and culturally formed – stemming in particular from developmentalist (Piaget, 1973 [1929]) and romantic (Rousseau, 1992 [1762]) constructions of ‘the Child’ – these critiques have also highlighted the social and political normativities that constitute and are constituted through such hegemonic (and indeed, heteronormative, ‘raced’, and classed) constructions (see Epstein et al, 2003). In her analysis of childhood and sexual citizenship, for example, Kerry Robinson

(2012) identifies childhood innocence discourse as central to the constitution and governance of the 'good, normative adult citizenship subject', positioning children as the symbolic regulators of 'normative life markers...family structures, behaviours, morals, and values' (2012: 258). She writes:

The mass perpetuation and regulation of the heteronormative sexual subject and the good citizen subject is dependent on the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses of childhood and childhood innocence... Children have ultimately become markers of the heteronormative status quo. (2012: 262)

As well as working to reproduce and govern social normativities, discourses of childhood innocence have worked also to deny children access to a range of purportedly 'dangerous' knowledges, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. Debates around the need for and 'appropriateness' of sex and relationships education for young children ('Would you want YOUR seven-year-old to see this model vagina at school?' (Linning, 2017)), and media coverage around the teaching of 'non-normative' relationships and identities ('Parents accuse teachers of 'brainwashing their children when teaching about homosexuality'' (The Telegraph, 2016)) demonstrate clearly the perceived incommensurability of childhood and sexuality, and position children 'outside of' (gendered and) sexual worlds. As well as contradicting a wealth of research revealing their active engagements in gendered and sexual cultures, such conceptualisations also fail to acknowledge the role played by 'innocence' discourses in reifying children's disempowerment and vulnerability. As Levine (2002: 19) asserts:

...censorship is not protection. Rather, to give children a fighting chance in navigating the sexual world, adults need to saturate it with accurate, realistic information and abundant, varied images and narratives of love and sex.

Nonetheless, the hegemonic status of 'innocence' constructions – 'congealed over time' (Butler, 1990: 33) in the Western imagination – has rendered them almost unquestionable, and ensured that they continue to structure and delimit contemporary understandings of 'the Child'. This is particularly evident within the space of the primary school, which is widely understood in terms of neutrality, protection, and asexuality: 'a cultural greenhouse for the nurturing and protection of

children's (sexual) innocence' (Renold, 2005: 1). Contrary to such constructions, however, a wealth of research has revealed the primary school as a 'key site for the proliferation, modification, and incessant inscription of [heteronormative] discourses' and relations of power (Youdell, 2004: 482). Through, inter alia, projects about (heterosexual) families and weddings, open disclosures of teachers' own (heterosexual) relationships, and the centrality of (hetero) sexual and homophobic discourse to peer group culture (see e.g. Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a; Meyer, 2010; Stonewall, 2017a), both children and teachers contribute to the construction of the primary school as a heterosexualised institution, structured by what Epstein and Johnson (1994) term 'the heterosexual presumption'. As well as permeating the formal and informal school curriculum (Best, 1983) and delimiting understandings and 'doings' of sexual identity, the 'presumption' of heterosexuality works also as 'a key matrix through which *gender* is understood by children, teachers, and other adults in the primary school' (Epstein, 1997: 38, my italics). As Robinson (2012: 268) notes:

...despite the prevalence of the perception that children are innocent, asexual and too young to understand sexuality, the construction of heterosexual identities and desire in early childhood is a socially sanctioned integral part of children's everyday educational experience. This process of heterosexualisation is rendered invisible through the heteronormativity that discursively operates and is especially naturalised within constructions of gender.

This assertion is corroborated strongly throughout Renold's (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities*, which draws on data from ethnographic research with final-year primary school children to demonstrate 'the salience of sexuality in children's accounts of being and becoming 'girls' and 'boys'' (2005: 1). For the children in Renold's study, the primary school represented a key site for the production of (hetero)sexuality, wherein doings of 'normal' gendered identity were inextricable from the 'projection of a coherent and abiding heterosexual self' (2005: 5). For all children, 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) was central to the production of femininity and masculinity, and projected through what Renold describes as a 'complex interactive

and daily...network of heterosexual performances' (Renold, 2005: 9) within which un/intelligible gendered identities were continually created and policed.

The primacy of the primary school as a site for such normative constructions has been revealed by theorists across a range of geographical sites (see e.g. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Rasmussen, 2006; Nelson, 2012 in Australia, Pascoe, 2005; Meyer, 2010; Bryan, 2012 in the USA, Moita Lopes, 2006 in Brazil, Msibi 2012; Francis, 2017 in South Africa) and disciplines (see e.g. Bell and Valentine, 1995; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010; Allen, 2013 for social geographic analyses of sexuality and space/place), and has served to counter not just popular conceptualisations of childhood innocence but also classic sociological positionings of children as 'passive recipients [rather than] active agents in the gendering process' (Renold, 2005: 4). Contrary to earlier sociological understandings, recent research has revealed children as competent social actors, complexly involved in the construction and governance of their own social worlds (Powell et al, 2012). This is revealed particularly profoundly throughout Mindy Blaise's (2005) *Playing it Straight*, which sees pre-school children governing the kindergarten classroom's social order through performances and regulations of heterosexuality. For the children in Blaise's study, gendered identities were constituted largely through the production and policing of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity' (Connell, 1987), which in their fundamentally hierarchical and heterosexualised positionings 'institutionalise men's dominance over women [and] boys' dominance over girls' (Blaise, 2005: 21). For these children, it was through the continued regulation of these (hetero)gendered categories – a practice that Thorne (1993) and Davies (1989) have described as 'borderwork' and 'category maintenance work', respectively – that normative 'girlhoods' and 'boyhoods' were established, and the heterogendered social order of the classroom was maintained. Far from 'passive, naïve and powerless' (Blaise, 2005: 77) in accordance with traditional conceptualisations of early childhood, children revealed themselves throughout Blaise's research as 'knowing agents in the process of gender construction' (Robinson, 2012: 267), 'actively regulating the gendered social order of their class and supporting the heterosexual matrix [Butler, 1990]' (Blaise, 2005: 77).

Far from desexualised, then, primary schools have been revealed consistently as fundamentally *heterosexualised* institutions, centrally implicated in the (re)production and regulation of (hetero)normativity and acting as key sites wherein children 'sort through the 'bits and pieces' of information that they receive about sexuality' (Robinson, 2012: 265) from parents, peers, teachers, siblings, and wider society. As Allan et al (2009: 68) argue:

Whilst sexuality is supposedly absent in the primary-school classroom, it is also fully present both through that absence and through the implicit presence of heterosexuality. As Epstein and Johnson (1998) argue, children are schooled into gender and sexuality in school settings that are suffused...with sexuality that is, specifically, a heterosexuality.

Notwithstanding the truth of this assertion, it is significant that what is learned through such schooling is an incomplete version of the 'full story', with children spending their earliest years 'struggl[ing] to make sense of a jigsaw puzzle of knowledge from which many pieces are missing and where they have no box with the whole picture on the lid' (Jackson and Scott, 2010a: 112). Whilst consistently presented with images of hetero-romantic practice, for example, young children are less often able to connect these with the specifically 'sexual' knowledges from which they are purposefully excluded. Thus, in attempting to balance 'adult evasions and half truths' (2010a: 115) with the partial hetero/erotic knowledges learnt from (amongst others) peers, parents, siblings, and the media, children are most often left with disconnected understandings of sexuality that only begin to make sense in adolescence and young adulthood. As Jackson and Scott (2010a: 115-16) observe:

It is only the specifically erotic component of sexual scripts that adults attempt to conceal from children: other aspects of adult maps of sexuality impinge on children's self-understanding from an early age...children acquire a great deal of common sense knowledge about the institution and practice of heterosexuality – about heterosexual love and marriage, about families, mothers and fathers – well before they are aware of the sexual activities these entail.

Further to this troubling partiality, another profound effect of such abundant heterosexual narratives is the marginalisation, vilification and silencing of non-heterosexual relationships and identities, which through being 'marked, subjugated to heterosexual knowledges, made simultaneously in/visible (Foucault, 1978), and...by definition sexualised' (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015: 148) have been positioned historically as 'incongruous with school education' (ibid). Further to their explicit marginalisation – through, inter alia, peer group discourses of homophobia, heteronormative sex and relationships education, and curricular exclusions of non-heterosexuality – non-heterosexual identities have been equally silenced through the 'quotidian subtleties' (2015: 146) that render them invisible and/or unspeakable within the space of the primary school. Indeed, as DePalma and Atkinson (2006a: 334) recognise, 'heteronormativity is maintained not only in terms of what is said and done, but also in terms of what is left out of the official discourse'. The effects of such 'leaving out' are explored throughout Sauntson's (2013) *Sexual Diversity and Illocutionary Silencing in the English National Curriculum*, which draws on speech act theory to position silence as a 'speech act which effects a discourse of heterosexism' (2013: 405; see also Sundaram and Sauntson, 2016a; 2016b). Through a close analysis of English National Curriculum materials, Sauntson reveals homophobia and heterosexism as 'discursively realised as much through what is not iterated as through what is explicitly stated' (Sauntson, 2013: 396), and in so doing draws attention to the problems inherent in 'fail[ing] to recognise that homophobia is not always overt, and is more often construed as a discursive effect of silence and invisibility' (2013: 395).

i. Curricular interventions

In recent years, the need to address gender and sexualities inequalities in UK schools has been reflected in some legislative and policy developments, including the launch of a recent government-led initiative to 'stamp out LGBT bullying' in primary and secondary education (Government Equalities Office, 2017). Whilst an important step forward, such developments have nonetheless been criticised by educational researchers on the grounds of their relatively narrow and individualising remit, which through a focus on 'tackling homophobic bullying and explicitly homophobic language' (Sauntson, 2013: 395) continues to ignore both the implicit workings of homophobia, and the 'quotidian subtleties' that contribute to school-wide cultures of

heteronormativity. Further, through their positioning within 'bullying' or 'deficit' frameworks (see Quinlivan, 2012; Formby, 2015) such interventions arguably reinscribe what Ullman and Ferfolja (2015: 151) describe as a 'discourse problematique' around sexual diversity, which positions non-heterosexual identities as fundamentally victimised or 'wounded' Other (Youdell, 2004; Butler, 1990). They insist:

...discourses of risk and victimization...undermine any positive construction or reading of LGBTQ subjectivities [and] mostly support 'band-aid' approaches aimed at discrete student-level intervention. This marks the 'homosexual' subjectivity, positioning them as problematically visible and in need of surveillance (Foucault, 1978) rather than addressing such discrimination as a whole-school issue. (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015: 149)

Such critiques have also been leveled at some non-governmental equalities initiatives (see for example Stonewall's (2017b) *School Champions*, Shaun Dellenty's (2018) *Inclusion for All*), which, though significant, have tended to be underwritten by similar 'discourses of victimisation and tolerance' (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b: 2) that construct non-heterosexualities as 'a problem requiring attention' (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015: 149). Through these constructions, such projects arguably individualise the broader problem of heterosexism, focusing on 'phobias' as they relate to 'wounded' LGBTQ students whilst doing little to interrogate either the more insidious workings of heteronormativity, or the wider issues of 'liberal tolerance' discourse (see Jackson and Rahman, 1997; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a).

Adding to this body of work, Liz Airton (2009) has drawn attention to the problems inherent in anti-homophobia efforts that conflate gender and sexuality in their positioning of gender-based oppression as inextricable from, and constitutive of, homophobia, identifying a tendency to subsume gender regulation 'within the sexuality-based concepts of homophobia and heterosexism' (2009: 129). Such conflations, she asserts, render the denigration of gender non-normativity 'inadmissible outside a (homo)sexual frame' (2009: 131), and fail to recognise gender normativity as 'its own axis of normalisation' (ibid), which regulates subjects and subjectivities regardless of sexual orientation. Given the frequency with which

speculations are made regarding the future sexual orientations of gender non-normative students, anti-homophobia initiatives that construct gender-sexuality linkages (however implicitly) arguably work to reinscribe the very essentialisms that stereotype and delimit gendered and sexual subjects within and outside schools. Through their viewing of queerness as identifiable through productions of gender, Airton argues, such initiatives effectively set as their desired outcome 'the flourishing of non-heterosexual identities as *visually inscribed* on the bodies of students' (2009: 135, my italics), and thus render educators' ability 'to recognise queerness as *queerness*' as dependent entirely on 'who [they] consider queer people to be or, at least, to resemble' (ibid, italics in original). Such frameworks thus not only subsume the particular problem of gender regulation within a more generalising discourse of heterosexism and homophobia, but also enable educators to 'await the presence in their school or classroom of a child recognisable *to them* as 'queer' before the need arises to palliate the deleterious effects of stringent gender non-normativity' (2009: 137, italics in original). Through such conflations, such efforts give little recognition to the impact of gender normativity on *all* student subjectivities, and fail to recognise the necessity of a conceptual distinction between 'gender' and 'sexuality' to understanding how these operate and interrelate (see Jackson and Scott, 2010a; 2010b).

ii. No Outsiders

It was with the express intention of disrupting such conflations that the 2006-2009 *No Outsiders* project was conducted (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). Working across 15 English primary schools, *No Outsiders* was an academic- and teacher-researcher led action research project that sought to disrupt the ways in which 'gender, sex and sexuality are conflated in the process of constructing 'appropriate' gendered behaviours and preferences for boys and girls' (2009b: 1). With the use of 'videos, posters and books depicting gay and lesbian characters, same-sex parents, and non gender-conforming protagonists', the project set out 'not only to interrogate the heteronormativity implicit in schools but to explore how these processes might be interrupted through critical pedagogic practices' (2009a: viii). Fully acknowledging the culture of fear that continues to surround sexualities work with children, *No Outsiders* sought to create and support 'a community of practice within which teachers [could] develop effective approaches to addressing sexualities equality within the broader

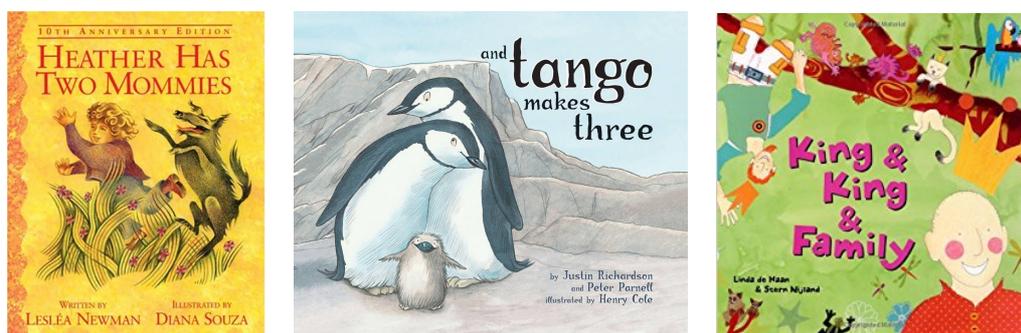
context of inclusive education' (ibid). Central to this was a conviction of the need to move away from 'anti-bullying discourses of tolerance in the form of quiet acceptance' (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b: 9) and towards the proactive incorporation of gender and sexualities equalities work into the primary school curriculum.

Whilst trailblazing in its criticality and scope, *No Outsiders* was not without its challenges. Perhaps the most documented of these were the ontological and epistemological tensions – specifically, between 'queer uncertainties and emancipatory practice' (2009b: 2) – that characterised the project's work, and at times divided its and academic- and teacher-researchers across broad lines of 'theory' and 'practice'. 'Framed expressly by queer conceptual tools' (Youdell, 2009: 54), *No Outsiders* sought at its outset to destabilise the normative categories of sex, gender and sexuality that work to delimit selves and subjectivities (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990), and to 'permit a complex interrogation of how [these categories] intertwine in heteronormative processes' (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b: 2). For many of the project's teacher-researchers, though, such queer framing was perceived, somewhat understandably, as 'over-theoretical, the preserve of academia, and not easily or straightforwardly translated into classroom practice' (Cullen, 2009: 22), standing at odds with the more identity-based human rights approaches that informed their own relationships to social justice and equalities pedagogy. In DePalma and Atkinson's (2009b: 3-4) own words:

Within the project team...we share the view...that teachers need to reach beyond passive and disingenuous tolerance of 'those LGBT people' to proactively incorporate discussions of sexuality and gender into the curriculum. We do not, however, agree on how this should be done. Whether tolerant silences and invisibilities can best be disrupted by highlighting lesbian and gay histories and attacking hetero-gender stereotypes or by troubling the binaries implicit in the very categories of lesbian/gay, boy/girl is a question that remains alive and unresolvable in our research.

From its beginning, then, *No Outsiders* was characterised by dissensus, working within 'twin frameworks roughly described as equalities/social justice/human rights on the one hand, and on the other the exploration of queer in terms of theory, pedagogy and curriculum' (Nixon, 2009: 51). Whilst often productive, such dissensus worked also to

divide project members, whose individual politics were at times threatened or compromised by the project's diverse, rather than unitary, framing. This division was perhaps most evident in attitudes towards the project's books (see Appendix A), as well as towards pedagogic 'role model' approaches that foregrounded teachers' own lived experiences as gay men and women. With regard to such arguably 'safe' (see Nixon, 2009) depictions of non-heterosexual subjects and subjectivities (for example through stories depicting child-rearing, monogamous gay parents, penguins, and princes (below), or through the role modeling of gay lives as unitary and enduring (see Youdell, 2009)), project members were divided on the extent to which *No Outsiders'* strategies reified essentialist binaries. Indeed, whilst the privileging of particular (normative, unitary) identities was critiqued by some of the project's researchers for its incommensurability with queer or deconstructive politics (see DePalma, 2016), others insisted on the necessity of identity categories for emancipatory rights-based practice, their approach to which was often profoundly informed by their own personal and activist histories (see Cullen, 2009; Nixon, 2009).



Figures 1-3. *No Outsiders* books

One of the key ways in which this tension between broadly 'queer' and 'liberal pluralist' (Youdell, 2009) approaches was bridged was via the appropriation of what Gayatri Spivak (1988; 1993) has termed 'strategic essentialism': the tactical and temporary deployment of fixed identity categories for the purpose of advancing particular political aims (see DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c). However, the question still remained as to whether and when strategic essentialism might collapse into simple collusion with heteronormativity (Nixon, 2009), as well as the extent to which liberal pluralist discourse may 'on occasion promote a degree of homophobia and heterosexism by insisting on essentialist binaries' (Nixon and East, 2010: 164).

Notwithstanding such profound concerns, the classroom-based practices of *No Outsiders* can be understood as having worked broadly within an ‘LGBT rights-based epistemological framing’ (Cullen, 2009: 33), with queer theorisations ‘tend[ing] to be used...as an analytical tool in exploring data from the field rather than as an on-going legible pedagogic intervention in the classroom’ (2009: 23). This was perhaps inevitable, given the profoundly difficult political, personal, and public spaces in which *No Outsiders* was working. Indeed, as Youdell (2009: 46) argues:

In a context where sanitised and heterosexualised versions of homosexuality are acceptable only as long as they ‘are not anywhere near my children’...the inclusion of a text such as *And Tango Makes Three* [above] in a primary school curriculum can be seen as a powerful practice of troubling simply in its speaking the legitimacy of same-sex relationships and parenting. And the take up of diversity discourses – recognition, equal opportunities, and equal treatment (even when these calls for recognition and equality inevitably inscribe the sorts of natural, abiding GLBT subjects that post-structural accounts have challenged and queer politics have troubled) – comes to appear an important tactical option when the alternative being powerfully promoted and constituted as reasonable by the media is the erasure of those subjects.

In her exploration of the epistemological tensions that characterised *No Outsiders*, Youdell concludes that the project might be read ‘simultaneously as both critical (and potentially normative) social action *and* queer troubling’ (2009: 35), with neither interpretation taking precedence over the other, but representing instead the inevitably hybrid outcome of a project situated at the intersection of multiple political and personal goals and practical limitations. With regard to interpretations of *Tango*, in particular, she suggests that whilst a child-rearing penguin couple might, indeed, ‘be read as a relatively conservative inscription of enduring unitary subjects and the normative heterosexual nuclear family’, it equally ‘render[s] intimate same-sex relationships and parents/families visible, intelligible and legitimate...in a place where they have been invisible, unintelligible and illegitimate’ (2009: 44). Thus, the book might be understood as at once ‘part of a performative politics [and] part of a citational chain that inscribes heteronormativity’ (ibid), with the job of teachers and researchers being to recognise this multiplicity and think tactically about its effects.

Equally, Atkinson and Moffat recognise the simultaneously queer and recuperative implications of pedagogic 'role model' approaches – oft-used by the project's teacher-researchers, who felt a profound need to provide children with the sorts of affirmative gay identities that they themselves had been denied – which might both reinscribe essentialist understandings, and forge new commensurabilities (see also Courtney, 2014). They write:

...the presence of 'impossible bodies' [Youdell, 2006] in educational spaces can disrupt dominant discourses...and making some of these impossible bodies visible can forge new echo-chains of connotation which, whilst always vulnerable to recuperation by heteronormative discourses, open up possibilities for the performative resignification of (wounded) gay identities. (2009: 95)

Indeed, the introduction of previously invisible and unintelligible bodies into the classroom might itself be read as a powerful act of 'degrounding' (Butler, 1994), in that 'to recognise similarities and normalities within the everyday is to undermine the subtle balance through which the absent Other marks and maintains the heteronormative centre: 'the avowal of different but equal...is much less threatening than the avowal of similar but equal'' (Rasmussen, 2006: 481 cited in DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b: 10). Further, given the restrictive educational context within which such introductions were being made, Youdell (2009) recognises that it may be useful to think of these necessarily compromised interventions in terms of what Michel de Certeau (1988) has called 'tactics' of power – which work within and against comparatively rigid and prevailing 'strategies' – and might be compared to the identity-based social justice work undertaken by theorists like Butler (2008) and Foucault (Kritzman, 1988), alongside their otherwise deconstructive, anti-identity politics:

Michel de Certeau (1988) draws a useful distinction between the strategies...that are encoded in policy and legislation and embedded in the structure of institutions, and the tactics of everyday life which people deploy, often tacitly, in order to survive and make the best of their daily existence... In the face of different circumstances and demands, and in pursuit of particular effects, we might deploy politics of opposition, recognition, resistance, deconstruction, reinscription and performative practice...

when [these tactics] are elaborated and critically interrogated we are able to consider the forms they might take under particular conditions, even when the 'right' tactic will remain undecidable and we know that we cannot guarantee effects. (Youdell, 2009: 65)

It was precisely these unguaranteed effects – as an outcome of productive complexities and queer/liberal tensions – that I found myself compelled to explore in the current research, and the implications of *No Outsiders'* multiple approaches can be seen throughout my analysis. I turn now, though, to an exploration of the theoretical framework that shapes my research, and that combines poststructuralist, queer, and interactionist thinking with Francis' notions of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia, to make sense of the complex workings of gender and sexuality across my two research schools.

II. Discourse, Power, Subjectivity: Theoretical Framings

There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations. (Foucault, 1977: 27)

In recent years, an increasing number of feminist thinkers (see e.g. Davies 1989; Atkinson, 2003; Youdell, 2004; Robinson, 2012) have drawn on Foucauldian notions of discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity to explore the ways in which purportedly objective 'truths' about gender and sexuality are discursively constructed and maintained within rigid, but shifting, systems of power. My work both builds on and advances this research, by applying both poststructuralist/queer thinking and aspects of symbolic interactionism to Francis' (2008; 2010; 2012) theory of 'gender monoglossia and heteroglossia' to make sense of the workings of gender-sex-sexuality in school. I consider these diverse paradigms to work together effectively in accounting for the multiple workings of sexuality and gender, in particular: their everyday workings in interaction; the relationship between embodied and discursive 'doings'; the nature and limits of agency; and the wider structural operations of 'genderism' (Airton, 2009) and heteronormativity.

i. Foucauldian poststructuralism and queer theory

Central to Foucauldian poststructuralist theorising is a recognition of the fundamental interrelationship between knowledge and power in the construction and maintenance of 'truth', whereby 'truth' is always culturally and historically specific, 'linked in circular relations with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it' (Foucault, 1980: 133). Thus, what we perceive to be true at any one time is always a political fiction, inseparable from power relations and 'express[ing] the politics of knowledge of the time and place' (MacNaughton, 2005: 4). Thus, truths that are politically and institutionally sanctioned combine to create discourses and 'regimes of truth' within which intelligible ways of being and knowing are defined and regulated; a process that can be understood as a violence 'that privileges homogeneity and marginalises diversity' (2005: 28) through the silencing and sanctioning of marginalised and powerful truths respectively. Within feminist poststructuralism, therefore, it is understood to be through the continual (re)production and sanctioning of inter alia male, heterosexual 'truths' that inequitable gendered and sexual discourses become produced and naturalised.

Inextricable from these 'regimes of truth' is the productive power of 'discourse': 'the theoretical grid of power and knowledge' (Blaise, 2005: 16) within which objects and actions are made meaningful. For Foucault, it is only within a particular discursive formation, or 'episteme' ('the way of thinking or the state of knowledge at any one time' (Hall, 2001: 73)) that meaning is produced, where throughout history new and competing discourses have continually emerged, 'opening up a new discursive formation and producing, in its turn...new discourses with the power and authority...to regulate social practices in new ways' (2001: 74). Thus, whilst discourses of gender and sexuality may appear natural or universal, it is for Foucault only within a specific cultural and historic episteme that 'gendered' or 'sexual' actions and subjects can be made meaningful. 'Sexuality', in particular, Foucault argued, is itself a historically contingent discursive formation, and 'the homosexual' as a distinctive social subject could only be produced and understood within the discursive episteme of the late nineteenth century (Foucault, 1978; see also McIntosh, 1968). Far from natural or universal constructs, therefore, sexuality and sexual subjectivity can be understood as produced, regulated and naturalised within continually shifting discursive formations,

and it is within these nexuses of power – where power is understood as a circular, omnipresent and productive force that operates at every level of social existence (Foucault, 1980) – that subject positions and identities are created. However, due to the multiple, shifting, and politically competitive nature of discourse, such identities are always fundamentally non-unitary, (re)created differently within different and competing regimes.

One of the central premises of feminist poststructuralism, therefore, is that dualistic conceptualisations of gender and sexuality – male/female, gay/straight – are constructed within truth regimes that produce and naturalise un/intelligible ways of being. Thus, ‘maleness and femaleness [alongside hetero- and homo-sexuality] do not have to be discursively constructed in the way they currently are’ (Davies, 1989: 12). By understanding gendered and sexual categories as constituted and maintained within shifting truth regimes, we reveal not only the power of discourse to create and regulate un/acceptable actions and identities, but also its potential to destabilise existing power relations through the generation of new and competing ‘truths’.

Drawing on these tenets of poststructuralism, queer theory has interrogated the role of heterosexuality in the production and regulation of ‘normal’ gendered and sexual identity, positing that ‘the concept of genderedness becomes meaningless in the absence of heterosexuality as an institution’ (Blaise, 2005: 22). For queer theorists, ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980) is central to the constitution of a binary and oppositional gender order wherein ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are mapped onto the (hetero)sexed bodies of ‘women’ and ‘men’, and it is the conflation of sex-gender-sexuality within this framework that constructs ‘femininity’ as both the gendered expression of ‘woman’ and the sexual ‘Other’ of ‘masculine/man’: its subject of desire. Butler (1990: 194) describes this constitutive framework as the ‘heterosexual matrix’: ‘[a] model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender...oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality’. For Butler, it is within this ‘grid of cultural intelligibility’ that un/intelligible identities are established and policed, with individuals only becoming intelligible through the

appropriation of a gendered identity that '[maintains] relations of coherence and continuity along sex, gender, sexual practice and desire' (1990: 23).

This notion of (gendered) 'intelligibility' (see also Goffman, 1969) is elucidated throughout Bronwyn Davies' *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*, which identifies 'the incorrigibility of the male-female binary and its construction as a central element of human identity' (1989: xi) as fundamental to children's productions and understandings of gender. For the children in Davies' study, 'part of being a competent member of society as it is currently organised derives from our capacity to attribute to others, and aid others in attributing to us, the 'correct' gender' (ibid), rendering the projection of a normative gendered identity 'morally imperative' to the constitution of a culturally intelligible 'self'. For this reason, children conceptualised gender as fundamentally collectively owned, requiring 'category maintenance work' to ensure the necessary continuation of the gendered social order (1989: 31). This was perhaps most clearly evidenced in children's readings and negotiations of Munsch's (1980) *The Paper Bag Princess*, in which the female protagonist, Princess Elizabeth, saves her would-be husband, Prince Ronald from being killed by a dragon, and in the process loses her fine clothes and is forced to wear a paper bag. Ronald, on being reunited with the disheveled Elizabeth, demands that she 'come back and rescue [him] when [she's] dressed like a real princess' (1980: 20), in response to which Elizabeth decides that she no longer wants to marry him, and skips off into the sunset. For many of the children in Davies' study, Princess Elizabeth was conceptualised as a 'bad princess', immoral and wrong for '[stepping] out of her female place' (1989: 29). The power of the male-female binary to constitute and delimit gendered intelligibility was such that for many children, who had come to understand gender as inarguably and hierarchically oppositional, 'there was no place in the narrative structure...for a feminist hero' (ibid).



Figure 4. *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980)

As well as providing further evidence of children's active engagement in the creation and regulation of (sexuality and) gender, Davies' work demonstrates the capacity of gendered discourse to constitute and regulate social intelligibility. However, by conceptualising the male-female binary as discursively upheld, Davies argues, we provide a framework within which gender's constructed nature can be revealed and destabilised. Indeed, a central premise of queer theorising is that gender should be understood as a performative and *contingent* construction; a 'regulatory fiction' that is 'constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990: 33). Butler writes:

Because there is neither an essence that gender expresses or externalises nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. (1990: 178).

Thus, it is precisely this fundamental contingency that makes gender open to rearticulation, and it is for many queer theorists through the practices of 'hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion and proliferation' (1990: 42) that gender's contingent stylisations can be exposed and 'troubled' (Butler, 1990; 1997a).

ii. Poststructuralist and queer applications: benefits and critiques

The application of feminist poststructuralist and queer theorising to analyses of gender and sexuality has led to a wealth of rich empirical works (see e.g. Davies, 1989; Reay, 2001; Youdell, 2004; Renold, 2005; Blaise, 2005; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a), and I continue to find it a valuable framework for the current research, elucidating as it does the constructedness and contingency of truth regimes, their productive capacity to define and regulate un/intelligible subjectivities, and their potential for disruption via the formation of new echo-chains (Butler, 1993) and commensurabilities.

Notwithstanding these strengths, though, such frameworks have faced criticism on the grounds of some arguable inconsistencies. Becky Francis examines three of these in particular in her exposition of 'gender monoglossia and heteroglossia' (2008; 2010; 2012) as more thorough frameworks for empirical analyses of (sexuality and) gender. I

look here at each of these critiques in turn, before considering in more depth the notions of monoglossia/heteroglossia, and their applicability to the current research.

1. Multiple masculinities/femininities

Notwithstanding the analytic nuance offered by poststructural and queer accounts, Francis (amongst others, e.g. Hawkesworth, 1997; Hood-Williams, 1997; Halberstam, 1998; McInnes, 1998) has identified a problematic tendency in some of these works to reify sex-gender linkages via the analysis of “girling’ (Butler, 1997b) and ‘boying’ as performed by ‘gender-appropriate’ bodies’ (Francis, 2010: 478). This is particularly evident, she argues, in works that draw on Connell’s (1987) notion of ‘multiple masculinities’ to analyse productions of gender, but that misuse this originally more nuanced concept by reducing diverse gendered performances to ‘different documented ‘types’’ (Francis, 2012: 2; see also Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Indeed, a theoretical move towards ‘multiple masculinities and femininities’ not only reduces gender analysis to a simplistic focus on ‘typologies’, but is also effectively ‘founded on gender essentialism [in that] all that such different ‘sorts’ of masculinity have in common is possession of a penis’ (Francis, 2010: 477). Empirical analyses that identify boys/men and girls/women as producing various ‘types’ of masculinity and femininity respectively, Francis argues, work to reify a the gender-sex conflation, and reflect what Hawkesworth (1997) has termed the ‘base/superstructure’ model, where sex continues to operate as the ‘base’ in analyses of ‘gendered’ performance. This raises the issue of ‘identification’ with regard to productions of gender, which Francis addresses in her second critique.

2. Essentialising categories via analyses of ‘performance’

With the express intention of challenging empirical works that position boys/men and girls/women as the necessary performers of masculinity/ies and femininity/ies, respectively (see also Delphy, 1984), Jack Halberstam (1998) has posited ‘female masculinity’ – as performed notably by Drag Kings – as a means by which to ‘sever the umbilical link between sex and gender’ (Francis, 2012: 2) and counter analyses that have read diverse gendered productions as ‘inevitably tied to the ‘appropriate’ sexed body’ (ibid). Whilst representing a profound contribution to gender theory, the analysis of gender via the identification of discrete (albeit female) ‘masculinities’ is not

without its problems, and indeed, 'risk[s] replacing the problem of essentialising *bodies* (via categorisation as male/female) with the problem of essentialising *expressions* (via categorisation of particular aspects of performance as masculine or feminine)' (Francis, 2008: 214).

Further to this, the concept of 'female masculinity' has been critiqued for its simultaneously romanticised and vague definition of masculinity (see Paechter, 2006), as well as for its insufficient recognition of the relationship between 'performer' and 'audience', and relatedly, 'the impact of the sexed body on issues of authenticity and power' (Francis, 2008: 215). As Francis (*ibid*) notes:

While Halberstam's Drag Kings may be accepted as females doing masculinity in their circle of friends and fans...they still risk refusal of their gender identification outside this circle if dissonance is identified between their gender identification/production and their sexed body... That 'passing'...is so consequential for those outside gender dualisms illustrates the purchase of sex-gender dualisms in terms of power to include/exclude, normalise/pathologise.

It is precisely this excluding/pathologising power of the sex-gender dualism that makes it so that productions of gender cannot be understood solely in relation to the intention of the individual, and it is to this interrelationship between performer, audience, and material/discursive context that Francis turns in her third critique.

3. 'Disembodied' gender and the role of the material

The last of Francis' three critiques relates to the primarily discursive focus of poststructuralist/queer analyses, which in their often 'disembodied' approaches to gender have been argued to pay insufficient attention to 'the role of the material in gender constructions' (Francis, 2012: 2). Francis draws in particular here on Kessler and McKenna's (1978) analysis of gender, which insists on the mutual significance of 'individual' and 'spectator' to gender authenticity. Indeed, if it is the case that 'gender attribution' depends as much on perceived as intended gender (in that a person's gendered performance may be rendered unintelligible by its 'audience') – and that perceived gender is informed largely in current society by readings of 'sex' – then productions of gender must be understood as constrained at least in part by '(sexed)

embodiment and discursive positioning' (Francis, 2008: 216), differently legible/liveable according to power differentials and material context. Francis provides the example here of 'physically large and able boys [who] are so 'authentically' bodily inscribed with masculinity that they are more able than smaller boys to incorporate traditionally feminine aspects of expression into their performances' (2008: 217). Gendered expressions that might render other boys' lives unintelligible/unliveable, then, are available to larger boys by virtue of their 'embodied' sex, and reveal the significance of the body to 'possible' gender productions. In relation to Halberstam's work in particular, Francis (2008: 18) identifies 'a lack of attention to the impact of embodiment on power positions', and asserts (ibid):

Although my poststructuralist reading is that 'gender' can be separated from 'sex'... performance of gender is not a straightforward 'choice', and not an equal choice... [Thus] I would assert the need to maintain recognition of (a) how embodiment constrains gender performances, given the disciplinary power of gender discourses that insist on a sex-gender link as integral to subjecthood; and (b) how certain bodies are inscribed with power or with the lack thereof.

iii. Gender monoglossia/heteroglossia

In an attempt to resolve some of these theoretical issues, Francis has posited the concepts of 'gender monoglossia and heteroglossia' as means by which to de-conflate analyses of sex and gender whilst simultaneously 'acknowledg[ing] the powerful role of embodiment in gender productions' (Francis, 2012: 1). Responding in part to Robyn Weigman's call for contemporary theorists to 'address the divide between genetic bodies and discursive gender [and] offer a political analysis of the socially constructed affiliations between the two' (Weigman, 2001: 376), Francis puts forward mono/heteroglossia as a framework for analysis that 'attend[s] to the material body as it is discursively produced, and in turn to the impact of this production on the discursive resources mobilised by embodied selves in relations of power' (Francis, 2008: 219). In so doing, she accounts for what she and Carrie Paechter (2015) have identified as three critical aspects of gender categorisation – spectator perspective; individual perspective; and social context – which I return to in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

Francis' framework for gender analysis emerges out of Bakhtinian literary theory, which analysed the workings and politics of language, and in particular the relationship and tensions between dominant and subversive linguistic forms. Within this theorising, Bakhtin understands 'monoglossia' and 'heteroglossia' as representing the linguistic expressions of dominant and subversive groups respectively, where monoglossia operates at the macro-linguistic level and works in part to subjugate resistant (heteroglossic) accounts:

[Bakhtin] uses the term 'monoglossia' to refer to dominant forms of language, representing the world view/interests of dominant social groups, which are positioned or imposed as unitary and total. However, for Bakhtin language is never static or fixed, but is instead diverse, and inherently dialogic... Hence, while at the macro-linguistic level there may appear to be stability (monoglossia), at the micro level there is plasticity, contradiction and resistance: heteroglossia. (Francis, 2012: 3-4)

Despite its dominance, then, the monoglossic account can be understood as always inevitably illusory, authored as unitary and total in spite of 'the furious scramble of heteroglossia continuously pulsating beneath the monoglossic façade' (2012: 5). It is precisely this acknowledgment of the relationship between dominant and subversive accounts – as well as the recognition of monoglossia's power to subsume heteroglossic subversions – that makes Bakhtinian theorising applicable to analyses of gender. Indeed, the dualistic and hierarchical gender binary, which occupies a hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) position in the contemporary popular imagination and 'bears the ideological convictions of socially dominant groups' (Francis, 2012: 5), can be understood as an example of gender monoglossia, and as such plays a powerful role in defining and delimiting subversive productions. In spite of its 'tyrannical power' (Francis, 2010: 479), though, the monoglossic account of gender should nonetheless be recognised as a fiction, rendered illusory by 'the dialogic heteroglossia always present within it' (Francis, 2012: 5). For Francis, heteroglossia exists 'both with regard to those subjects that do not 'fit' the monoglossic gender-sexuality order (what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix), and within the contradictory productions that...inevitably characterise all performances of gender' (Francis, 2010: 480). Indeed,

[Even] apparently straightforward [gendered] delineations turn out on closer inspection to be fluid and shifting, incorporating contradiction, and readable as associated with different genders depending on the specific circumstances and associated discourses... It is here that we may apply the notion of heteroglossia, both as operating within the individual gender 'attributes', and more broadly within the whole (apparently monoglossic) system of gender. (Francis, 2008: 219)

However fictional, though, the force of the monoglossic account is nonetheless such that heteroglossia is powerfully invisibilised; masked through ongoing processes of 'submersion, refusal and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7). At the macro-level, for example, certain cultural practices are able to 'assimilate and 'hold' potentially disruptive aspects without disturbing the "whole' of the monoglossic phantasy' (ibid), with popularised drag performance representing a key example of heteroglossia's potential for assimilation into the 'monoglossic whole' (ibid). At the individual level, heteroglossia can be effectively subsumed through the accentuation of particular gender signifiers – what Francis terms 'totemic motifs' – that work to 'mask/distract from aspects of [gender] production that might otherwise disrupt the monoglossic façade' (Francis, 2010: 486). This is revealed in the example above, which discussed certain boys' ability to incorporate 'feminine' aspects into their productions of gender whilst maintaining an overall impression of 'authentic' (monoglossic) 'maleness'. In so doing, these boys/men (consciously or otherwise) employ 'totemic motifs' to distract from the heteroglossic aspects of their gender performance. This is resonant of Kessler and McKenna's notion of gender as a 'cluster concept': 'one that cannot be straightforwardly defined but rather is identified through a cluster of attributes, [some of which] have more salience than others' (Francis, 2008: 216). Through understanding gender as a cluster, we can recognise the ways in which 'broad identifications are actually riven with complexity and contradiction' (Francis, 2012: 7), and authored as unitary in spite of evident (but subsumed) dialogism and resistance. In this way, heteroglossic elements 'both work and are drawn in to support the 'style of the whole'' (ibid).

iv. Spectator, individual, social context

Above, I identified three key issues with regard to poststructuralist/queer analyses of gender. It is my conviction that a mono/heteroglossic framework for gender analysis

goes some way to addressing these issues, and further, accounts for what Francis and Paechter (2015) have identified as three critical aspects of gender analysis and identification: spectator view, individual view, and social context.

First, in understanding gender in terms of mono/heteroglossia, Francis moves away from analyses that have reified sex-gender linkages through identifying 'types' of femininities and masculinities as performed by girls and boys, respectively. Within Francis' framework, *all* gender productions are understood as contradictory and uncategorisable, and thus can be understood as variously heteroglossic doings, performed by discursively-sexed bodies within a monoglossic (unifying) gender order. Notwithstanding this rejection of 'girling' and 'boying', Francis maintains a recognition of the cultural import of 'girlhood' and 'boyhood' as subjectifying categories (see Foucault, 1978), and a related need to at times evoke these categories in order to elucidate the still inequitable social positions of (discursively constructed) 'girls/boys' and 'women/men' (see Francis, 2010: 481).

Second, Francis avoids essentialising *performances* via masculine/feminine categorisation by situating *all* doings of gender as variously heteroglossic (contradictory, fluid, contingent), whilst at the same time acknowledging monoglossia's capacity to position these performances on one or other side of a fixed (and fictional) male/female binary. She writes:

[Mono/hetero-glossia] better allows for recognition that even apparently straightforward delineations turn out on closer inspection to be fluid and inconsistent...we may see patterns of gendered behaviours and inequalities as expressive of monoglossic gender practice, but within this be attuned to the complexity and contradiction at play (heteroglossia)... It is this attunedness to heteroglossia [that avoids] reification of gender norms, and [exposes] gender as discursively produced rather than inherent. (Francis, 2010: 488)

Finally, within Bakhtinian theory, language is understood as fundamentally *mutually* constructed, with each of our utterances representing 'just one link in a chain of other utterances', which effectively cites and/or resists the countless previous discourses 'borne by that chain' (Francis, 2012: 4). Thus, for Bakhtin, interpretation and context

are critical, with 'the reading/hearing...as integral to construction as its writing/speaking' (Francis, 2010: 479). Bakhtin (1981: 212) writes:

...in the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active...
understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other.

In its application to gender, then, Bakhtinian theory avoids an overly discursive approach that divorces gender from its interactional or material context. By recognising gendered productions as produced and unified within particular socio-historical, material, and structural discourses, a mono/heteroglossic framework accounts for both the mercurial diversity of gender, and the continued power of monoglossia to subsume this diversity within discourses of fixity and sameness. Further, in recognising gender as fundamentally *relationally* produced and authenticated, mono/heteroglossia maintains a recognition of the body, and its impact on power relations and authenticity. Indeed, 'the power of the 'reader' to assign gender is an integral aspect of 'authentic' identification' (Francis, 2012: 9), with the application of Bakhtin's work 'belying analyses that see gender as either produced only in the reading, or only via individual choice' (2012: 12).

It is in light of each of these assertions that I consider mono/heteroglossia a profoundly useful framework for analysis. Crucially, I use this in conjunction with both poststructural/queer thinking, and interactionist understandings that situate gender/sexuality as fundamentally *relationally* produced (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Gagnon and Simon, 1967; 1968; 1974). I turn finally, then, to a delineation of symbolic interactionist thinking, and its contribution to Francis' theoretical framework.

v. Symbolic interactionism

In their exploration of the value of symbolic interactionism to analyses of gender and sexuality, Jackson and Scott (2010b) identify one of the key weaknesses of queer and poststructuralist theorising as being its arguable lack of attention to 'the everyday gendered doing of sexuality in interaction' (2010b: 812): undoubtedly key to making

sense of gender-sexuality productions in school. Whilst I continue to find queer/poststructural frameworks useful in analyses of the everyday (via explorations of discourse as constructed and normalised through interaction, conversation, and play), I agree that interactionist thinking facilitates further understanding of the processes by which gender and sexuality are 'done' collectively, through cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic processes (see Denzin, 2001 for further discussion of poststructuralism and interactionism as complementary theoretical perspectives).

Central to symbolic interactionist thinking is the notion of 'scripting' – the construction of cultural resources or guidelines for behaviour – which occurs at interactional, individual, and cultural levels and both constrains and enables sexual and social possibilities (2010: 820). For Gagnon and Simon (1967; 1968; 1974) – and with regard to sexual scripting in particular – cultural scripts or 'scenarios' can be understood as the "cultural narratives' constructed around sexuality, [or] 'what the intersubjective culture treats as sexuality' (Laumann et al, 1994: 6)' (Jackson and Scott, 2010b: 815). Rather than determining sexual conduct, cultural scripts are understood as resources on which individuals can draw in making sense of the sexual, and though comparable to poststructural notions of 'discourse', differ in their relationship to the subject, who is in poststructuralist thinking *located within* discourse, rather than able to draw on discourses/scripts in locating themselves (2010b: 820).

It is at the level of interpersonal scripting that the negotiation, reworking and/or contestation of cultural scripts takes place, with interpersonal scripts understood as 'emerging from and deployed within everyday interaction' (2010b: 815), constituted and negotiated through fundamentally relational practices. It is this level of scripting that lends itself well to the current research, providing a framework for understanding gendered and sexual scripts as co-constructed within the relational spaces of the school, classroom, and peer group. Indeed, in its recognition of selfhood as both 'constrained and enabled by the cultural resources available to us' (Jackson, 2010: 133), symbolic interactionism provides a particularly useful framework for comparative analyses of gender and sexuality. Differing primarily with regards to their involvement or otherwise in 'equalities' pedagogy, my research schools represent distinct sites

shaped by local and contextual scripts, the particularities of which inform the nature of students' interactional (and possible) gender-sexuality (re)workings.

Finally, intrapsychic scripting occurs at the level of 'reflexive internal dialogue' (Jackson and Scott, 2010b: 815), and reflects the processes by which individuals draw on and make sense of the interpersonal and cultural scripts available to them. As Jackson and Scott (*ibid*) assert:

These three interrelated but analytically distinct aspects of scripting...permit a more nuanced analysis of how sexual scripts emerge, evolve and change and are sustained culturally, interpersonally and subjectively. They also allow for individual agency and variation but without assuming voluntarism.

Indeed, another critique made of queer/poststructuralist theorising is its arguable failure to account for individual agency, encapsulated in Jackson and Scott's (2010b: 820) assertion that 'the idea of subjects 'positioning themselves' within discourses or resisting available discursive positions...gives no account of how such intentionality becomes possible and we are therefore left with an unexplained voluntarism'.

Conversely, in understanding the self as reflexively constructed through internal, interactional, and cultural/social processes, we can account for agency at the level of the intrapsychic, whilst acknowledging the constraining (as well as enabling) potential of wider cultural processes. Thus, whilst I remain convinced of the ability of certain employments of poststructural/queer thinking to account for individual agency (see e.g. de Certeau, 1988; Derrida, 1988; Youdell, 2004), I nonetheless consider an interactionist perspective to strengthen such understandings via its recognition of the self as internally and reflexively produced. Indeed, by combining interactionist (and poststructuralist) thinking with a broader theoretical framework of mono/heteroglossia, I acknowledge (re)negotiation and resistance as reflective of (contingent) individual agency, whilst recognising this as always inevitably constrained by the overarching (albeit fictional) monoglossic 'whole'. In relation to mono/heteroglossia, Francis (2012: 12) asserts:

Similar to poststructuralist accounts, there is no naïve reading of agency here, as our utterances/productions of gender can never be produced in individual spontaneity...

Our lives are, as Emerson and Holquist elegantly put it, 'drenched in signs and conventions' [1987: xix], but clearly, Bakhtin also sees tangible and integral resistance to, and deconstruction of, these conventions, as manifest in heteroglossia.

Taken together, I find poststructural/queer, mono/heteroglossic and symbolic interactionist frameworks profoundly useful for the analysis of subjects as simultaneously discursive, material, and (contingently) agentic, situated in and operating with/in divergent social structures and relations of power. My analysis therefore recognises children's productions as both constrained and enabled by broader monoglossic scripts within, against, and through which subjects are made, discourses are negotiated, and new heteroglossic realities are constructed, contested, and affirmed. Specifically, in applying poststructural/queer and interactionist thinking to notions of mono- and hetero-glossia, I account for both macro levels of gender-sexuality production (via poststructural/queer thinking) and micro, heteroglossic variation, which operates at the level of the interpersonal and intrapsychic (wherein dominant constructions are individually and collectively (re)worked).

vi. Conclusions: Literature, theory, praxis

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to situate my research in relation to both empirical works and theoretical perspectives, beginning with an exploration of contemporary and historic understandings of 'the Child'. Here, I highlighted (still prevalent) discourses of 'childhood innocence' as fundamentally historically and culturally constructed, and identified a number of key empirical works that have revealed children as active 'gendered' and 'sexual' beings. Central to many of these analyses has been a challenge to perceptions of the school as inherently 'neutral' and 'asexual', with schools revealed as key sites for the production and governance of (normative) sexuality and gender. Subsequently, the school has been exposed as key to the continued 'Othering' of (non-normative) relationships and identities, with a number of contemporary in-school initiatives seeking to challenge such inequalities. Whilst significant, though, many such initiatives have been criticised for reinscribing a so-called 'discourse problematique' (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015) around gendered and sexual 'Otherness', which positions 'non-conformity' as an individualised problem to be addressed. It was in response to such arguably recuperative efforts that the *No*

Outsiders project was conducted, seeking to disrupt *heteronormativity* through critical pedagogy. Whilst trailblazing, the project was nonetheless characterised by profound epistemological and ontological tensions, the complexities of which represent part of the theoretical impetus for my research.

Following this, I discussed my project's theoretical framework, and argued that the application of poststructural/queer and interactionist frameworks to Francis' concepts of mono/heteroglossia has the potential to account for both the material and discursive workings of gender, and the workings (and limits) of individual agency. As well as accounting for the variously embodied/discursive and agentic/constrained ways in which children produced gender and sexuality across my research sites, such a framework also goes some way to addressing what Robyn Weigman (2001) identifies as one of the key challenges in contemporary feminist theory: 'not simply to address the divide between genetic bodies and discursive gender but to offer a political analysis of the socially constructed afflictions between the two' (2001: 376). I am convinced that this approach goes some way towards achieving this.

3. Researching Childhood

[P]ublished work rarely explicates the myriad decisions, turn-arounds, heartaches and enlightened moments that constitute the ethnographer's daily fare. (O'Reilly, 2012: 4)

Notwithstanding the advances made by a number of (particularly, contemporary feminist) ethnographers in exposing the 'messiness and unpredictability' of social research (Jackson et al, 2017: 2; see also Letherby, 2003; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010), there continue to be many methodological accounts that offer minimal insight into the challenges and pitfalls that characterise the doing of ethnography. Despite the many (theoretical, political, ethical) issues that compound his work, I am in agreement with Bronislaw Malinowski's (1944) insistence that the design and process of ethnography should be thoroughly and systematically documented, and with Karen O'Reilly's (2012: 11) observation that 'unfortunately many contemporary ethnographers seem not to have learned this lesson'. With this in mind, it is my intention throughout this chapter to provide a methodological account that is transparent in its explication of research design and process, and that recognises fully the many 'dilemmas, challenges, and choices' (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010: 2) that marked my time in the field. Not only am I convinced that such exposition should be seen as key to 'good' qualitative research, but I also consider these complex 'decisions, turn-arounds, heartaches and enlightened moments' to have profoundly informed and strengthened my project, creating 'opportunities for methodological innovation as well as unanticipated insights into the lives of [my participants]' (Jackson et al, 2017: 2).

The first half of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of research design and methods, beginning with a consideration of the ways in which certain early fieldwork experiences led to some shifts in methodological approach, and then moving to an exploration of participant observation; discussion groups; story groups; and interviews, in turn. Following this, I focus in some depth on issues of power and positionality in ethnography, and consider the value (or otherwise) of Nancy Mandell's (1988) 'least adult role' for ethnographic research with children.

I. Design

i. Designing, and doing

Research design should be a reflexive process operating throughout every stage of a project. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 24).

In June-July 2013, I conducted the pilot study for the current research, investigating the ways in which children negotiated discourses of gender and sexuality in two *No Outsiders* schools. As a result of this project I became concerned to investigate what I saw as two key research problems arising from its findings. First, I was interested in the question of how, or whether, children's negotiations of gender and sexuality might differ in schools where no comparable equalities work was taking place. And second, I was interested in the form that equalities work in *No Outsiders* schools took; the related tension between 'liberal pluralist' and 'queer' approaches, discussed in the previous chapter; and the attitudes of teachers and project members towards 'effective' gender and sexualities pedagogy. I wondered: what was the effect, or otherwise, of *No Outsiders* on children's understandings and 'doings' of gender and sexuality? And how do teachers and project members conceptualise, enact and experience gender and sexualities pedagogy and practice?

Informed by these questions, my initial project design delineated a year-long comparative ethnography – comprising participant observation, discussion groups, and story groups with children – in two primary schools in the North East of England, one that was and one that wasn't involved in *No Outsiders*. Through a comparison of these schools, it was my intention to investigate the differing ways in which children understood and negotiated gender and sexuality, and to come to a related conclusion about the 'effects or otherwise' of *No Outsiders*. In addition to this ethnographic focus, the project also sought to gain insight into broader conceptualisations of gendered and sexual workings in education through in-depth interviews with head/teachers and *No Outsiders* project members. Overall, my aim was to go some way towards extending current (academic and public) understandings, and thus strengthening practical 'doings', of equalities work in primary education.

The study therefore set out with the following key research question:

- How are children 'doing' gender and sexuality in the primary school, and what difference does/might a critical gender and sexualities pedagogy make?

Further, it asked:

- How do children (co-)construct, negotiate and regulate gender and sexuality within both formal (classroom, assembly) and informal (playground, peer group) sites?
- To what extent, and how, do teachers interact with, conceptualise, and/or trouble children's in-school productions of gender and sexuality?
- How do children's productions compare in schools that *do* vs. *do not* incorporate gender and sexualities work into their curriculum?
- How has gender and sexualities equalities work been employed (or not), and what epistemological, political and methodological convictions/assumptions have underpinned this?
- To what extent, and how, do teachers and *No Outsiders* project members conceptualise 'effective' gender and sexualities pedagogy, and how have these conceptualisations informed their work? (*Later removed*)

Being a fundamentally flexible and iterative-inductive project, though (see O'Reilly, 2012), it was not long before changes were made to this initial design. One such change – which impacted on the final of the above research questions – was the decision to narrow the scope of my *No Outsiders*-interview 'sample' to include only those project members who were teachers at Newhaven⁴ (and thus not the project's investigators, academic-researchers, or teacher-researchers from other schools). This was a decision informed by three factors. The first of these related to the risks involved in 'data overload', and the fact that multiple *No Outsiders* interviews alongside a year-long ethnography, discussion groups, story groups, and interviews with head/teachers at both schools, was likely to amass more data than was workable over the course of a

⁴ One of my two research schools. All schools' and participants' names are pseudonyms

single PhD. This was a decision informed in part, then, by a concern with 'quality over quantity', and the related desire to conduct a focused qualitative exploration of two particular sites.

Second, I became aware on further consideration that interviews with *No Outsiders* teachers from other schools would make for a somewhat decontextualised set of data when compared with those collected at Newhaven, where interviews were located within the broader context of an ongoing participatory ethnography. Notwithstanding the partiality of all data and claims to 'truth' (see e.g. Lather, 1991; Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Atkinson, 2002) I still concur with O'Reilly's (2012: 10) observation that 'what people say they do is not the same as what they actually do', a fact that renders stand-alone interviews somewhat less rounded in terms of their insight into the surrounding 'realities' of their respondents. By deciding ultimately to situate all of my interviews within the context of two whole-school ethnographies, it became possible to analyse my interview data in relation to (and as inextricable from) the corresponding and competing 'truths' that circulated in their school environments.

Finally, there is an already comprehensive body of published work from the *No Outsiders* team – and in particular, its academic-researchers – that explores precisely the queer/liberal tensions and practical/political complexities that I was concerned to investigate (see for example DePalma and Atkinson, 2006b; 2007; 2008; 2009a; 2009d; De Palma and Jennett, 2007; No Outsiders Project Team, 2010). Representing an already rich source of secondary data, these writings made it possible to gain a depth of insight into the perspectives of other *No Outsiders* members without further (possibly superfluous) data collection. Indeed, given the comprehensive and reflexive nature of these works, it is likely that further interviews would have yielded broadly replicative findings that corroborated already stated positions.

In light of these considerations, I withdrew 'other' *No Outsiders* members from my interview sample, and removed the final of my research questions, above, which I recognised as broadly restating the question preceding it (but with the addition of further interviewees). The result of this change was a more focused qualitative research design, which had at its centre an in-depth exploration of the complex and

multiple workings of two distinct primary school cultures (one of which, Newhaven, represents just one of multiple manifestations of *No Outsiders'* work).

ii. Access, sampling, research design

In the interest of drawing on existing contacts and gatekeepers, and enabling follow-up research with previous participants, I decided to contact Newhaven (one of the two schools from my pilot study) in the hope of returning there for fieldwork. After an exchange of emails with the Headteacher (George/Mr Graham), and a full explanation of the research (see Appendix B), access was easily granted. However, access to the second (non-*No Outsiders*) school was slightly more complex. Whilst it was relatively easy to describe the focus of the project to George – who continues to be involved in gender and sexualities work – I felt significantly more wary about giving a full description to Headteachers who were less likely to be familiar with (or perhaps more likely to be resistant to) what are often deemed risky and controversial pedagogies (see e.g. Jackson, 1982; Epstein, 2000; Allen et al, 2012; Phillips and Larson, 2012). As such, I wrote emails to six other Headteachers in the area that included a more general description of the project, focusing on 'gender equalities' and excluding any mention of 'sexuality' (see Appendix C), and decided that a fuller explanation would be given in person once access had begun to be established. In response to the six emails sent, I received three replies: one rejection and two expressions of interest. Of the two interested schools, one – Eastfield – had a similar pupil demographic and was within the same collaborative Learning Trust as Newhaven, whilst the other had a slightly different pupil demographic, was not so closely linked with Newhaven, and was a First School as opposed to a Primary⁵. As it was initially my intention to draw 'valid' conclusions about the effects of *No Outsiders* through a comparison of two schools that were demographically similar (aside from their involvement in *No Outsiders*), Eastfield became the obvious choice for a second school, with the whole process of site-selection having epitomised the 'more or less haphazard combination of theoretical/research interests, pragmatic approaches and personal networks' that is typical of most qualitative research (Epstein, 1998: 28).

⁵ In the UK, First Schools (now relatively few) run from Nursery to Year 4, whilst Primary Schools run from Nursery to Year 6.

Having selected Newhaven and Eastfield as research sites, I met separately with each school's Headteacher to discuss in more detail the nature and practicalities of the project. At this stage it was agreed that I would spend one to two days per week at each school (concurrently) over the course of eleven months, participating in and observing a range of school activities, conducting a series of discussion and story groups with children, and later carrying out informal interviews with teachers. In the interest of gaining insight into children's cultures of gender and sexuality across a range of ages, and enabling a more rounded impression of the school as a whole, it was agreed that my time be split evenly across years one, three, and five: representing a broad 'cross-section' of year groups. Significantly, this was not a decision based on any notion of 'age' as a fixed developmental category or sure indicator of certain 'knowledges' (see Christensen and James, 2008b) but rather one informed by a desire to explore the social organisation and varied social experiences of schooling, as well as the in/formal learning that accompanies these. In other words, part of what I was seeking to investigate was: 'what are children of these ages permitted to know?' as opposed to 'what are children of these ages capable of knowing?'

In particular, though, my decision to conduct research with children in year five as opposed to year six (who in their final year of primary school might be considered a particularly rich 'sample' (see e.g. Renold, 2005)) was informed by a desire to follow up some of the same children and friendship groups that I had worked with in my pilot study. Specifically, I had been struck during this study by the gender production of one child, Finn – who was outspoken and confident in his love of 'girly' things and rejection of normative masculinity (see Chapter 5) – and was interested to see whether and how his counter-normativity had continued. As such, it was agreed that my time with year five at Newhaven would be spent with Finn's class, specifically⁶: a decision that was theoretically and pragmatically informed, but that also inevitably 'impose[d] a structure on events' and shaped what I was able (and chose) to see and hear (O'Reilly, 2012: 99). However, in light of my understanding of all research as reflecting only some of many contingent and changing realities (see Atkinson, 2003), I am not concerned that this decision 'skewed' or otherwise negatively impacted my data

⁶ Newhaven has two-form entry (two classes per year group) and Eastfield has three-form entry (three classes per year group).

collection. Rather, I see such selectivity as being an unavoidable element of (particularly small-scale, ethnographic) research, but nonetheless one that requires acknowledgement and justification. In this instance, it was as a result of a broadly poststructuralist concern with the turning of attention from the centre to the margins (Atkinson, 2003: 37) – from normative doings to counter-normative resistances – that I made the decision to actively follow up Finn in particular.

Finally, during these early negotiations, I also provided a more detailed explanation of the research to Eastfield's Headteacher, Andrew/Mr Stuart, during which I explained that part of the focus of my project would be on 'young sexualities and relationships'. Whilst this went beyond my initial explanation, it still positioned 'sexuality' as a sub-focus – rather than central concern – of the research, betraying a somewhat unacknowledged reticence on my part to be explicit about the project's exact nature with non-*No Outsiders* teachers. Whilst providing an altered project description to gatekeepers is not necessarily atypical, I was nonetheless concerned that in doing this I had given weight to – rather than challenged – the notion that sexualities research with children is necessarily 'controversial'. Indeed, during a more candid discussion with Andrew later in the fieldwork process – which included mention of *No Outsiders* and sexualities equality more generally – he was wholly positive in response and admitted to feeling that the school should be doing more to address these issues. Although my initial reticence may have been ill-founded, then, it is also possible that it was at least in part as a result of the good relationship I developed with Andrew that he responded so well to this description, and it is not possible to know whether he would have agreed to the research had I provided this explanation initially. This is a possibility that I would justify in terms of the political importance of the project (Epstein, 1998) and the necessity, at times, of being 'semi-overt' with more powerful institutional bodies in order to bolster the narratives of less powerful, marginalised groups (O'Reilly, 2012).

iii. Timetabling... and timetabling again

Having agreed on these core elements of the research design, I set about writing a research timetable that would split eleven months of fieldwork evenly across six classes. This initial structure comprised concurrent fieldwork across the two schools,

with one full 'settling in' week followed by nine weeks in a row of 1-2 days per week with each year group (and accounting for school holidays):

| | Newhaven | Eastfield |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2 nd -6 th Feb (2015) | Year 1 (full week) | |
| 9 th -13 th Feb | | Year 1 (full week) |
| 16 th Feb-1 st Mar | School holiday | |
| 2 nd Mar-3 rd Apr | Year 1 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 1 (1-2 days p/w) |
| 6 th -17 th Apr | School holiday | |
| 20 th April-15 th May | Year 1 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 1 (1-2 days p/w) |
| 18 th -22 nd May | Year 3 (full week) | |
| 25 th -31 st May | School holiday | |
| 1 st -5 th Jun | | Year 3 (full week) |
| 8 th June-17 th Jul | Year 3 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 3 (1-2 days p/w) |
| 20 th July-6 th Sept | School holiday | |
| 7 th -25 th Sept | Year 3 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 3 (1-2 days p/w) |
| 28 th Sept-2 nd Oct | Year 5 (full week) | |
| 5 th -9 th Oct | | Year 5 (full week) |
| 12 th -23 rd Oct | Year 5 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 5 (1-2 days p/w) |
| 26 th Oct-1 st Nov | School holiday | |
| 2 nd Nov-18 th Dec | Year 5 (1-2 days p/w) | Year 5 (1-2 days p/w) |

Figure 5. Initial research timetable

By the end of my first two weeks in the field, though, this timetable had been altered in two significant ways. The first of these involved the decision to return to fieldwork following the first school holiday (see above) with a full week in each of my six classes, rather than waiting to 'complete' research with one class before meeting the next. This decision reflected my conviction that by spending a number of weeks exclusively in one class, I was not only limiting my ability to become a known and familiar presence across the school (see O'Reilly, 2012: 11; 93), but also enabling children in other classes to 'interpellate' (Althusser, 1971) me from afar in ways that contradicted my intended 'least adult' positioning. Indeed, during these first weeks spent in part chatting and playing with children in 'my' (year one) class in the playground and lunch hall, I became aware of children from other classes watching me with interest and

suspicion, presumably attempting to make sense of who I was. Whilst some of these children were confident in approaching me and asking what I was up to (in response to which I would tell them about my research, and explain that part of what I was doing was behaving 'like a big child'), I was concerned that those who were less forthcoming would spend the next number of months forming an impression of me that might work against the relationships I hoped to develop with them later on. In particular, I thought it possible that I might come to be seen by other children during this time as an official 'year one helper', and given many older children's keenness to distance themselves from 'childish' associations (see Paechter, 2015), was concerned that this might put me at a disadvantage when seeking to develop informal relationships with older children later in the research process. Thus, I made the decision to dedicate the first six weeks of fieldwork to familiarising myself with children across all six classes via a full week spent in each, which in turn enabled the establishment of earlier, and thus longer-lasting, relationships with all research participants.

Second, these initial two weeks also entailed a more general shift in my conceptual approach to the project, and a rethinking of some of the assumptions inherent in my original design. Specifically – and as I became attuned to some of the particularities of each school – I began to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the 'quasi-experimental' turn that the research had taken. I realised that despite the project's largely poststructuralist framing, I had nonetheless managed to develop a methodological design that set out to draw conclusions about *No Outsiders*' 'effects' through an almost pseudo-scientific lens, with Newhaven and Eastfield as 'experimental' and 'control' school respectively. This was further exacerbated by a research timetable wherein fieldwork was conducted concurrently, with Monday and/or Tuesday spent at Newhaven, and Wednesday and/or Thursday spent at Eastfield, and little time left over to become immersed in the particularities of either school. Thus, I made the decision to restructure my research timetable to allow me to return (after the school holiday, see Fig. 4, below) to a block of twelve weeks at each school, with one settling-in week, and three 3-day weeks spent with each class in total. This alteration both allowed for a more focused exploration of each school culture, and reflected a broader shift in conceptual approach, from a parallel investigation of 'comparable' schools, to a more focused exploration of two distinct educational sites, each in their own right. Whilst

entailing a marginally shorter total amount of time per year group than originally planned⁷, I am convinced that this more time-intensive structure enabled richer, more immersive (and less positivist, ‘comparative’) fieldwork at each school than was initially possible:

| | Newhaven | Eastfield |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 nd -6 th Feb (2015) | Year 1 (full week) | |
| 9 th -13 th Feb | | Year 1 (full week) |
| 16 th Feb-1 st Mar | School holiday | |
| 2 nd -6 th Mar | Year 3 (full week) | |
| 9 th -13 th Mar | | Year 3 (full week) |
| 16 th -20 th Mar | Year 5 (full week) | |
| 23 rd -27 th Mar | | Year 5 (full week) |
| 30 th Mar-3 rd Apr | Year 1 (3 days p/w) | |
| 6 th -17 th Apr | School holiday | |
| 20 th Apr-1 st May | Year 1 (3 days p/w) | |
| 4 th -22 nd May | Year 3 (3 days p/w) | |
| 25 th -31 st May | School holiday | |
| 1 st -19 th Jun | Year 5 (3 days p/w) | |
| 22 nd Jun-10 th Jul | | Year 5 (3 days p/w) |
| 13 th -17 th Jul | | Year 3 (3 days p/w) |
| 20 th Jul-6 th Sept | 7-week summer holiday | |
| 7 th -18 th Sept | | Year 3 [now Y4] (3 days p/w) |
| 21 st Sept-9 th Oct | | Year 1 [now Y2] (3 days p/w) |

Figure 6. Final research timetable: note reversed order at Eastfield (year 5, 3, 1), as requested by Headteacher

Central to these changes in design was a shift in my overall approach to the project, and a rethinking of my initial (somewhat unacknowledged) attempts to conduct a methodologically ‘valid’ ethnography via the concurrent analysis of two demographically similar schools. Given its largely poststructural framing, the notion of ‘validity’ is not one easily (or desirably) applied to my research. Thus, although the

⁷ The initial research timetable (see Fig. 3) comprised between 14-23 total days per year group (one 5-day week followed by nine 1-2 day weeks). The final timetable (see Fig. 4) comprised 14 total days per year group (one 5-day week followed by three 3-day weeks).

research remained necessarily comparative in some key ways (concerned as it was with the workings or otherwise of equalities pedagogy), my aim was no longer to draw ‘valid’ conclusions about directly comparable schools via a structured investigation of ‘equivalent’ year groups and children. Rather, I set out to glean a rich, and necessarily partial, insight into two distinct and complex educational cultures that were at once similar and different, with variability identifiable within, as well as between, sites.

iv. A note on demographics

Newhaven and Eastfield are two inner-city, state funded primary schools in the North East of England with a pupil roll of 420 and 636, respectively. The majority of pupils at both schools are of White British origin, though Eastfield has a higher than average percentage of pupils whose first language is not English⁸ (21.6%), compared to a lower than average percentage (9.5%) at Newhaven. Both schools serve areas of relatively high social deprivation, though Newhaven has a higher than average percentage of pupils who are currently eligible for free school meals⁹ (19.5%) compared to a lower than average percentage (9.4%) at Eastfield. As free school meals data was not available for individual classes, ‘relative social deprivation’ was calculated for my particular sample via an assessment of pupil postcodes (which should be recognised as reflecting national measures: the city in which the schools are located ranks lower than the national average on income). A broad exposition of demographics for the children that I worked with is included below (see Figures 7 and 8), with a more detailed breakdown by friendship group in Appendix D. Importantly, I recognise these figures as inevitably partial, and include them only to provide a broad overview of each school’s socio-economic makeup:

⁸ UK national average of EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils was 20.8% as at January 2017 (Department for Education, 2017)

⁹ UK national average of pupils currently eligible for free school meals was 14% as at January 2017 (Department for Education, 2017)

| Newhaven | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| | Living in areas of relatively high social/economic deprivation | White British/Other White Background | Chinese | Mixed White/Asian | Black African | Mixed White/Black Caribbean | Total = |
| Year One | 18 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 29 |
| Year Three | 16 | 24 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| Year Five | 15 | 22 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 24 |

Figure 7. Newhaven sample group demographics

| Eastfield | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------|-------------------|---------------|--|-----------------------------|----------------|
| | Living in areas of relatively high social/economic deprivation | White British/Other White Background | Chinese | Mixed White/Asian | Black African | South Asian (Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian) | Mixed White/Black Caribbean | Total = |
| Year One | 10 | 17 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 28 |
| Year Three | 9 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 27 |
| Year Five | 8 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 24 |

Figure 8. Eastfield sample group demographics

II. Methods

i. Ethnography

In her exposition of ethnography – as a methodological approach that enables the researcher to ‘learn from peoples’ lives from their own perspective and in the context of their own lived experiences’ (2005: 84) – Karen O’Reilly (2012: 3) identifies ethnographic research as, minimally:

Iterative inductive research, that draws on...a family of methods...involving direct and sustained contact with human agents...within the context of their daily lives (and cultures)...watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, and...producing a richly written account...that respects the irreducibility of human experience...acknowledges the role of theory...as well as the researcher’s own role...and that views humans as part object/part subject.

My research reflects this exposition of ethnography, setting out via participant observation, discussion groups, story groups, and interviews, to gain a depth of insight into the multiple lived realities of primary school children (and teachers) over one almost full school year (February-October 2015). In particular, I sought to explore the ways in which local, situational workings of gender and sexuality interacted, or otherwise, with formal school ‘equalities’ pedagogies. In contrast to some traditional ethnographic accounts, the research was reflexively conducted, with ‘a full awareness of the myriad limitations associated with humans studying other human lives’ (O’Reilly, 2012: 14), and a related recognition of data as always partial and constructed rather than fixed or ‘true’. With regard to its conceptualisation of ‘childhood’, the project moved away from traditional psychological and sociological accounts that have positioned children and adults as incompetent ‘becomings’ and competent ‘beings’ respectively (Qvortrup et al, 1994), whilst simultaneously avoiding any overly fixed conceptualisations of children *or* adults as fixed or unitary. Indeed, ‘all people are simultaneously both active agents and constantly in a state of becoming’ (Kesby et al., 2006: 199), and thus recognisable as fundamentally multiple and fluid participants in research. Equally, whilst aligning myself with some of the central tenets of the ‘new’ sociology of childhood, which recognises children as competent social agents, I

nonetheless recognise 'agency' as fundamentally contingent, and constrained by various social and structural factors (see Tisdall and Punch, 2012 for a thorough critique of 'agency' as conceptualised in contemporary childhood studies). Klocker's (2007) notion of 'thick' and 'thin' agency proved a useful concept here, where "thin' agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts [...whilst 'thick'] agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options' (2007: 85). Children's agentic capacities can thus be understood as having been variously 'thickened' and 'thinned' throughout the research process, both 'over time and space, and across their various relationships' (ibid) and as a result (or so I intended) of particular research methods and methodologies.

With regard to my 'situatedness' in the field, I was attuned throughout the research to the impact of my presence as researcher on participants' 'doings' of gender and sexuality, and viewed this as an inevitable aspect of both qualitative research (wherein data is always situationally co-constructed), and human sociality (wherein meaning is produced and negotiated in interaction). Through maintaining a reflexive approach to this 'situatedness', I was able to consider the particular ways in which I (as young, white, British, female, able-bodied researcher) was located in and through participants' interactions and processes of meaning-making, and shift my positional approach accordingly. Indeed, whilst shaped by poststructuralist, queer and interactionist thinking, the project was open throughout to shifts in design stemming from new findings and realisations in the field, with theory and method mutually informing one another throughout the research process.

ii. Ethics and consent

Whilst I am convinced of the rights and ability of children to grant or deny access to their own social worlds (see Barker and Smith, 2001; Heath et al, 2007; Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Powell et al, 2012), an inevitable aspect of childhood research is the establishing of parental (and institutional) consent 'on behalf of' child participants (see Barker and Weller, 2003a; Powell and Smith, 2006; Coyne, 2010). Thus, further to being granted approval by the University of York's ethics committee (see Appendix

E)¹⁰, a section was added to the school newsletter at both Newhaven and Eastfield explaining the nature and purpose of the research and inviting parents to contact me with any questions (see Appendix F). In this instance, no parents contacted me, and no children were withdrawn from participation in the project (although at least one parent at Eastfield did make a complaint, see Chapter 7).

However, as with my email to non-*No Outsiders* teachers, this description excluded any mention of sexuality, and situated 'gender' as the central focus of the research. This is a decision that I would justify in terms of the disparity between academic and public terminologies, where 'sexuality' might be understood to relate to issues of identity/subjecthood in sociological circles, but sexual activity/sex education in public discourse. I was concerned, therefore, to avoid misrepresenting my research given broader (misguided) concerns around the incommensurability of sex(uality) and childhood. Further, given the central role that sexuality occupies in primary school culture, I was not concerned that this explanation masked a 'sensitive' or 'covert' agenda, or that my exploration of 'sexuality' introduced a new (threatening) element into the 'innocent' space of the school. Rather, the project sought to explore an already visible, pervasive element of children's lives, which is often silenced as a result of dominant adult perceptions of childhood and its in/commensurabilities.

Notwithstanding these practical necessities, it is my conviction that children should be their own gatekeepers throughout the research process, and that informed consent should be continually and meaningfully established with them on their level (see Gallagher, 2009). With this in mind, I developed an explanation of myself and my project that I used with every class and child that I worked with, which described who I was (a university student: conceptually distinct from 'teacher' and arguably more understandable than 'researcher' (see Epstein, 1998)); what my research was about ('gender'); and what I hoped to be doing in their school (observing and participating in their classroom and playground activities, taking notes, asking questions and conducting 'discussion and story groups'). I also positioned myself explicitly in these discussions as a 'big child': not a teacher or a teaching assistant, but someone who

¹⁰ See also Powell and Smith, 2006; Horton, 2008; Carter, 2009; Gallagher et al, 2010 for discussions of the problems inherent in institutional ethics guidelines.

hoped to learn from them and participate in various aspects of their school day. Notwithstanding the various problems inherent in this 'least adult' approach (Mandell, 1988, discussed further below), children were almost always excited at this prospect, and keen to share their time and views with a non-official, friend-like grown up in school (see also Corsaro and Molinari, 2008; Roberts, 2008).

A further aspect of this initial explanation involved a discussion with children around the notion of 'gender', where I would ask if anyone knew what this meant, and then listen to responses, examples, and questions. During these discussions, I would always query the divisions drawn between 'boys' and girls' stuff' in the style of 'uninformed adult' (Mayall, 2008), by asking, for example, 'oh are dresses just for girls then?' In so doing, I hoped that I would neither push my own (fluid) conceptualisations of gender on participants, nor confirm the legitimacy of their preexisting (fixed) definitions.

Following this class-wide explanation, I then took smaller groups of children for 'consent groups', where we would revisit the subject of the research via an understandable information sheet (see Appendix G) and open discussion. Children would then ask further questions, and agree or otherwise to participation, confirming their understanding verbally via a set of clear questions on a separate consent form (see Appendix H). Consent was verbally recorded, and recognised as an ongoing process, to be reestablished at various points throughout my time in the field (see Valentine, 1999; Hill, 2005; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). It was made clear during these groups that children's participation was wholly voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. In the case of participant observation, this would entail my withdrawal of any notes about them from my fieldwork diary, whilst for discussion/story groups it was made clear that participants were free to leave any time (which many did), and/or withdraw their own comments from transcription and analysis. Somewhat unsurprisingly, though, no children withdrew themselves from the research, and all were enthusiastic about my interest in their lives.

With regard to teachers' consent, information sheets (see Appendix I) were provided at both schools, and the project was openly discussed throughout the research process, with questions answered as honestly as possible. Prior to interviews, a

consent form was read and signed (see Appendix J), and interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their conversations with me, which would be closely protected, anonymised (via pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying information) and deleted following transcription. Equally, discussion and story groups with children began with a reiteration of the project's focus, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their freedom to leave at any time and for any reason, with consent verbally recorded. Children, like adults, were assured of the confidentiality of our conversations, but informed that I would have to speak to an 'official adult' in school if I was concerned for their safety (see Fargas-Malet et al, 2010). Whilst a number of researchers have discussed the benefits of allowing participants to choose their own pseudonyms in research, I made the decision to select pseudonyms myself in the interest of clarity. Indeed, given the centrality of gender to the current research (and its intersection with other axes of identity including 'ethnicity'), it was important that participants' pseudonyms reflected these (albeit discursively produced) positionings as far as possible.

Whilst each of these steps made me feel confident that consent for the research had been meaningfully established, the extent to which children, in particular, were fully informed was inarguably compromised by my decision to describe the project's focus to them in terms of 'gender' rather than 'sexuality'. This was a decision based not on any misconception of sexuality as 'controversial', but rather on concerns regarding the effect of sharing too much information on the strength of my findings, motivated by a desire to be sure that when children were 'doing' sexuality, these were as far as possible authentic (albeit necessarily situated) productions. Further, the extent to which children are ever fully able to 'consent' within the context of the school has been a long-discussed topic in the childhood research literature (see for example Denscombe and Aubrooke, 1992; Graue and Walsh, 1998; David et al, 2001), as has the extent to which any participant (adult or child) is ever fully 'informed' in (by definition shifting and unpredictable) qualitative research (see McLeod, 2001; Law, 2003; O'Reilly, 2012; Popke, 2006; Horton, 2008). Thus, my decisions were shaped ultimately by a recognition of consent as located 'in the context of constraints, obligations and expectations over which researchers often have little control' (Gallagher et al, 2010: 479). Whilst making all efforts to ensure participants' safety, confidentiality, and

consent (which was always verbally recorded/written; voluntary; renegotiable; and informed by an understanding of the research (see Powell et al, 2012; Gallagher, 2009)), an 'ethical/political' (Epstein, 1998: 38) judgment was nonetheless made regarding children's arguably lesser capacity to consent to participation. This judgment responded to Epstein's question (ibid): 'is the research important enough to justify researching children when their capacity for informed consent may be limited in [certain] ways?' I would argue in this instance that it is, given its concern to disrupt enduring processes of gendered and sexual inequality in education (the particularities of which are only fully understandable via a contextual, situated exploration of children's social/school worlds).

iii. Participant observation

In the interest of exploring these social worlds across a range of sites and ages, participant observation was conducted in years one, three, and five at each school, with one full week and three 3-day weeks (14 days/84 hours in total) spent with each class. Each day, I would arrive at school at the same time as the children (around 8.50am), filter into class with those I was working with that week, and sit with them on the carpet (chatting, catching up) to wait for the register. I then spent the next six hours participating fully in the children's school day: joining in their lessons, playing outside at break and lunch time, eating school dinners in the lunch hall, and waiting on the carpet for 'home time'. During these hours I would take extensive 'jotted fieldnotes' (Emerson et al, 2001: 356), which would be written into a small notebook when in the classroom (allowing my note-taking to go relatively unnoticed alongside children's work), or into my phone when participating in the more fast-paced world of the playground. Once the children had left to go home (around 3pm), I would most often stay to talk to the class teacher about the school day, before leaving school around 3.30-4pm. On arriving home, I would write up and expand on my jotted fieldnotes (generally comprising between 700-1500 words per day, and totalling 40 and 54 pages at Eastfield and Newhaven respectively), situating the day's observations alongside broader theoretical/reflexive thoughts and 'flashes of insight' (Whyte, 1951). Whilst recognising my fieldnotes as always inevitably selective – 'never able to explain fully the intellectual work that went into determining what to do and write, when, and how' (O'Reilly, 2012: 99) – I endeavoured nonetheless to produce a thorough

delineation of events at the end of each day that exceeded the bounds of my particular research questions. Indeed, whilst the subject of my research inevitably informed the ways in which I wrote and expanded on my fieldnotes (which became necessarily more focused as the research went on), I was still open at all times to new observations and shifts in direction, and allowed my explorations to develop in light of new happenings in the field.

Over the course of the research, I came to feel accepted by children as a participating member of their in/formal school worlds, and gradually 'settled into a semi-overt role' (O'Reilly, 2012: 87), wherein my position as researcher became secondary to my role as (honorary) peer/classmate/friend. Through this positioning, I was able to gain valuable insight into children's formal and informal worlds in school, both observing and participating in multiple rich and shifting ethnographic moments. A key example of such shifting/situated conduct is that of Obasi (age 5) at Newhaven (discussed in Chapter 5), who behaved within the classroom and friendship group in a distinctly 'normative' masculine manner, and was perceived by teachers and children as a typically 'rough, boyish' boy. Within small discussion groups, though, and during passing moments with me on the playground or field, Obasi talked about loving to wear dresses and makeup and wishing that he could be a mermaid. Without having developed a relationship with Obasi over a number of weeks spent in his class – or, indeed, having extended my methods beyond 'detached' observation in the classroom to participation in friendships and the conduct of informal discussion groups – I am convinced that I would not have been made privy to this somewhat secret aspect of his personality. Thus, I consider my role as participant observer to have been critical in enabling insight into children's *situated* doings of gender and sexuality in school, which differed markedly across time, space, and context.

iv. Discussion groups

...small focus [/discussion] groups are one of the best ways to obtain data from children, because they replicate a natural and familiar form of communication in which children talk together with peers. (Gibson, 2012: 150)

In order to gain further insight into children's collective, peer group negotiations of gender and sexuality, a series of informal discussion groups were conducted with children in each of the six classes that I worked with. I describe these purposefully as 'discussion groups' rather than 'focus groups' to reflect the 'naturally occurring' relationship between those involved, the relative fluidity of the resulting discussion, and the familiar (school) context in which they were conducted (see O'Reilly, 2012: 131-5).

Whilst a number of childhood researchers have discussed the benefits of children selecting their own groups for research (see e.g. Christensen and James, 2008a), I made the decision to compile groups myself in order to avoid facilitating peer group exclusions, and to ensure that all children had a chance to participate. During my first few days in each class, I would make a note of identifiable friendship groups, then corroborate these by asking children (informally, during class or playtime) who their 'best friends' were and/or who they usually played with. Drawing on this information, I organised discussion groups that comprised pre-existing friendship groups of 3 to 6 participants, and that lasted 20 to 40 minutes. In the case of children with few identifiable friends, I would ask the child in question to tell me who they'd like to be in a group with, enabling their participation alongside a classmate whom they liked and felt comfortable with. Whilst discussion groups did not set out to be 'single-sex', children largely identified 'same sex' classmates as their 'best friends', with the exception of four groups at Eastfield, and five at Newhaven. Thirty-eight discussion groups (20 at Eastfield and 18 at Newhaven) were conducted in total, and carried out in relatively informal 'pods' or activity rooms, which were perceived as less formal than the classroom, and which children freely rearranged prior to the start of each session (see e.g. Barker and Weller, 2003a; Valentine, 1999 on the significance of spatiality in childhood research).

Of these groups, two (one each at Newhaven and Eastfield) were 'follow up' discussions with children whose voices I felt needed more space to be heard. This was a simultaneously political and methodological decision, concerned with turning attention from the centre to the margins (Atkinson, 2003) and facilitating a space wherein transgressive positions could be more readily heard. At Eastfield, this group

comprised two boys and one girl (Tanish, Aqib and Varsha, see Chapters 5 and 6), all of whom transgressed normative expectations in their firmly 'heteroglossic' doings of gender. Having conducted an earlier group wherein Aqib's voice had been quashed and his 'girlish-ness' subject to mockery, I felt it was important to create a space wherein he could be listened to and (perhaps) validated. At Newhaven, the 'follow up group' comprised four boys (Julian, Jevaun, Obasi and Hugh, see Chapter 5), all of whom had mentioned an enjoyment of wearing dresses. These follow up groups were thus motivated by a desire to more closely explore certain children's 'transgressive' doings of gender, and create a space wherein these could be (tactically) 'bolstered'.

Each discussion group began with a reiteration of the project, an opportunity to ask questions, and the recording of verbal consent. It was made clear to all participants that their involvement was voluntary and that they could leave at any time and for any reason (and that no reason had to be given). In line with Chambers' (1994) 'tell me' approach, I then asked children to simply 'tell me about being a boy/girl', at which point conversation would usually flow freely with little need for intervention. Whilst the direction of group discussion was largely dependent on children themselves, I asked a number of open questions/prompts of each group, which reflected some of the more specific foci of my study (see Appendix K). I would also interject intermittently to get the group 'back on track' where necessary, diffuse any particularly tense interactions, and/or ensure all children were getting a chance to speak. Whilst I tried to maintain as 'least adult' a role as possible in these moments, this was necessarily compromised by my relative power as 'adult' to direct groups in particular (albeit gentle, friend-like) ways. Whilst groups were relatively child-directed, then (in that children introduced and expanded on a variety of unanticipated topics, dominated group discussion, and overrode many of my interjections), my position as researcher necessarily 'impose[d] a structure on events' (O'Reilly, 2012: 99), and influenced interactions in various unavoidable ways. Nonetheless, discussion groups represented valuable research sites wherein multiple shifting knowledges were constructed and contested in interaction.

Finally, in the interest of gaining relatively 'authentic' insight into children's peer group constructions – as well as maintaining a non-authoritative, 'friend' positionality – I

chose to remain neutral in all groups to children's hetero/sexist, homophobic, or otherwise 'offensive' language and attitudes (except when these were directed consistently at any one particular child)¹¹. Whilst it is arguable that such neutrality may have worked implicitly to condone children's attitudes, I am convinced that challenging these would have closed down open conversation, and provided an unhelpful, 'sanitised' insight into children's peer group interactions. Indeed, given the project's concern with understanding the ways in which children negotiate gender and sexuality across various school spaces, it was important that discussion groups represented informal, non-authoritative sites wherein significant peer group cultures could be revealed. It is only through such open exploration, I would argue, that the currently unacknowledged pervasiveness of primary school (hetero)sexism/homophobia can be exposed, where placing limits on such openness would have served to further conceal the various heteroglossic realities that pulsate beneath the monoglossic primary school 'façade' (Francis, 2012: 5).

v. Story groups

Inspired by Davies' (1989) use of feminist stories to facilitate discussions with children around gender, thirty-three mixed-sex 'story groups' (15 at Newhaven and 18 at Eastfield) were conducted with children at both schools, and involved the reading and discussion of De Haan and Nijland's (2002) *King and King*: a children's story used by *No Outsiders* in which two princes fall in love. As with discussion groups, these comprised 3 to 6 participants and lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. Having found during the pilot study that children's attitudes towards the story's 'gay princes' differed markedly according to gender (see Atkinson, 2013), I initially organised these groups as mixed sex – generally comprising two female and two male friends – in the interest of exploring how this dynamic might inform children's constructions. However, the comparatively contrived nature of these first few sessions made for a far less open friendship-group dynamic, and I decided to organise the remaining groups in the same way as discussion groups, above, with participants drawn from naturally occurring, self-identified friendship groups, which were almost invariably single-sex.

¹¹ Although see section III of this chapter for a discussion of the problems inherent in such contingent intervention

The story of *King and King* (2002) concerns a prince whose mother is desperate for him to marry a princess, and take over the responsibility of ruling the kingdom. After meeting four princesses, none of whom he is interested in, the prince sets eyes on the brother of his fifth and final female suitor and falls immediately in love. The two princes are happily married and take over the ruling of the kingdom as the first King and King.



Figure 9. *King and King* (De Haan and Nijland, 2002)

Whilst *King and King* has been critiqued for its arguably problematic celebration of heteronormative, marital, and royalist coupledness (see DePalma, 2016), I nonetheless found the story a useful starting point for discussion around non-heterosexuality. Featuring two human protagonists who are depicted explicitly falling in love, getting married, and kissing (above), the book differs from other more 'safe' (see Nixon, 2009) or implicit depictions of non-heterosexuality (see for comparison *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2002); *And Tango Makes Three* (Parnell and Richardson, 2005); *The Different Dragon* (Bryan, 2006); *Dogs Don't Do Ballet* (Kemp, 2010)). Further, in its subversion of a traditional 'fairytale' narrative, *King and King* enables readers to recognise and reflect on some of the 'common-sense' messages around love, marriage, and romance that they have learned through similar (heterosexual) stories throughout their lives. The fairytale genre, moreover, made the book relatively versatile for use with children across all year groups, where younger (aged 5-6) children related it to similar stories read at school and home, whilst older (aged 9-10) children discussed it in relation to their younger childhoods, and in terms of its 'appropriateness' or otherwise for children younger than themselves.

Prior to story groups, and on my request, children were read *King and King* by their class teacher. Groups were then conducted over the following few days, beginning

again with a reiteration of consent, opportunity for questions, and assurance of children's freedom to leave at any point. As with discussion groups, I began with a broad, open question – 'what did people think of the story?' – and allowed conversation to develop relatively unaided, with open questions and prompts introduced where necessary (see Appendix L). The presence of the book itself was of particular use in these groups, providing both a visual reference for participants (e.g. 'wait let me show you my favourite character!'), and further insight into the particular significance of certain pages (e.g. the princes' kiss, above, which was often singled out for repudiation). During one group at Eastfield, one child quickly closed the book and hid it with her hands when a teacher entered the room, revealing clearly her perception of *King and King* as representing a 'taboo' presence in school (see also Allen et al, 2009).

As with discussion groups, I perceived children's hetero/sexism and homophobia during these groups as valuable examples of gender/sexuality 'borderwork' (Davies, 1989) in school, and again remained neutral in response to oppressive language and attitudes. As above, I justify this decision on the grounds of its importance in revealing peer group workings, as well as with reference to my role as 'least adult', which arguably diminished my capacity to 'condone' or 'legitimise' children's views from a position of authority.

vi. Interviews

Finally, in the interest of gaining insight into teachers' attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and related pedagogy and practice, informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the class teachers that I worked with, and with each school's Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher. Additional interviews were conducted with Newhaven's 'equalities officer' and a staff member at Eastfield who had recently participated in Stonewall's *School Champions* training programme. Twelve interviews were conducted in total, each lasting from 40 to 90 minutes and beginning with a reiteration of the project, the opportunity to ask questions, and the recording of written consent:

| Interviewee | Newhaven | Eastfield |
|--|---|---------------------|
| Headteacher | George/Mr. Graham (Involved in <i>No Outsiders</i>) | Andrew/Mr. Stuart |
| Year One | Nora/Ms. Gibson | Diana/Ms. Marsch |
| Year Three | Imogen/Ms. Groves (Involved in <i>No Outsiders</i>) | Chloe/Ms. Connell |
| Year Five | Lauren/Ms. Johnson | Georgina/Ms. Simons |
| Deputy Headteacher | Julie/Ms. Ross (Involved in <i>No Outsiders</i>) | Louise/Ms. Arran |
| Equalities Officer | Eddie/Mr. Ellis | |
| Year Six Teacher/ Stonewall Trainee | | Cheryl/Ms. Porter |

Figure 10. Interviewees

Far from objective sites for the establishment of interviewee ‘truths’, interviews were viewed as ‘situational and dialogical construction sites of knowledge’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 2) wherein particular, partial meanings were made and negotiated in interaction. Whilst an interview schedule was compiled for each interviewee (see Appendices M-S), interviews were generally fluid, and open to shifts in direction in line with interviewees’ particular thoughts and narratives. Necessarily, each interview schedule differed slightly according to the interviewee’s school, role, and involvement or otherwise in *No Outsiders*, and it was rare that all pre-set questions were answered over the course of the conversation, acting rather as a loose guide for more open-ended, mutual talk.

vii. Data analysis

Data analysis followed an exploratory, as opposed to hypothesis-driven, thematic analysis method, wherein ‘the researcher carefully reads and rereads the data, looking for key words, trends, themes or ideas...that will help outline the analysis, *before* any analysis takes place (Guest et al, 2012: 7). This was carried out initially by hand

(reading and rereading, highlighting, and identifying themes and sub-themes) before insights or 'nodes' were entered into NVivo, where they could be more closely and systematically explored. 36 nodes emerged from analysis of discussion groups, 20 from story-groups, 24 from teacher interviews, and 19 from fieldnotes (see Appendix T, i-iv), and were identified according to frequency (with e.g. 'heterosexuality' being referred to 180 times over 29 discussion groups, see Appendix T, i), as well as perceived significance. For example, "race'/ethnicity' is included in the list of nodes for story-groups (see Appendix T, ii.) although it is only discussed twice across two groups. The significance of the comments made, though (specifically, in terms of notions of 'sameness' and 'difference') warranted inclusion in analysis, and their omission on the grounds of 'infrequency' would have silenced an important and potentially marginalised perspective. Equally, whilst 'religion' is referenced in only one teacher interview (albeit three times, see Appendix T, iii.), the extent to which this informed the interviewee's conceptualisation of 'imaginable' equalities work was profound, necessitating its inclusion in analysis. It is also important to note that data was often coded across more than one node (e.g. 'heterosexuality' and 'doing girlhood'), reflecting the irreducibility of participants' lives and accounts, as well as the interrelation of, for example, 'gender' and 'sexuality' in productions and conceptualisations in school.

III. The Least Adult Role

I include these stories here to show how tricky it is as adult to participate in this subtle, shifting, complex world of childhood relations. (Davies, 1989: 39)

Having identified above the significance of positionality in research with children, I turn here to a more thorough exploration of the complexities inherent in my positional approach, and dedicate a significant portion of this chapter to its discussion. Following a consideration of some of the benefits of least adulthood, I move to a discussion of the various practical, ethical, and emotional challenges inherent in this position, and conclude that whilst productive in some ways, the least adult role is one that fundamentally misconstrues the complex workings of power.

i. Deciding on least adulthood

Prior to my entry into the field, it was crucial that thought be given in advance to the 'role' I would take with participants, as well as how this role might sit within the 'minefield of power relations' (Epstein, 1998: 38) that characterises research with children. In deciding on this role, I was informed in large part by the debates that have taken place within the 'new sociology of childhood' (see e.g. Qvortrup et al, 1994; 2009; James et al, 1998; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998; Christensen and James, 2008a), and their recognition of the ways in which unequal power relations that exist already between 'researcher' and 'researched' are heightened in social research with children, who occupy an especially marginalised role in society (see Valentine, 1999; Tooke, 2000). In light of this recognition, an increasing number of childhood researchers have sought to disrupt the imbalance of power between adult researchers and child participants through the development of new methods and methodologies, which work in part to 'give power over' to children (see Gallagher, 2008). Whilst some (Punch, 2002, 2007; Van Blerk and Kesby, 2007; Thomson, 2008) have advocated the development of novel, child-specific methods, I am convinced along with Alderson (2008) and others (e.g. Harden et al, 2000) of children's clear ability to participate in 'traditional' methods such as interviews, observation and discussion groups. Indeed, one result of the still relatively recent acknowledgement of children as active and agentic beings has been a recognition of their capability as participants in the research process. Thus I would argue that conducting 'empowering' research with children is less about developing new methods, and more about adopting new methodological *approaches* that enable the researcher to 'start from children's lives' (Epstein, 1998: 32). My concern prior to entry into the field, then, was with how children's voices and experiences might best be foregrounded in the research, as well as how my 'situatedness' as researcher might contribute to (and potentially disrupt) the imbalance of power between myself and my participants.

One positional approach that attempts to address precisely these issues is Nancy Mandell's (1988) 'least adult role', which advocates that the researcher relinquish all adult signifiers except physical size in order to enter into children's worlds as an 'active, fully participating member' (1988: 433). Using this role during my pilot study, I found it to be a productive means of engaging with children 'on their level', minimising

my heightened power as adult, and creating informal spaces for the discussion of gender and sexualities (see also Epstein, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Abebe, 2009). Further, having become acutely aware during my pilot study of the fundamentally situational nature of children's productions of gender and sexuality, the least adult role represented an important means of accessing certain situated performances, in particular those that were not made visible to teachers or other 'official' adults in school. Indeed, when discussing the findings from my pilot study, I have often used the following extract (which I return to more critically later) to demonstrate the significance of this role in enabling access to children's private, 'counter-school' worlds:

(In response to my asking the group what they would think about a boy who played with dolls)

Conor: I'd pretend to be his friend, and play a game with him, but then/

Dylan: /when he walks away, we'll just run away/

Adam: /or when he goes to the toilet just hide his dolls or something.

Adam: I'd hoy it on the shelter on the/

Dylan: /hoy them in the toilets!

Jamie: You do realise that if this wasn't Catherine you wouldn't be saying this to a teacher would you. (Boys aged 7-8, cited in Atkinson, 2013: 20)¹²

ii. Doing least adult: benefits

Throughout the majority of the fieldwork process, my commitment to enacting least adulthood was considerable. As well as being known by my first name, dressing informally, and distancing myself from teachers and other 'official' adults in school, I also joined in lessons, sat on the carpet during lessons and assemblies, ate dinner at children's tables in the dining hall, and participated fully in games and conversations on the playground and field.

¹² See p. 7 for key to transcripts



Figure 11. Exercise books, Newhaven

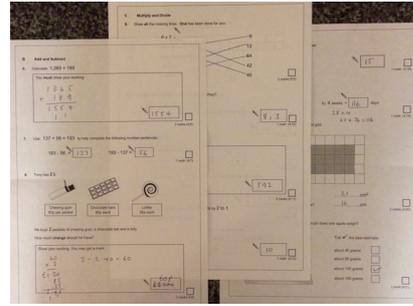
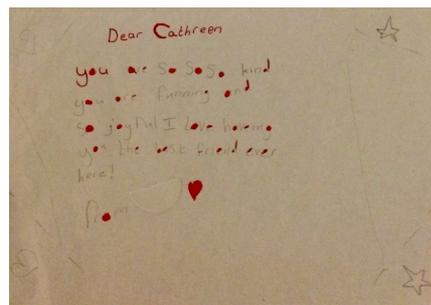


Figure 12. Maths test, Eastfield

Whilst during the very early stages of fieldwork these behaviours were met with amusement and suspicion from children, I felt as the research progressed that my position as least adult became accepted and embraced by many, if not most, participants. Whilst clearly it was not possible to relinquish adulthood completely, there were numerous ways in which children signified an acceptance of my role and saw me as distinct from other adults in school. In the case of the card, below – given to me by an eight-year-old girl at Eastfield with whom I had established a particularly close friendship – the description of me as ‘the best friend ever here’ makes clear the friendly and equitable, as opposed to more normative, hierarchical relationship that we shared. Significantly, the card that this child gave to her class teacher on the same day described him as ‘the best *teacher* ever’ (my italics), signalling a clear differentiation in the way she viewed the two adults (friend/teacher) in her class:



Figures 13-14. Card from child at Eastfield

I would argue in light of such moments that there were a number of ways in which the least adult role was productive. Most notably, it enabled the development of relatively equitable, non-authoritative relationships with participants that helped in the creation of informal, peer group research spaces. Within these, children ‘open[ed] up to me in ways which do not usually happen with teachers’ (Epstein, 1998: 30) and discussed

various subjects (gender, sexuality, sex, relationships, misbehaviours, friendships, fallouts) that were far less likely to be broached with 'official' adults in school. Further to this, being 'least adult' played a significant role in the development of friendships between myself and children, which not only helped in the creation of informal research space, but also contributed to children's own enjoyment of the research process. As 'least adult', children included me enthusiastically in their games and peer groups, referred to me as their (sometimes 'best') friend, and expressed their happiness at my presence in school:

During playtime, I danced around the yard singing the 'Chocolate Lake' song with Russell and Ray, who appear to have almost completely accepted me as their classmate. When a child from another class came up to ask me for help with something, Russell told them, laughing, 'she's not a teacher!!'

...

Spent the morning floating the paper boats we'd made earlier in the week, and chatted to Russell about how I was sad to be leaving their class (he had been expressing disappointment about me leaving). He responded supportively, 'yeah, but at least you'll make lots of new friends!' (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 10-13/03/15: Class aged 7-8)

The enthusiasm that children showed towards both the research and their relationships with me was not only gratifying, but also significant in terms of ensuring mutuality in the research process. Although fieldwork undoubtedly served my interests more than theirs, I would suggest that children's clear enjoyment of the project (which I believe was aided significantly by my position as least adult) went some way to 'foster[ing] reciprocity and [overcoming] inequality' (Barker and Weller, 2003b: 41) during fieldwork. Rather than being seen to monopolise or waste children's time for my own purposes, my presence in school was clearly enjoyed, and thus to a certain extent benefited participants as well as myself (albeit to differing degrees).

Notwithstanding these benefits, occupying the role of 'least adult' was not easy, and over the course of a year in the field I became not only exhausted by its multiple challenges, but also critical of what I came to see as its many inherent pitfalls. Throughout the remainder of this chapter I focus on what I consider to be the key

limits of least adulthood with regard to four broad themes (Mis/behaviour; Participation; Resistance; and Vulnerability), and conclude that the fundamental problem with this approach is its misconceptualisation of the workings of power.

iii. Doing least adult: challenges

a. Mis/behaviour

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of being least adult, and the one that first pushed me to consider the limits of the role, was negotiating children's mis/behaviours¹³ during discussion and story groups. Motivated by a desire to foreground children's voices and minimise my own 'heightened power', I approached these groups with the conviction that they should be fundamentally non-authoritative, child-led spaces for discussion. Thus, following a recap of the nature and aims of the project, I began groups by restating my 'non-teacherly' role (reminding participants 'I'm not here to tell you off') and assuring children that 'no topics were off limits' (Renold, 2005: 13). Whilst most discussion groups were productive in various ways, some – as a result of both this non-authoritative approach and, perhaps, an unnecessary overstating of my positionality – became so out of control that I found myself in states of total exasperation, and bafflement as to what to do. During these sessions, children ran and jumped around the room, talked and shouted over one another, and swore excessively, whilst I agonised about how and whether to intervene, and about the effects of these behaviours on the quality of my data. Having (naïvely) been unprepared for this particular challenge, I spent the early stages of the research process responding to such 'misbehaviours' in a largely makeshift and unsatisfactory manner. Sometimes I asked (or rather, begged) children to calm down, whilst at others I offered imperatives such as "the Headteacher is right there!" or "we don't want to get in trouble!" in an attempt to quieten the group, whilst maintaining a 'least adult' position through the suggestion of shared culpability. During some of my most fraught moments, though, I regretfully found myself 'snapping' at children, or worse, telling them off. These moments were met with justified indignation from participants ('you said you weren't

¹³ It should be noted that the idea of 'misbehaviour' is subjective, and depends on certain normative understandings of childhood, as well as of the relationship of authority and submission between adults and children.

a teacher!'), and made me feel – both during, and for days afterwards – that I was failing at doing research (see also Horton, 2008).

It was during this time that I began to think deeply about some of the limits of least adulthood. Was it possible to simultaneously be least adult and conduct discussion groups, without these groups descending into chaos? Was there any empirical use in half an hour spent trying, and failing, to calm down a hyperactive group of children? Was it even ethical to let children 'misbehave' to this extent? (Were all children enjoying the 'misbehaviour'?) And how least adult was I, really, if children still considered swearing in my presence to be such a novelty?

More than this, these groups pushed me to reconsider some of the ways in which I had been conceiving of power up until this point. Indeed, like many others within the 'new sociology of childhood' (see Gallagher, 2008), I had been imagining power broadly as 'a commodity that is possessed by certain groups (e.g., adults) and not by others (e.g., children)' (ibid: 137), with my employment of least adulthood representing an attempt to 'hand over' my disproportionate adult power to child participants. I had therefore been unprepared for the multiple ways in which children might 'exploit, appropriate, redirect, contest or refuse' (ibid) my research techniques, with their ability to subvert and manipulate my 'adult power' made clear throughout groups in which I was rendered relatively powerless. Michael Gallagher (2008: 137) provides a thorough critique of such 'problematic oppositional model[s]' of power in his discussion of participatory research with children, and draws on Michel De Certeau's (1988) distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics' to elucidate the ways in which dominant 'adult' power might be subverted by children 'from within'. Applying De Certeau's formulation, adult power over children (particularly within the context of the school or classroom) can be understood as a 'strategy', or dominant mode of power that is able to produce and impose spaces in which to act, where 'tactics', conversely, can only manipulate or subvert strategic power from within:

[A strategy] is the calculation of power relationships that becomes possible when the subject of a power...locates itself within a place of its own. By contrast...a 'tactic'

describe[s] a calculated action that does not have a place of its own. 'The space of the tactic is the space of the other' [De Certeau 1988: 37]. (Gallagher, 2008: 145)

Within this framework, children's discussion group 'misbehaviours' might be understood as enactments of tactical power, with my least adulthood and related refusal to 'tell children off' representing an opportunity to rail against the strategic (adult, institutional) powers to which participants were normally subject. Through these resistances, children revealed themselves not as wholly powerless, as I had (somewhat subconsciously) imagined, but rather as able to tactically manipulate power 'from within', and in complex and unpredictable ways.

Gallagher further emphasises the importance of avoiding a romantic conceptualisation of children's resistant tactics, noting that these 'may involve the oppressive colonisation of resources from weaker groups' (2008: 146; see also Shilling and Cousins, 1990) and the mobilisation of other available power strategies. Such colonisation was evidenced clearly during discussion and story groups during which inequitable power dynamics existed between children themselves, with more dominant (usually male) participants using these groups as sites for the enactment of oppressive behaviours. In the excerpt below, for example, Andy, Adam, Mike, and Dan employ dominant power strategies to police the non-normative gendered behaviour of Laurel, a boy with long hair:

Adam: [To Laurel] I think you're a girl (loud laughter)

Laurel: I think you're a crazy woman!

Andy: He hasn't got long hair though! Like you!

(I try to calm Laurel down, who is trying to fight everyone)

Adam: Mrs- Mrs Johnson [Laurel's surname]! (laughter) Mrs Johnson/

...

Andy: Look he's got eyeshadow on like a girl!

CA: So, what's it like- (overtalking, laughter)

Laurel: I'm not a gi::rl!

Andy: Yeah y'are

Adam: Miss Johnson.

Mike: Hello woman/

- Dan: /((Fiercely) don't act like one then (laughter)
- CA: E:r, what's it like being a boy/
- Laurel: /fun. Beating up Adam, is fun
- Dan: The thing about, being a boy is like, people don't judge yu- how y'look unless y'look like Laurel (laughter)/
- CA: /oh come on, that's harsh
(Laurel dives across the table to fight Dan)
- CA: Laurel! Careful, or we won't be allowed to use this room (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

The issue that arose during interactions such as these was that of whether, where and how to intervene. Was it more important to challenge emotional, or physical, discord between children (see Keddie, 2000), and in what way should this be done? Should a least adult positionality be maintained whilst doing so? And if so, how?

Largely, in the case of verbal or emotional fallouts, I chose to side with the group's 'underdog' in a manner that intimated my disapproval of unkind behaviour whilst at the same time maintaining a non-authoritative positionality. For example, my comment above ('oh come on, that's harsh') attempts to make clear my support for the 'victimised' child whilst using shared language ('harsh' was a term often used by children during arguments) to maintain my affinity or 'equal status' with participants. Following these groups, though, I was pushed to consider the possibility that by refusing to exert more definitive adult power in these moments I had enabled other dominant powers to be exercised, where in the excerpt above, Adam et al use my 'least adult' position as an opportunity to enact other dominant power strategies. In Gallagher's (2008: 146-7) words, 'had I approached the project with a less romantic view of children's agency as inherently benign, I might have decided that a stronger mobilisation of an adult power strategy...could have been justified here as a tactical resistance to the enactment of male domination'.

Further, and significantly, I did feel compelled to abandon least adulthood in the case of physical violence, and when Laurel (above) responded to the others' teasing with (tactical) punches and hair pulling, I definitively stopped him out of concern for the physical safety of the children 'in my care'. Following this group, though, I found

myself troubled by my response to these enactments. Indeed, how fair was it of me to regulate Laurel's physical, but tactical, exercise of power more fiercely than the rest of the group's emotional, but strategic and dominant, ones? And how, indeed, can I claim least adulthood when I had the power to regulate children's behaviour according to what I deemed acceptable?

Despite feeling sure of the need to intervene in these instances, I still felt, having set out to be fully and permanently least adult, that succumbing to adulthood in such moments represented a significant personal failing (see also Keddie, 2000). Troubled by this, I decided to seek advice from other more experienced researchers on how best to manage such 'failures', and found myself both challenged and surprised by their responses. Alongside a justified scepticism towards the least adult role, there also appeared to be a general consensus that the setting of ground rules in discussion groups was an absolute necessity, with one researcher describing having enacted least adulthood during her own research whilst also always setting ground rules (or encouraging children to set their own) at the start of any structured discussion. Whilst ultimately I found the setting of such rules ('we can't be mean to each other', 'we can't share each other's secrets') to be a practical and ethical necessity, I nonetheless remained dubious about how least adult it is possible to be if adult-researcher power must always be used to regulate the limits of peer group behaviour.

b. Participation

Equally as challenging as this issue of participant 'misbehaviour' was negotiating the limits of my own behaviour as least adult participant-observer in school. As one of the tenets of ethnographic research is that ethnographers will immerse themselves in the world of their participants and share in local cultures and languages (see Barker and Weller, 2003a; O'Reilly, 2012), my time in school was spent participating fully in children's day-to-day lives in a manner that allowed a depth of insight into their in-school worlds. Whilst such 'straightforward' participation was fairly uncontentious (although still not without its challenges), significant issues arose when deciding where to draw the line with regard to 'misbehaviours' in school. Given that a significant part of what I was interested to explore were the workings of gender and sexuality in children's informal cultures, it was important to participate in these in order that my

role be cemented and further access and insight gained. However, when cultural behaviours comprised rule stretching or breaking, participation became a significant practical and ethical challenge, and placed me in difficult situations with teachers and parents. Indeed, maintaining good relationships with teachers whilst simultaneously aligning myself with explicitly anti-teacher or anti-school sentiments proved a difficult tightrope to walk.

In addition to some minor 'misbehaviours', such as writing notes at the back of the classroom and playing in 'out of bounds' areas of the playground, there was one 'critical incident' (Tripp, 1993) in particular that pushed me to consider at length the terms and limits of least adult participation. The details of this incident are laid out in the following extract from my fieldnotes, and reveal not only the risks inherent in participatory least-adulthood, but also the fluid rather than fixed nature of adult-child power relations, which are 'prone to slippage' (Barker and Smith, 2001: 145) and subversion over the course of research ('I'm telling on you!'):

Following [Tyler et al's] discussion group [all aged 9-10], I returned to class and started packing up for the end of the day. Tyler, not for the first time this week, began trying to take my notebook from me, which I couldn't let him read as it contains fieldnotes that reference other children by name. In the spirit of the discussion group we'd just had, where children had been swearing freely as well as trying to 'out-crude' one other and me, I said – in an attempt to signify firmly that he couldn't read my notes but without positioning myself as adult/authority figure – 'C'mon Tyler, don't be a dick'. Tyler looked shocked, and then said, in a tone of amusement/triumph, 'you just called me a dick!' He paused briefly and then clarified (upon realising that he had been using similar language in our discussion group, as well as regularly on the playground?) '...in the class! I'm telling on you!' In a state of panic, I got up and left the room as I heard Tyler go off to tell Lauren [the class teacher]. For about five minutes, I sat in a toilet cubicle, heart pounding, in a state of total indecision as to what to do. I decided I would return to the class and own up, explaining to Lauren that it was an attempt at least adulthood. When I returned, though, (by which time the children had left to go home) Lauren told me with a look of total disbelief, 'Tyler just said to me, "Catherine just called me a dickhead"', in response to which, Alison [the other year five class teacher, who had joined Lauren for a chat in her classroom] laughed and said 'I'm going to go out on a limb and say that's probably not true!' Thrown by this reaction

(and by the presence, and *absolute* disbelief, of both class teachers) I panicked, and despite having fully intended to own up, denied it. I then muddled my way through the rest of the conversation and left school full of regret, wondering: what if Tyler goes home and tells his parents? What if he gets in trouble for lying, which he didn't? What if I am discovered later as having said what I said and denied it?

...

How should I have managed the ethical complexities of this researcher/participant relationship? Where do I draw the 'least adult' line? How do I successfully navigate this 'inbetweener', dual world positionality? (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 20/03/15)

Following an agonising weekend spent debating how best to redeem this situation, I returned to school the following Monday morning and confessed my lie to Lauren, Alison, and George (Newhaven's Headteacher). All three teachers were (admirably) supportive, and understood that this incident – albeit misjudged – represented an aspect of the positionality I was attempting to maintain. It was agreed that if Tyler were to mention what happened, he would be told how sorry I was and that I had 'got into trouble' for my behaviour: satisfying in-school expectations of fairness and discipline whilst simultaneously maintaining my least adult position. As it happened, Tyler never mentioned the incident again to any teachers, although he did speak to me and to other children about it over the following months, which gave me the opportunity to apologise to him, and in fact earn some useful kudos from other (impressed!) groups of year five children...

This incident stands as a prime example of some of the practical and ethical challenges of being 'least adult', and exposes the vulnerabilities that can characterise this position, as well as the shifting relations of power between myself and my participants. Consistently unconvinced by my role and presence in his school, Tyler used this moment as an opportunity to employ tactical power 'against me' ('I'm telling on you!'), and as somewhat threatening 'leverage' over the following months (for example, signalling at me across the classroom or playground to indicate: 'I'm watching you'(!)). The relationship between myself and Tyler, then, '[cannot] be reduced to the powerful and less powerful along essentialised lines of difference' (Holt, 2004: 15), but should be understood rather as shifting and multivalent, where generalised (strategic) systems of adult dominance '[do] not preclude multiple points of resistance and

confrontation at which children are able to exercise power over adults' (Gallagher, 2008: 143).

As well as complicating my previous conceptions of children as always relatively powerless, what was also significant about this incident was the questions it raised around the limits of least adulthood, as well as the social norms that remain intact in (even norm-critical or queer) childhood research. When speaking to other researchers in the weeks following, I found not only that some were deeply shocked that I had sworn with a child, but also that many (who spoke of having occupied least adult roles themselves) confessed to having never dealt with the issue of swearing because children had never sworn in their presence. Such revelations pushed me to question the extent to which these researchers can be said to have enacted least adulthood, as well as the limits of the role more generally. If children chose not to swear in these instances because it was made clear by the researcher, explicitly or implicitly, that doing so would not be tolerated, then what was being enacted was not least adulthood. And yet also, if the researcher placed no (implicit or explicit) limits on swearing, but still no children swore in their presence, then perhaps something greater was being revealed about the 'ever-adult' nature of the adult researcher. Indeed, as I came to realise, 'one can resist these discourses but it is impossible...to step right outside of them' (Epstein, 1998: 30). Thus, whilst it might be the case that these researchers all happened to work with children who simply never swore (unlikely!), a more probable explanation is that despite the researchers' intended positioning, they continued to be read by children as 'adult enough' for swearing to remain out of bounds.

c. Resistance

This 'inescapability' of adulthood manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout my research, with the first of these relating to the manner in which I continued to enact adulthood unintentionally. For example, unlike children, who had to remain in the classroom for the duration of a lesson, I was allowed to leave without permission whenever I chose, and walk around school unattended. Sometimes I was required to wear a fob or visitor's pass, which children recognised as an 'adult' item, and questioned. At lunch (despite my continued requests to the contrary) I was always

given a china as opposed to plastic plate, and a larger portion of food. And perhaps most notably, I was allowed to take groups of children out of class unaccompanied for discussion and story groups. Children themselves noticed these inconsistencies and challenged them, and over time I became increasingly aware, and critical, of the contradictions inherent in the role I had chosen to occupy.

Further to these fairly subtle contradictions, there were also a number of more obvious ways in which my adulthood revealed itself and at times prevented me from participating in certain activities. Whilst I often joined in PE, for example, it was clearly not possible for me to get changed into a PE kit in the classroom or, indeed, wear a PE kit (or school uniform) at all. I used the adults' toilets as opposed to the children's, which whilst inevitable, likely precluded interesting insight into school toilets as spaces for often regulatory peer group behaviour (see e.g. Rasmussen, 2009; Ingrey, 2012). Whilst these enactments of adulthood might seem obvious or banal, they nonetheless represented further ways in which the role contradicted itself, and again children challenged these contradictions ('why aren't you getting changed?') whilst trying to make sense of – and sometimes refusing to accept – my somewhat confusing positionality.

Of all of the role's difficulties, though, by far the most challenging were the moments during which children interpellated me as 'teacher' despite all of my efforts to the contrary. At intermittent moments throughout the year-long fieldwork process, children with whom I was convinced I had established a completely non-teacherly status would ask me to intervene in a fall out in the playground, or call me 'Miss'. One lunchtime, I was playing what I thought was a definitively 'non-teacherly' game of '20 questions' with someone I believed I had established a child-like friendship with, only to discover that the 'teacher' she was trying to help me guess was myself. Another time, amidst a raucous discussion in the lunch hall about girlfriends, boyfriends, dating and dumping, one child told me enthusiastically, 'you're the best teacher ever!' And yet another time, having told a child that I had got lost trying to find the toilets, I was drawn a map for next time, with 'staff toilets' clearly labelled:

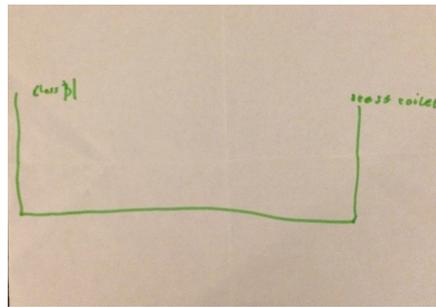


Figure 15. Map

More so than any of the role's other challenges, it was being positioned as 'adult/teacher' despite all my efforts to the contrary that gave rise to the greatest feelings of personal failure. Each time a child called me 'Miss' my heart would sink, and I found myself responding to these unwanted interpellations by effectively resisting children's resistances: telling them 'I'm not a teacher, remember', and insisting that they accept me as 'one of them'. However, over time this insistence began to feel uncomfortable, and I started to question the feasibility of rejecting this positioning, as well as the ethical justification for insisting children accept my role. In asking to be accepted as least adult by children who challenged this positionality, wasn't I enacting dominant adult power to project onto them an unwanted researcher/participant relationship? Was I, in Gallagher's (2008: 137) words, 'unwittingly reproduc[ing] the regulation of children by insisting upon certain forms of participation, in the belief that these constitute 'empowerment''?

Troubled by these resistances – and by my own responses to them – I began to recognise some of the ethical problems inherent in attempting to occupy any singular research positionality, in particular one that is researcher- as opposed to participant-defined. Further, in being interpellated continually as adult by children despite all of my efforts to the contrary, I was pushed to think about the escapability of subject positions more generally, and the extent to which any researcher can resist the organisational structure of their research site in the manner that the least adult role attempts to. Indeed, notwithstanding 'the multiple points of resistance and confrontation at which children are able to exercise power over adults' (Gallagher, 2008: 143), the adult/child binary is nonetheless one of the most rigid organisational structures in our society, and one that is perhaps most vehemently maintained within the space of the primary school. As such, it is not a structure that I have the freedom

to reject for the purpose of my research. 'Once "in the field" the researcher does not remain outside the social relations of the space being observed' (Katz, 1994 cited in Barker and Smith, 2001: 143), and in the school in particular, the discourse of 'adult as teacher' is a profoundly difficult one to resist (see Epstein, 1998: 30).

It was this realisation that pushed me to think again about the discussion group extract discussed above, in which Jamie asserts, 'you do realise that if this wasn't Catherine you wouldn't be saying this to a teacher would you'. It is clear from this statement that I am being recognised by Jamie as someone who is told things that other adults or teachers are not, and I am convinced that this 'telling' came as a result of the relationship I had developed with this group of children over time. However, is Jamie saying that I am not a teacher? In fact, he says 'if this wasn't Catherine you wouldn't be saying this to a *teacher*', the implication being that 'Catherine' is still a teacher, but not the sort that tells children off for things, or puts limits on what is allowed to be said. In this instance, though, (and as I came to realise, many others like it) being read as 'teacher' clearly did not stand in the way of being allowed insight into private peer group discussions. Thus, I wondered: is it perhaps the case that we as researchers occupy various positions on an inescapable adult/teacher spectrum? And is it our positioning on that spectrum – informed as much by commonality as by difference – that determines the level of access we are granted into children's peer group worlds?

d. Vulnerability, and a 'sense of failure'

This is an article written from a number of overlapping senses of failure... First, most simply, the small sense of failure that arises in/from ostensibly small, banal moments of angst, awkwardness, embarrassment, uncertainty, hopelessness, and so on – like my awkward silence in the face of children's racist, sexist, uneasy questions. Second, more broadly and persistently, the sense of failure and self-doubt which I find crowds my thoughts, dreams and reflections in the shadow of such moments (what was I thinking when I did X? Why didn't I do Y? What could or should I have done differently? Really, how can I be so hopeless?!) (Horton, 2008: 364; see also Rose, 1997)

Whilst by no means specific to the doing of least adulthood, the 'senses of failure' about which John Horton writes resonate strongly with my own fieldwork experiences, and in writing this chapter I was reminded somewhat painfully of the many times over the course of a year in school that I felt I was 'failing' at doing research.

In particular, this sense of failure manifested during my attempts to navigate the many ethical challenges, and related personal and professional vulnerabilities, that marked my time in the field. As least adult, I regularly found myself in the position of having to make improvised decisions regarding questions and behaviours from children, and often felt, like Horton, incredible self-doubt about the decisions made. Horton (2008: 364) opens his piece by citing a string of miscellaneous questions asked of him by a group of ten-year-old interviewees during his research:

...'you know that football song about Pakis?', 'do you beat people up?', 'do you have fights outside the football?', 'have you ever done it?', 'do you think (that girl) is ugly?', 'do you think (insert name of latest pop music starlet) is fit?'

Really, what do you say? (What should one say? What would you say?)

Moments such as these represented one of the most significant challenges of the research process, not least because my intended role as 'least adult' made it difficult to know how to respond to some children's genuine requests for information. In the case of a group of ten-year-old boys asking me how two men have sex, for example, I felt simultaneously reluctant to occupy the role of 'informant' (after all, I was not in school as an educator, let alone a sex educator) and compelled to share the knowledge that I have as adult in order to provide desired information and counter the in-school 'taboo' of homosexuality. In this instance, I was so concerned to avoid giving weight to the notion of two men having sex as unspeakable that I ended up giving the group a (probably inadequate) overview of anal sex, along with a somewhat hurried qualification about how 'people have sex in lots of different ways'. Whilst the children appeared satisfied with this explanation, I still left school that day feeling both nervous about potential repercussions from teachers and parents, and ashamed at having provided the group with what felt like relatively inadequate, and perhaps

essentialising, information. More generally, I was profoundly concerned about how my least adult positionality should have been negotiated in this moment, and the many others like it. Should I, for example, refuse to tell a five-year-old boy what breasts are (in response to him asking about my own), in order not to disrupt his understanding of me as least adult? Would doing so be ethical? And how do I justify some of the unintentionally essentialising aspects of my 'on the spot' answers to these questions ('they're something that women have')?! Was it right of me to answer 'yes' to the question of whether I had a boyfriend, feeling as I did that providing a truthful response was only fair, given that I was expecting children to be honest with me? Or did doing so compromise my least adulthood, and serve to confirm the heterosexist expectations that those children likely had of me as 'grown up female'? In dealing with these ethical dilemmas, I was, like Horton, plagued by a profound sense of uncertainty, in particular about 'what I should have done for the best in particular research situations...how I could ever know what to do for the best in such situations, and moreover...how to articulate all this, and myself' (Horton, 2008: 365).

No less difficult than negotiating these multiple ethical challenges was managing the vulnerabilities that came with reverting to the social status of 'child' (see also Thorne, 1993; Epstein, 1998; Barker and Smith, 2001; Gallagher, 2008). Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that adults in general occupy a more powerful social position than children, this relationship of power is not fixed, but 'constantly negotiated and prone to slippage' (Barker and Smith, 2001: 145), and it is still possible for the researcher to be 'rendered powerless, vulnerable and open to exploitation' (ibid). In occupying the role of least adult, I experienced both positive and negative relationships with children, and opened myself up to interactions from which a more normatively positioned 'grown up' might have been exempt. Whilst sitting on the carpet one day, I was asked by a five-year-old boy, 'do you *ever* brush your teeth?' and when I replied yes: 'then why are they so yellow?' Another time, an eight-year-old boy pointed at my legs, laughing, and said 'look how fat you are!' Though I was able to deal with some comments objectively (and consider their significance in terms of, for example, gender; age; power) I confess that the two described here caused me to go home and cry at the end of the school day. These experiences, whilst not reasons against the use of this role, draw attention to the significant emotional, as well as practical/ethical, challenges of

least adulthood, as well as to the often profoundly complex (and often unacknowledged) interplay of power between children and adults in the field.

iv. Reconsidering the least adult role

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, being least adult did enable the development of relatively equitable friendships with children, and provided a resultant depth of insight into peer group and counter-school cultures. Further, participating as least adult to the extent that I found myself in trouble for swearing enabled a more general questioning of some of the norms (particularly around adult/child power and related 'mis/behaviour') that have remained intact even in norm-critical childhood research. I would argue in light of this for the necessity within – particularly queer – childhood studies for greater criticality with regard to swearing and 'misbehaviour', especially given their significant relationship to peer group culture (and thus participatory methodologies).

With the benefit of hindsight, though, I am able to recognise that one of the most significant weaknesses in my enactment of least adulthood was my over-investment in trying to almost 'become' or 'pass as' a child (Epstein, 1998: 33). Having used the least adult role for my pilot study and finding it to be productive, I entered into the field this time with an urge to apply the role in its purest form, to test *just how far* I might disrupt power relations between myself and children and *just how much* insight might be made possible by a *truly* least adult positioning. The results of this, though, were having to negotiate extreme practical/ethical dilemmas and feeling probably unwarranted degrees of personal failure whenever my least adult status was questioned, not realising at the time that resisting adult-/teacher-hood entirely was a near impossibility.

More than this, I came to realise through my use of the least adult role that I had been working until this point under the assumption that 'power' was something that I had and children didn't. Whilst it is true that children are rarely in a position of strategic power in relation to adults (Gallagher, 2008), their ability to enact tactical power, as well as to exert other forms of dominant – for example, masculinist – power over their peers and myself was revealed clearly throughout the research process (see also

Walkerdine's (1990) 'Miss Baxter Paxter'). In its fixed positioning of 'adult as powerful' (Barker and Smith, 2001: 146), then, the least adult role not only over-simplifies the adult-child relationship, but also works under the assumption that power is almost wholly negative; a unitary force that needs to be expelled. Conversely, I have come to see power – operating at multiple levels between children, teachers, and myself – as both multivalent and productive, and I conclude in line with Gallagher that when it comes to emancipatory ethics, 'the question is not how to avoid using power, but how power can be used to resist domination' (2008: 147). Having recognised the relative inescapability of adult/teacher status – and the opportunities for insight that remain possible within it – I would advocate now for a research positionality that acknowledges both differences *and* similarities between children and adults, and that works 'with' these rather than against them (Mayall, 2008). Further, I would consider it justified in future to challenge some children's more oppressive interactional power strategies (e.g. in the instance of Laurel's group, above), whilst at the same time maintaining a neutral position in response to other, more abstract (homophobic, hetero/sexist) attitudes that provide crucial insight into gender/sexual workings in school. In line with Birbeck and Drummond (2005), I view the role of 'participant adult' – wherein the researcher positions themselves as concerned to learn from children, without either ignoring their own adulthood, or assuming children's 'powerlessness' – as a more valuable place from which to bolster children's voices. Further, I would argue for the need for childhood researchers to remain attuned throughout fieldwork to the 'multiple, multivalent power relations' that operate in their research sites (Gallagher, 2008: 145), and to be open to shifts in researcher positionality in line with such workings. Specifically, this entails a recognition of various forms of (tactical and strategic) power as accessible to children, whilst simultaneously maintaining an understanding of power strategies as largely colonised by adults.

v. Conclusions: Childhood, method/ology, and power

This chapter has situated my research in relation to both methodological frameworks and theorisations of power, beginning with a discussion of issues around 'ethics' in childhood research. In particular, I identified some of the key debates within the 'new sociology of childhood' as having centred around children's capacity to understand, participate in, and consent to social research, and argued for a recognition of children

as capable (but, like adults, *contingently* agentic) social actors: able to participate meaningfully in a range of (not only 'child-specific') research method/ologies. Following this, I discussed each of my research methods in turn, situating these within a broader ethnographic framework that sought a depth of insight into the multiple lived realities of primary school children (and teachers).

The second half of this chapter focused in some depth on issues of power and positionality in research with children, and identified Nancy Mandell's (1988) 'least adult role' as being one that – whilst in some ways beneficial – fundamentally misconstrues the complex and contingent workings of power. I identified issues around mis/behaviour, participation, resistance, and vulnerability as further complicating my use of this role in the field, and closed by arguing for the use of research positionalities that at once foreground children's voices, and recognise the inevitably shifting power relations between adult-researcher and child-participant. Whilst challenging, it was significantly as a result of employing a positional approach of which I am now critical that I was able to develop a more nuanced understanding of power, identify some of the continued normativities that infuse childhood research method/ologies, and recognise that when it comes to childhood research:

...the question is not how to avoid using power, but how power can be used to resist domination' (Gallagher, 2008: 147).

Part II.

4. 'Girls', 'Boys', and the Gender Binary: An Introduction to Analysis

CA: Mei why did you think boys and girls were quite different?

Mei: (Thinking) Emm, because, boys, are boys and girls are girls.

Alice: Yeah that is true. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

...children learn to take up their maleness or femaleness as if it were an incorrigible element of their personal and social selves. (Davies, 1989: xii)

Given the centrality of binary conceptualisations to children's understandings of gendered 'intelligibility' (see Davies, 1989; Goffman, 1969), it should have perhaps come as little surprise to find that the gender binary – encapsulated by Mei and Alice, above – was central to constructions and regulations of girl- and boy-hood at both Newhaven and Eastfield. Indeed, even when gender stereotypes were being challenged, the inseparability of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' from 'boy' and 'girl' bodies remained incorrigible, and the notion of girls and boys as separate and opposite – almost two different species (Jackson 1999; see Mark, below) – permeated interactions across both schools. Almost always, children sat together in same-sex clusters on the carpet, chose another child of the same sex for pair activities, avoided being the 'odd sex out' on tables or in groups, and regulated behaviours of other children that threatened to disrupt the binary order. Though children identified themselves in various ways, identifications were almost always primarily gendered, and this was understood – despite the actual diversity that underwrote productions in practice – in terms of clear and impermeable distinction:

When we go back to class, children sit where they want and in doing so split the class evenly into a girls' and boys' half. This is almost always the case – when choosing partners, lining up, or sitting at tables/on the carpet, girls and boys are separate. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 24/03/15)

There is a boy using the water fountain in the hallway. A girl passes and tells him, laughing, "that's the girls' one! That's the boys' one!" (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 08/10/15)

Mark: If w' make a line, girls there, boys there

[...]

Mark: Um, adults there. Babies there. (Laughter) cats there. Dogs there. Rabbits there. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

The fact that these binary conceptualisations endured despite some of the anti-essentialist work occurring at Newhaven might be seen as inevitable, given the evident difficulties associated with translating deconstructive politics into legible pedagogic practice (see Chapter 2). Indeed, as Davies (1989) notes, adults' attempts to challenge gender inequalities amongst children tend not to be concerned with troubling the fixity of the gender binary, but rather with 'rejecting the negative side of femininity for girls...and the negative side of masculinity for boys' (ibid: xi), an approach that arguably characterised some of the more 'liberal pluralist' interventions of *No Outsiders'* teacher-researchers (see Chapter 8). The problem with this approach, Davies argues, is that it fails to recognise that 'these qualities themselves are key signifiers of dualistic maleness and femaleness. Children cannot both be required to position themselves as identifiably male and female and at the same time be deprived of the means of signif[ication]' (ibid: 23).

Further to children's own productions, the language and behaviour of teachers contributed equally to the shoring up of the gender binary. At multiple points throughout the school day, teachers not only interpellated (Althusser, 1971) children as 'girl' or 'boy', but also positioned 'girlhood' and 'boyhood' as opposites. Girls and boys were regularly set at odds with one another as part of teachers' classroom management strategies, and gender norms were reinforced through teachers' interactions with children and each other:

When leaving the class for break, [teacher] asks everyone to sit smartly, and then asks 'who's going to be the smartest? The girls or the boys?' Komi looks at one of the girls competitively and says "boys". (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/02/15. Class aged 5-6)

After English, Georgina tells children 'ok girls – ladies first'; one boy is conspicuously outraged. She also regularly tells off 'boys' or 'girls' as a whole (e.g. for not listening) when really she's referring to just two or three children – children are thus categorised

by sex to the extent that the actions of the individual implicate a whole group, and vice versa. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 23/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

Arguably one of the most universal, and insidious, ways in which teachers interpellated children as gendered, though, was through simple, regular use of the phrase 'boys and girls' (see Bloom, 2014). Not only did this almost invariably position boys 'first', but it also worked to inform children that their 'boyhood' or 'girlhood' was what most centrally defined them. With the notable exception of one class teacher at Newhaven, who explicitly cited her involvement in *No Outsiders* as the reason for not doing so (see Imogen, Chapter 8), teachers' use of the phrase 'boys and girls' was consistent across both schools, working both to locate children as essentially (and hierarchically) gendered, and problematise those whose gendered productions lay outside binary categorisations ('and boys with long hair!', below):

Went to assembly and listened to [teacher] read George's Marvellous Medicine. Noted 'boys and girls' used 6 times in around 3 minutes. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 30/04/15)

'Boys and girls' was used 49 times by Diana that I recorded throughout the day, and 4 times during short recorder lesson with external music teacher. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 29/09/15. Class aged 5-6)

When going outside, Georgina tells the class 'ok if you're a girl, go and get your stuff'. Adam shouts 'go on Laurel!!!' [a boy with long hair] to great amusement, and Andy chips in: 'girls, and boys with long hair!' (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 27/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

i. Gender monoglossia and heteroglossia

Whilst binary conceptualisations permeated understandings and doings of girl- and boy-hood, what was striking was the actual diversity that underwrote these supposedly fixed constructions. Throughout my time in school, I became increasingly struck by children's (and teachers') apparent ability to maintain binary understandings whilst simultaneously observing or enacting gendered productions that revealed these to be fictitious. Whilst in reality children exhibited a range of non-normative gender performances that belied the authenticity of a gender dualism, 'boyhood' and

'girlhood', and their associated characteristics, continued to be understood in oppositional terms. Like the townspeople in the story of The Emperor's New Clothes, children seemed invested in maintaining a charade that revealed itself persistently to be untrue.



Figure 16. The Emperor's New Clothes

Below, for example, Sophie sees no contradiction in her simultaneous transgression and regulation of the gender binary, policing Agwe's anti-normativity by positioning 'gentleness' as definitively 'female', before going on to describe herself as a 'tomboy' who dislikes pink (despite pink being a defining feature of girlhood):

Robert tells me that 'boys like wrestling, that's really important to us'. Agwe disagrees: 'not for me, I'm more gentle' to which Sophie responds derisively, 'yeah you're more like a girl. I'm more like a tomboy'. She then tells me 'girls like fashion, pink and makeup. Except, I don't like pink'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 18/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

At a later point, Lucy manages to maintain a dualistic understanding of normative girl/boy behaviour despite participating in that very moment in a mixed-sex activity that reveals this dualism to be untrue:

Sitting on the field making daisy chains with Lucy, Jevaun, and Julian [ages 5-6], I ask if many boys make daisy chains. Lucy responds with surety, 'No. They're for girls'. Jevaun objects, 'they're not just for girls!' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 22/04/15)

It was this disjunction between the *notion* and *reality* of gender – this 'remarkable capacity to keep the idea of the dualism intact by ignoring individual deviations'

(Davies, 1989: 20) – that led me to understand children’s productions in terms of Francis’ concepts of gender ‘monoglossia’ and ‘heteroglossia’ (Francis 2008; 2010; 2012). The gender binary – itself a monoglossic construction or ‘façade’ – represented such a totalising force that the reality of heteroglossic subversion was powerfully subsumed or invisibilised. As Francis observes, ‘gender monoglossia appears to be able to present itself holistically, masking contradiction and dissonance even where these are evident’ (2012: 7). Thus, despite productions being shot through with diversity, the power of the monoglossic order was such that contradictions did little to disrupt understandings of gender as dualistic, hierarchical, and collectively owned (Davies, 1989).

The following two chapters explore some of the ways in which the ‘monoglossic façade’ of binary gender was produced and maintained by children in spite of the heteroglossia that underwrote almost all gendered productions, and considers how a range of ambiguous and shifting signifiers were drawn on in children’s ‘doings’ of girl- and boy-hood. Whilst these chapters are organised under the headings ‘boyhood’ and ‘girlhood’, I use these categories not to perpetuate a ‘superstructure’ model of gender with sex at the base (see Hawkesworth, 1997; Francis, 2008), but rather to demonstrate the enduring power of the girl/boy dichotomy, which fundamentally shaped constructions of gender in school:

It seems important to explain that...sex difference is here conceived as discursively produced (Butler 1990, 1993). Yet I assert the need to retain such distinction as a point of analysis to facilitate identification of continuing discrimination and inequality according to ‘sex’... It would be most accurate to refer to ‘those discursively constructed as male’ in place of ‘boys/men’, and ‘those discursively constructed as female’ in the female case; yet this is extremely clumsy, hence I have retained traditional terminology, with this explainer. (Francis, 2010: 481)

Following these explorations of ‘Boyhood’ and ‘Girlhood’ I move in Chapter 7 to a discussion of ‘Sexualities’, beginning with an exploration of (hetero-)romantic school cultures, and moving to a discussion of the significance of formal equalities work in rendering *non*-heterosexualities speakable, legitimate, and ‘real’. Finally, Chapter 8 explores the attitudes of teachers and *No Outsiders* project members towards gender

and sexualities in general, before considering the particular significance of *No Outsiders* in informing understandings of 'conceivable' equalities pedagogy.

5. Doing Boyhood

i. Male as default

I think the problem about uh gender is just girls. It's not so much boys. Cos I feel happy just, being a boy. (Ian, Newhaven, age 8)

Over the course of my ethnography, I became increasingly struck by the seemingly 'default' position that boyhood occupied in children's language and interactions (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Francis and Paechter, 2015), with Ian's comment, above, encapsulating the 'marked' or 'problem' position of girlhood in contrast to easy, unquestioned maleness. In addition to teachers' regular use of the phrase 'boys and girls' – which worked near-constantly to position boys 'first' – there were a multitude of other ways in which boyhood and girlhood were located respectively as '[universal] subject' and 'other' (de Beauvoir, 1972; Walkerdine, 1990), with each of the excerpts below encapsulating the unquestioned, everyday nature of such positionings:

[Teacher] draws a pencil case on the whiteboard and asks children for examples of items to put inside. When adding the items in, all inanimate objects (rulers, pencils, rubbers) are male: "there he is"/"I'll just pop him in there". (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 03/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

The class is given a writing task based on the single line: 'the kangaroo's secret'. When feeding back, I notice that the kangaroo has been assigned male by all children, as well as the class teacher ('what might his secret be?'). During the next exercise, the author of the passage being explored is presumed male ('how did he describe his characters?'), though when I look into this later I find that the author is a woman. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 17/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

Characters on worksheets, fictive animals, and inanimate objects were almost always presumed (or explicitly) male unless stated otherwise, and disruptions to this presumption resulted in a confusion that seemed to stem from the unexpected 'gendering' of previously 'ungendered' (that is, male) objects or characters. Indeed, given that boyhood's 'default' status necessarily afforded it invisibility (see Patai, 1992;

DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c), girlhood – representing in these moments ‘the only gender’ – took on a heightened visibility by effectively ‘gendering’ characters or objects. In the extract below, for example, Mr. Booth introduces a new book to his class that features a monkey as one of its central protagonists. Before going into any detail about the character (or gender) of the monkey, Mr. Booth asks the class ‘what she might be good at’, in response to which the class demonstrate how a discourse of ‘male as default’ has effectively proscribed their ability to read this character as a girl:

Mr Booth introduces a new book, and when covering the main characters, asks about the monkey: ‘what might she be good at?’ There are immediate whispers around the class: ‘is it a she or he? Mr Booth is it a boy or a girl?’ Children are acknowledging here a disruption to male as default – unless given reason to believe something is one gender or the other, it is assumed male. When gendered as female, there is confusion. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 09/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

In other instances, the delimiting effects of male-as-default were more concrete:

During the rugby session, the coach refers to both players and referees as ‘he/his’ throughout, and all examples given/people in the videos shown are male. Matt asks, ‘can women play rugby?’ The coach replies ‘yeah there’s some really good women players.’ Another boy then comments, ‘rugby is more rough so there’s more men’, to which the coach counters ‘have you seen a women’s rugby match? It’s pretty rough, I don’t know if I could handle it’. Jacob laughs ‘yeah that’s cos they fight!’ Luke adds, laughing, ‘yeah they bitch slap... like, “oh no girlfri::end!”’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/06/15. Class aged 9-10)

Here, the coach’s persistent use of ‘he/his’, alongside exclusively male video clips and examples, has had a tangible impact that results in Matt wondering whether or not women/girls can play the game. Although the coach works to assure Matt of women’s abilities – noting the skill and ‘roughness’ of women rugby players – some damage has still been done. ‘Default male’ discourse has not only led Matt (and presumably others) to question the relative abilities of ‘non-males’, but has also created a space within which the notion of women in rugby as ‘laughable’ is given weight (‘yeah they bitch

slap'). In greater and lesser ways, the discourse of 'male as default' shaped and delimited understandings of gender across both schools.

ii. Boyhood as better

One is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other...a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair. (Butler, 1990: 30)

In addition to occupying a seemingly default position, 'boyhood' was also understood by many children as the 'better' sex, able to do and achieve more, unshackled by the restrictions inherent to girlhood. As has been demonstrated consistently elsewhere (see Reay, 2001; Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005), the notion of boyhood as superior, and girlhood as necessarily inferior and 'contaminating' (Thorne, 1993) permeated many discussions and interactions in school ('Boys rule this world, girls stink!' (Finley, Newhaven, age 6); 'I would like to be a boy, because boys, do more stuff and have more money' (Robyn, Eastfield, age 6); 'obviously boys are better' (Jacob, Newhaven, age 10)). Thus, boyhood was not only produced through various supposedly 'masculine' signifiers, but also through the necessary repudiation of all things female and 'lesser' (see Pascoe, 2005). Thus, short hair not only signified maleness, but also worked to repudiate 'long haired' femininity, whilst strength and activity were not just inherently 'male' characteristics but also the antitheses of 'weak' and 'passive' girlhood. The following discussion thus serves to demonstrate not only how boyhood was constructed (and, often, valorised) by children, but also how girlhood was constituted as 'lesser' in the process. I begin here with a note on 'ethnicity' and 'class', before discussing boyhood's various 'material' constructions. I then move in the second section to a discussion of boyhood (inter)action, focusing in particular on gendered doings of 'friendship' and 'play'.

iii. 'Ethnicity' and 'class'

It is important to note that whilst I was attuned throughout the research process to differences in gendered and sexual doings across intersections of 'ethnicity' and 'class', my findings revealed gender and sexuality discourses to cut across almost all

demographic divisions, structuring the inter/actions of children of all ‘classed’ and ‘ethnic’ backgrounds. Second to White British friendship groups (unsurprisingly prevalent given the make-up of my sample) the most notable ‘grouping’ that occurred along lines of ethnicity was that of South Asian boys at Eastfield (see Appendix D). However, these groups were not homogenous (see for example Jaaved, Brad, Raajih and Amir, below) nor did they preclude additional friendships and relationships outside of these core ‘clusters’. Equally, the significantly ‘classed’ and gendered demographics of Jaaved and Ray’s friendship groups, below, warn against readings of (e.g. predominantly South Asian) friendship groups as primarily ‘ethnically’ structured:

| Eastfield | | | | |
|---------------|---------|---------------------|---------------|---------|
| | Name | ‘Sex’ ¹⁴ | ‘Ethnicity’ | ‘Class’ |
| Year 3 | Jaaved | M | Bangladeshi | MC |
| | Brad | M | White-British | WC |
| | Raajih | M | Pakistani | WC |
| | Aamir | M | Pakistani | WC |
| | | | | |
| | Ray | M | White-British | MC |
| | Joe | M | White-British | MC |
| | Russell | M | White-British | MC |
| | Shane | M | White-British | MC |
| | Renee | F | White-British | MC |

Figure 17. Excerpt from demographics, Appendix D

Whilst there were some notable ‘working-class and ‘middle-class’ clusters across both schools, then, constructions of gender and sexuality did not differ in any substantive way across these groups. Further, there were many more friendship groups that comprised children from different class and ethnic backgrounds than there were those comprising the same (see Appendix D), and seemingly homogenous ‘clusters’ (above) were not wholly demonstrative of children’s more varied interactions in practice (‘we::ll I play mostly with Russell but then sometimes, I play tag with Kara [W]¹⁵ and

¹⁴ I use ‘sex’ here rather than ‘gender’ to reflect the fact that ‘male’ and ‘female’ are identity categories allocated in this instance by parents/the school, rather than self-identified by children or reflective of individual ‘gender expression’.

¹⁵ White.

Amelia [W] too and Fatima [SA]¹⁶ and Fariah [SA] and they're, all girls' (Ray, Eastfield, age 7)).

Perhaps most notably, my findings do not corroborate previous research that has revealed the denigration, 'feminising' and sexual 'Othering' of South Asian boys in UK schools (see Mac an Ghail, 1988; Reay, 2001; Connolly, 2002), and instead reveal South Asian boys as equal – and at times dominant – participants in the field of heterosexual relations. Each of the extracts below, for example, demonstrates the active role played by both White (W) and South Asian (SA) boys in constructing and negotiating cultures of hetero-romance. With (hetero) gender norms appearing largely to override 'ethnic' delineations, these excerpts reveal girls *and* boys from White and South Asian backgrounds as occupying equal positions on the heterosexual playing field:

- Pete [W]: Aqib [SA] did kiss Bella [W]! (laughs)
Zuraib: Yeah cos she- she was y'girlfriend now she's broke up with yu!
Aqib: No I broke up with he::r, I broke up with her
Zuraib [SA]: (Laughing) yo:u had a gi::rlfriend yo:u had a gi::rlfriend
Pete: And Labeeq's [SA] girlfriend is, Aadita [SA]! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)
- Pete [W]: I've got, actually, two girlfriends!
CA: Have you?
Pete: Uh huh it's/
Zuraib: /Ling [Chinese] and Robyn [W]!
Pete: Ling and Robyn (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)
- Ray [W]: Um um, but so. But Farid [SA] and Alec [W] are fighting over Amy! [W]
Fariah [SA]: Yeah because, Farid wants to marry Amy, and Alec wants to marry Amy so!
Ray: But nobody knows who Amy wants (DG, Eastfield. Boys and girls aged 7-8)

¹⁶ South Asian.

Equally, Black and ‘mixed-race’¹⁷ boys across both schools appeared to occupy similar positions to White boys regarding gender and sexuality constructions, and contrary to Connolly’s (2002) findings, it did not appear to be the case that Black boys in particular were constructed as ‘hyper-masculine’ (2002: 97), nor used as markers of ‘social [heterosexual] capital’ by girls (2002: 106). Indeed, each of the extracts below sees Black African [BAFR] and ‘mixed-race’ [MWBC – Mixed White-Black Caribbean] boys staking equal claim to participation in hetero-relations, and positioned alongside (rather than above or below) their White peers in girls’ discussions of boyfriends and ‘desirability’:

Oliver [W]: But I actually do have a girlfriend. (Laughter)
 A few: Me too!
 CA: Who’s your girlfriend Oliver?
 Oliver: Mei! [Chinese]
 Jevaun: My girlfriend’s Ellie! [W] (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Poppy [W]: I’ve got a boyfriend!
 CA: Have you?
 Poppy: Komi [BAFR]
 [...]
 Rachel [W]: Komi is my boyfriend as well! I’ve got six boyfriends/
 Poppy: /yea::h William [W]
 Rachel: (Laughing) Willia::m, Jevau:n [MWBC], Olive::r [W], Ni::ck [W] a::nd, Komi!
 Poppy: That’s five boyfriends! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Whilst processes of gendered and sexual Othering did inevitably occur, these appeared to be organised along various lines of ‘difference’ (e.g. size, gender non-normativity, ‘culture’) that were far from exclusively ‘raced’, and I did not observe the systemic Othering of boy or girl pupils on the grounds of either ‘ethnicity’ or ‘class’ (although more girls than boys were ‘objectly’ positioned, as I discuss in the opening to Chapter

¹⁷ I use this term to reflect the schools’ own demographic markers (‘Mixed White-Black Caribbean’ and ‘Mixed White-Asian’) whilst remaining critical of its reductivity (see e.g. Ifekwunigwe, 2004).

6). It is for this reason that I do not single out 'ethnicity' or 'class' in my analysis, though my choice of pseudonyms does allow a broad insight into the demographic make-up of friendship group interactions. Rather, the following pages serve to demonstrate the largely similar ways in which discourses of gender and sexuality were negotiated, resisted, and reified by children across both schools, with 'gender' (and relatedly, heterosexuality) appearing broadly to precede and/or override other axes of identity.¹⁸

I. Looking Like a 'Boy'

- C: Why do you think boys and girls are different?
- Rachel: Because boys got short hair and girls have got long hair. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

One of the clearest ways in which the symbolic boundary between 'boyhood' and 'girlhood' was constructed by children at both Eastfield and Newhaven was in discussions and enactments of physical appearance or 'looks'. Across all discussion groups, short and long hair were cited as defining features of boyhood and girlhood respectively, and the wearing of skirts, dresses and makeup were understood largely as incompatible with intelligible 'maleness'. The incorrigibility of these gendered signifiers is encapsulated by Rachel, above, who demonstrates an unshakeable conviction that girls and boys *looking different* is 'part of what is 'obvious and known to everybody'' (Davies, 1989: 2; see also Goffman, 1969). As Davies (ibid) notes:

In learning the discursive practices of their society children learn that they must be socially identifiable as [male or female]... Dress, hairstyle, speech patterns and content, choice of activity – all become key signifiers that can be used in successfully positioning oneself not only as girl or boy, but also as identifiably *not* the other.

¹⁸ The relative lack of diversity in my sample (see Appendix D) should nonetheless be recognised as delimiting insight into the more complex ways in which 'ethnicity' might have operated in a less White British-dominated context.

It therefore came as little surprise to find that physical male/female signifiers occupied a central role in 'marking' boy/girl bodies as intelligibly gendered. I begin here with a discussion of how 'looks' were normatively conceptualised across both schools, before going on to explore the myriad ways in which such conceptualisations were underwritten by heteroglossic subversion, in both theory and practice.

i. Normative conceptualisations

Across all six of the classes that I worked with, all but two boys (Tanish and Laurel, discussed later) had short hair, and equally few wore – in school at least – items that transgressed expectations of normative boyhood. At both schools, 'hair' and 'clothes/makeup' were some of the key ways in which children made sense of people as male or female, with short/long hair (and associated signifiers like combs and hair accessories), alongside makeup, dresses, and skirts, being some of the most frequently cited symbols in discussions and enactments of gender:

CA: How can you tell if someone's a boy or a girl?

Scott: (Laughing) boys- boys/

Mark: /what about girls' hair!

Scott: Boys, boys have, short hair and the girls have long hair! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

CA: Jay why d'you say ew [in response to boys dressing as mermaids]

Jay: Cos men don't wear girls' stuff!

CA: Men don't wear girls' stuff?

Jay: Only girls wear girls' stuff and boys wear boys' stuff. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

It became clear during such discussions that hair and clothes/makeup represented not just symbols of gender, but constitutive features of girl- and boy-hood, working to physically define bodies as 'one or the other'. In each of the extracts below, for example, the inscriptive power of these symbols is revealed in their ability to write and re-write bodies as gendered. For Eric, the sex of the body that he is drawing is effectively reconstituted through the simple removal of 'long hair and flowery boots', whilst for Lucy, 'boys [wearing] girl clothes' is equated with 'boys being girls':

Eric and Tom are colouring in nature workbooks as part of a task. Eric tells me, 'look I turned that girl into a boy, I traced it and got rid of the long hair and flowery boots'. I ask, 'do they still have the flower in their hair?' He answers matter-of-factly: 'No. It's a boy now'. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 15/07/15. Class aged 9-10)

If boys wear girl clothes, they will be silly. If girls wear boy clothes, they will- we will be silly, if boys *are girls*, they will be silly! (Lucy, Newhaven, age 5, my italics)

Such was the significance of these symbols in marking bodies as gendered that transgressions were understood as a disruption to the intelligibility of the body as a whole (see Steph, below), and an indication of a 'crossing-over', or hybridisation, of the gender binary ('He's a girl'/'He'd be a boy-girl', below). Jess' assertion, below, that she '[does] not want them to have long hair' is indicative, further, of the notion of gender as 'collectively owned' (Davies, 1989: 31), necessitating policing from others to maintain the binary order:

CA: Right? Why would you not like that?

Jess: Cos I've never seen them before like that and I do not want them to have long hair/

Steph: /and if they had that they would have really weird teeth and face and legs and mouth- and bones (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: So what if there was a boy in your class who wanted to have really long hair?

Hugh: E:::w!/
/

Jay: /(With surety) he's a girl.

Patrick: He'd be a boy-girl with- with just hair here and long hair here. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

CA: Or a boy who wore a dress what would you think about it?

Luke: He's a girl! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Because the distancing of oneself from a concern with physical appearance was key to constructions of 'normative' boyhood, hair and clothes were discussed in matter-of-fact rather than celebratory terms (cf. girls, Chapter 6), and it was their distinctness from femininity, and association with greater freedom and activity, that rendered

short hair and 'boy clothes' key to productions of 'masculinity'. This collective repudiation of 'feminine' concern with looks, and (albeit joking) valorising of 'masculine' ease and physicality is encapsulated by Dan, Andy and Mike, below:

Dan: Boys don't care what each other wear, it's like, cos girls all/

Andy: /a:r you're ugly!

Mike: Well that's why you're a girl Andy/

Dan: /nar cos girl- girls are always like, (high pitched, posh voice) oh my god don't touch me, u::r y'little peasant! (laughter) but then boys are like... if they don't like, what somebody's wearing they like, stop them, swear at them, and then punch them in the face. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Hair and clothes' significance in maintaining gender monoglossia was made clear also in children's numerous 'rememberings' of people who had transgressed established norms, with all such incidents referencing efforts made to render this 'transgressor' intelligible. The two examples below describe a remembered and imagined incident respectively, yet encapsulate the same set of confusions with regard to 'boys with long hair'. Both children are unsure of how to describe such a person: Kara uses the pronoun 'it', whilst Ray – despite having been asked what he would think about a 'boy' with long hair – describes the child as 'him... or her'. Crucially, both children are explicit about the disruption long hair causes to their ability to 'make sense' of a person as male, and the subsequent 'moral imperative' (Davies, 1989) felt to 'find out':

Kara: Em once I went to the park and then I saw someone. A kid who had, hair up to here but it looked like a boy so I didn't know if it was a boy or a girl so I went and asked them and they went, why do you need t'know that? Then they just went, obviously I'm a boy! (Laughter)

CA: Mm hm?

Kara: But they had long hair!?! (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

CA: So what- what would everybody else think about a boy with long hair?

Ray: I would, I would just go up to, him... or her and ask, are you a boy or a girl cos y'seem to be a girl cos y'have long hair. And he'll- and he might go, no I'm a boy! Why did y'ask! And I'll say oh, I'm quite... Sus- suspicious! If he's a girl or a boy. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Similarly, below, the long-lasting confusion caused by others' transgressions is made clear in Freya, Ellen and Mona's discussion of a boy 'wearing a butterfly top', with Mona's insistence that the remembered man 'must have been a girl', alongside Freya's stumbling over gendered pronouns ('when she- when he'), revealing the ability of 'the material' to both inscribe and disrupt the sex of the body (see Francis, 2012; Francis and Paechter, 2015):

Freya: We went on the bus one day and we came back from town, and there was this, man, eh- it might've been a woman but it looked more like a man (laughter) and, he had- he was wearing, a butterfly top and stuff/

Ellen: /a:r my god/

Freya: /with, pink all over it and/

Mona: /it must have been a girl/

Freya: /when she- when he went up the stairs, he had a really big butt and he was like, twerking up the stairs (laughter) and I was like, are you a boy or a girl!?
(DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Whilst Freya attempts to establish the man's intelligibility by asking 'are you a boy or a girl?!', Jaaved, below, makes his 'transgressor' intelligible through the process of writing him into an understandably 'masculine' narrative (being 'under cover'). Although this enables Jaaved to characterise a boy wearing lipstick and a dress as justifiable ('they'll protect me!'), the 'troubling' nature of this production nonetheless remains unquestioned ('probably die. Faint.')

CA: Ok! So what if there was a boy in your class who wanted to wear lipstick, or wanted to wear a dress/

Jaaved: /he would be under cover!

CA: Mm hm?

Brad: What if y'go like this (deep, raspy voice) are you under cover kid! (Laughter)

Raajih: E::h, I'd say, you're too weird for me. I'm not, gonna be your friend

Brad: Chuck him out the window

Jaaved: I would! Cos they'll protect me! We'll be good together!

CA: And what do you think your teacher would think?

Jaaved: Em. I dunno. Probably die. Faint. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

In addition to these processes of 'sense-making', what was also striking was the hyperbolic nature of many of these discussions, with the phrase 'big fat long hair' (below) – alongside the characterisation of a male friend's (imagined) hair as being 'around the whole school' – reflecting the 'surplus visibility' (see Patai, 1992) ascribed to long hair on the body of a male. The addition of 'boobies' serves to further feminise this production, whilst the laughing description of William's hair as 'absolutely gorgeous!' reflects the perceived conflation of long hair and (by definition, female) 'beauty':

CA: So what would you think if there was a boy in your class with really long hair?

Dawn: I would be like this, (whispering) "look, at that big fat long hair" (laughter)

Rachel: Boobies! Big fat long tummy, and a big long fat hair.

CA: What would everybody else think about a boy with long hair?

Rachel: If a- if, William had long hair, all of his hair would be around the whole school!

Ooh (in a silly voice) 'absolutely gorgeous!' (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

This framework of 'excess' is revealed further in Adam's impersonation, below, of a boy who wants to wear a dress. Though I consider it possible that Adam is masking a genuine desire to 'dress up' here, my focus is on the role of hyperbole in his construction of the imagined boy as 'deserving of derisive laughter' (Pascoe, 2005: 239). Like the students in Pascoe's (2005) research, it is the fleeting nature of his impression that enables Adam to both invoke and repudiate the 'threatening spectre' (Butler, 1990) of effeminate boyhood, with his ultimate reinscription of the binary ('boys, can't dress up in things') and deflection of effeminacy onto someone else ('I would love t'see you in a dress') working effectively to cement his normative position in the gender order:

CA: What's not good about being a boy?

Adam: Em. I can't wear a dress! (Laughter) I saw a beautiful one in Primark! 50 quid! (Laughter) me mam said, you're a fucking boy man, you're not getting that dress!

CA: Right?

Adam: So my mam goes in and buys us it, gets it, then I put it on, I look like a girl I look like a fairy. So I play fairies with my brother!

CA: So would you like to wear a dress?

Adam: (Laughing) nah! Boys can't dress up in things, (addressing Mike) I would love to see you in a dress (laughter) (addressing Laurel) Definitely you! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Considering the extent to which normative expectations of 'appearance' permeated discussions and enactments in school, it followed that children spoke straightforwardly about the consequences that would face those who transgressed 'material' norms ('everyone would just laugh at them' (Jaaved, Eastfield, age 8); 'the boys would make fun' (Asiyah, Eastfield, age 10); 'it would be horrible' (Julian, Newhaven, age 5)). Recognition of the inevitability of bullying characterised discussions of gender transgression across both schools, and it was significant that children often simultaneously disapproved of, and participated in, fierce gender policing. Below, for example, Amy characterises a boy with long hair and painted nails as at once 'very weird', and entitled to his 'opinion and his life', recognising both his gendered 'wrong-doing' and 'individual rights' (see Davies, 1989):

CA: What if there was a boy in your class, who liked to maybe, paint his nails or have very long hair (Faria laughs)

Amy: Em, I would say, that's different- I would say, that's different to what boys normally do but it's your life so, you can choose

Fatima: It'd be weird

CA: Yeah?/

Fariah: /(Laughing) what a silly question!

Amy: I would think that, that's very weird but it's his opinion and his life. So he can do what he wants with himself. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

Equally, the excerpt below sees Tyler characterising gender regulation as the reserve of 'bullies', before going on to disapprove fiercely of Jacob's recently dip-dyed hair. Here, the coexistence of 'anti-bullying' discourse alongside vehement 'borderwork' (Davies, 1989) reveal Tyler's need to characterise himself as 'not a bully' (equivalent to

Amy's conviction of the 'rights of the individual') to be as unshakeable as the moral obligation of all boys to 'do masculinity right' (ibid):

CA: So what if a boy wanted to have long hair like all the way to here (points to shoulder)

Tyler: I would be a little bit scared for their health but...

CA: What do you mean?

Tyler: Cos if they went into [secondary school] they'll get beat. The sh- the sugar out of.

CA: Yeah?/

Tyler: /cos my brother beats the sugar out of people like that, and, he's a bully that's why. But I'm not.

...

Tyler: Why the hell would he dip dye his hair

Matt: Cos he said he did so he dip dyed it and it looks really dip dyed

Tyler: (Disgustedly) Well why would he do that. Y'know, I feel like strangling him for that

CA: Why?

Tyler: Cos he looks like a lass!

Josh: It's true! He does/

Tyler: /(rapping) y'know what mate. You're a loser. I'm gonna get yu. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

ii. Heteroglossic reality

Notwithstanding the significance of these conceptualisations, boys' productions were revealed nonetheless as underwritten by various forms of heteroglossic subversion, and despite the conviction with which children policed the 'looks binary', boys in both schools alluded to various ways in which they, and others, transgressed this in their actual 'doings' of boyhood. It was, however, through the policing, mitigation, and 'invisibilising' of such transgressions that children maintained impressions of monoglossic 'fixity'.

Perhaps the clearest disruptions to binary conceptualisations of 'appearance' were boys' transgressions within 'safe' or unregulated spaces outside of school. Indeed, almost all boys' discussion groups featured conversations about 'dressing up' –

currently, or in the past – and it seemed largely to be the learned unacceptability of such behaviour (rather than a lack of enjoyment in it) that regulated such counter-normative doings. Julian (aged 5) at Newhaven, for example, spoke enthusiastically about wearing nail varnish and skirts outside of school, and had a close friendship group of four other boys (below) who largely accepted – and participated in, to differing degrees – this counter-normativity. Even so, the limits placed on Julian’s transgressions (‘At school!?’/‘Pink!’, below) demonstrated the ever-presence of binary conceptualisations, even within otherwise ‘gender-troubling’ groups of friends:

Julian: I’ve only worn, a skirt once but I quite enjoyed it.

CA: And would you like to wear a skirt more?

Jevaun: At school?

Oliver: At school!?

Julian: Umm, yes. No I only like the ones, that are pink.

Oliver: Pink! (Laughing)

Julian: And purple. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

In spite of his enjoyment of wearing skirts, it was the inevitable regulation that he would be subject to by (particularly male) classmates that prevented Julian, and the rest of the group, from transgressing these norms in public. Thus, what made the group’s heteroglossic productions of boyhood ‘liveable’, (Butler, 1990; Francis, 2010) it seemed, was the relatively hidden nature of their subversions:

CA: So would you like to wear a pink skirt to school, Julian?

Julian: (Thinking) Mmm, no.

Jevaun: I think everybody would laugh at him.

CA: People might laugh?

Jevaun: Yeah boys.

Julian: It would be horrible.

...

Nick: /yeah because once when I came into school you could see- you could still see some nail varnish/

Julian: /yeah I saw Nick wear nail varnish/

Nick: /when Obasi saw it he said, boys aren’t allowed to wear nail varnish only girls.

(DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Whilst Julian's was one of the only persistently transgressive groups that I met, more fleeting confessions to 'dressing up' or wearing makeup featured across many other discussion groups ('I like to em, wear like this pink dress' (Agwe, Newhaven, age 10); 'I once weared Mini Mouse clothes!' (Hua, Newhaven, age 7)). Always, though, children were acutely aware of the repercussions of these subversions, and thus confessions tended to concede ultimately to overriding discourses of social unacceptability ('I looked stupid'):

Rob: I got my- I got my nails painted at my friend's party, which is a girl, so I did it for fun at her pa::rty, and I didn't like it

CA: Why didn't you like it?

Rob: Cos- well I liked it but- cos I looked stupid, and everyone was staring at me when I came out. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Unsurprisingly, effective regulation from others was one of the key ways in which such moments were prevented from significantly troubling monoglossia, and despite almost all discussion groups featuring intermittent talk of gender subversion, this was so regularly policed that it did little to disrupt prevailing normativities. In the conversations below, for example, Rob, Josh and Aqib reveal the instability of monoglossia in their discussion of long hair, nail varnish, and makeup, respectively. However, in their policing of these confessions (significantly, in each instance on the grounds that they reveal the boys to 'be girls') the group collectively ensures that the normative order is maintained:

CA:: Ok? So what if there was a boy in your class who had really long hair?

Jacob: (Gasps) there is one! He did have really long hair/

Rob: /yeah, I did it was like, in my mouth or summat.

CA: Right?

Luke: Cos he was a girl then (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

CA: What about, if a boy wanted to have painted nails

Josh: That's fine cos I used to/

Tyler: /nar/

Josh: /have blue nails (long pause) when I was little

Tyler: I'm going- I'm scared in case I'm gonna turn insane. From all these... girls

CA: From all these girls? Why?

Tyler: Yes. Josh is a girl if he likes bloody nail varnish

Josh: It was when I was in year one! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Aqib: Ok once, I put makeup on but not too much makeup just a little bit of makeup/

Zuraib: /n::o too much makeup!

Aqib: And then, I just wipe it off. I just put a like, like a/

Zuraib: /you're a girl/

Aqib: /someone just, do my makeup? One time but/

CA: /yeah? And who did that for you?

Aqib: Um, my cousin?

Zuraib: (Gasps) you a:::re, a girl! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

The power of such borderwork to negate heteroglossia was revealed equally in children's reflexive policing of their own past transgressions (see Jackson and Scott, 2010b), and those of their (often younger) siblings. Below, for example, the effect of Colin's self-deprecation, and Ella's despair at her brother – who she characterises as having failed to properly understand the binary ('no they were my clothes') – is to position such behaviours as laughable examples of 'doing gender wrong'. Thus, rather than troubling the binary by revealing the gendering of physical symbols to be learned rather than innate, these examples served instead to shore up monoglossia, and reaffirm its compulsory and punitive nature:

Colin: The one thing that I'm rea::lly embarrassed at. I'm rea::lly rea::lly embarrassed at something that I used to do when I was like, three! I used to put on these pink sparkly scarves (laughter) and go like (imitates 'camp'/'girly' dancing) da da da da daa!

...

Ella: /my brother used to have, this kind of thing, where he had a tutu on (laughter) and then he had pink leggings, and pink shoes, ballet shoes, and I was like what the heck you've got loads of, girly stuff on and he was like "ah yeah! Grandma gave me it!" and I was like no they were my clothes [...] he used to dance around like 'la la laa!' and I was like 'shut up!' (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Most often, though, it was its location within otherwise monoglossic enactments that allowed heteroglossia to exist without disrupting the wider gender order, with children's discussions of diversity occurring frequently within groups where gender normativity was otherwise rigidly maintained. Below, for example, Alberto, Dawei and Toby deride and feminise Noah for 'wearing lipstick', despite having discussed their own makeup usage moments earlier ('I once put nail varnish on/yeah me too I put pink/I put red on' (Alberto/Dawei/Toby, Newhaven, aged 7-8)). Despite recognising heteroglossia in their own performances, then, they nonetheless manage to maintain a monoglossic impression through ridiculing the transgressions of others:

Toby: Noah's got lipstick!/
Dawei: /I wish Noah/
Toby: /you've got lipstick!
Noah: It's no::t! It's lip ba::lm/
Dawei: /I wish Noah was a girl so he would have bigger boobies! (Laughter) (DG,
Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

At other moments, it appeared to be the somewhat 'tentative' nature of gender subversions that rendered them liveable, where shining too bright a light on a transgression could result in a forceful re-insistence of the gender order. This is encapsulated by Mark, below, whose particularly subversive boyhood was recognised, and policed, by various children throughout the research ('everyone calls me gay cos I've got a left earring' (Mark, Newhaven, age 7)). Despite opening with a confident claim to anti-normativity ('I dress up like girls!'), Mark responds to my (possibly misguided) reiteration of his statement ('you dress up like girls?') with vehement denial, shrinking quickly away from his confession like a tortoise back into its shell. For Mark, then, it appeared to be the relative 'visibility' of his gender transgression that determined its liveability, with my too explicit questioning – alongside regulation by other group members – resulting in a defensive return to the monoglossic order ('boys don't like girls'):

Mark: I dress up like girls!
CA: You dress up like girls?
Mark: (Shouting) I don't- n::o!

Scott: Boys don't wanna dress like a gi:rl!

...

CA: So, what do you think it'd be like to be a girl?

Mark: Em! I don't- don't talk about girls now! I don't- boys don't like girls. I- I don't like dressing up like girls now.

...

CA: Is there anything that you think would be good about being a girl

Mark: I don't like dressing up, like a gi:rl (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

It was predominantly, then, through drawing on more dominant monoglossic signifiers that children worked to override or invisibilise contradiction, with many children citing 'particularly significant tropes of gendered performance to promote an overall impression of monoglossic gender stability, and mask/distract from inconsistency' (Francis, 2012: 7). Such 'masking' was made most evident in the multifaceted gendered production of Obasi (age 5) at Newhaven, who struck me, in our first interactions, as a child who embodied normative, 'hegemonic' masculinity. In the eyes of his teacher and classmates, Obasi was a 'boys' boy' who fought, played rough, and policed others for their transgressions, and it is he that Nick cites above as having asserted that 'boys aren't allowed to wear nail varnish only girls'. Fascinatingly, though, Obasi's performance of gender was in other moments one of the most anti-normative of all of the children that I met, where below, he ignores Hugh and Jay's borderwork when insisting on his love of wearing dresses, and desire to be a mermaid on 'makeover island':

Obasi: I wanna b::e... I wanna be a lady!

Hugh: La:::dy Gaga!

Jay: Lady Gaga!

Obasi: Cos, a lady likes to buy dresses.

CA: And you'd like to have dresses?

Obasi: I like dresses.

CA: Yeah? D'you like putting on dresses at home?

Obasi: Yeah/

Jay: /e::w!/
...

CA: So Obasi why do you want to be a mermaid?

Hugh: Urrrrr mermai:id!

Obasi: Em, because, when y'go to makeover island there's lots of mermaids, and mermans/

CA: /what's makeover island?/

Obasi: /it means mermaids live there and mermans, because when the water is, if the water's bubbling/

Jay: /it's a merman.

Obasi: Em, I'm gonna be, a real mermaid. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Despite the counter-normativity that characterised many of Obasi's relatively private conversations, though, his 'front stage' (Goffman, 1969) doings of boyhood conformed far more closely to normative expectations. Indeed, Obasi's name arose regularly in other children's conversations about particularly regulatory boyhoods ('Finley and Obasi would definitely laugh at you [for wearing a skirt]... they hate girls' (Oliver, Newhaven, age 6)), and he was vehement in his regulation of others' transgressive gender productions:

Waiting to go home, Obasi asks Nick 'why have you got a purple water bottle?! It looks like a girl's one' then gets Patrick's attention: 'Patrick! Look it looks like a girls' one!' (Obasi and Patrick laugh loudly, Nick doesn't reply). (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 05/05/15. Class aged 5-6)

What became clear through Obasi's production was the capacity of hyper-masculine 'tropes' (rough play, borderwork, sexism) to override heteroglossic productions through an impressions of 'monoglossic gender stability' (Francis, 2012: 7). Indeed, it seemed for Obasi to be the vehemence of his 'front stage' hyper-masculinity that both enabled his subversive 'doings' to go unnoticed, and made heteroglossic 'boyhood', for him, liveable.

In addition to such relatively fleeting moments of heteroglossia, there were also three children in particular – Finn, Tanish, and Laurel – whose consistent transgressions of normative boyhood with regard to 'looks' warrant discussion in turn.

. . . *Finn*

Finn, whilst biologically male, appeared to successfully disassociate himself from almost all signifiers of masculinity (excluding, crucially, his short hair and 'male' school uniform) by being in a close friendship group with three girls; engaging in stereotypically 'girly' pursuits such as making daisy chains, gossiping and choreographing dance routines...[and] admitting, confidently and enthusiastically, to his love of 'wearing pink...playing dolls, [putting makeup on], draw[ing] fairies and hav[ing] a fairy castle'. (Atkinson, 2013: 44)

The above quote comes from the pilot study to my research, at which time Finn was 7 years old, in year three at Newhaven. Two years later, Finn's production of boyhood was no less subversive; he was still part of the same all-female friendship group and spoke often about his love of 'girl things' and rejection of normative boyhood. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the school put on an 'alternative' version of Cinderella in which Finn wore a red velvet dress, gloves, and a tiara to play the queen.

Whilst Finn's 'material' doing of boyhood was relatively normative – with short hair and 'male' clothes positioning him firmly as 'boy' – it was his overt enjoyment of dressing up and fervent desire to have long hair that led me to understand his gender production in terms of consistent, rather than fleeting, heteroglossia. Indeed, whilst most boys' discussions of dresses, makeup and long hair were mediated by self-regulation or subterfuge, Finn was unapologetic in his counter-normativity:

Finn: I wanna be a gi::rl! (Laughter)

Sophie: Why!

Finn: So I can grow long hair!

[...]

Finn: I hate being a boy

CA: Y'hate being a boy?/

Finn: /because y'can't grow long hair y'can't plait or anything. (DG, Newhaven. Boys and girls aged 9-10)

The fact that Finn so confidently embraced anti-normativity ('I love being different!') and yet continued to deny himself the experience of long hair seemed indicative of the particularly marked and punitive symbol that hair represented. For Finn, it appeared in part to be through adherence to the 'significant trope' of short hair that his otherwise consistently transgressive production of boyhood was made liveable. In spite of this, though, he still paid a price for his anti-normativity, and whilst it often seemed to be the 'strength of the group collective' (Renold, 2005: 5) that legitimated his 'difference', he was at times judged by friends, too, as transgressing one step too far ('that's a bit, dodgy'):

Ava: /people say like, eh he may be a boy on the outside but everything inside of him is a girl?

CA: Mm hm?

Finn: And that's just sexist!

Ava: I have t'say, he does wanna put on makeup, so... that's one thing that's a bit, dodgy. (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

Nonetheless, Finn's production of boyhood continued to represent one of the most confidently transgressive that I witnessed, something that I have suggested before (see Atkinson, 2013) as having likely been aided by his materially 'boyish' appearance, middle-class positionality, firm friendship group, and location within a school that formally celebrated difference ('it's got words on it that are meant to be, it doesn't matter if you're different' (Finn referencing a *No Outsiders* banner, cited in Atkinson, 2013: 45)). The extent to which he troubled the monoglossic order, though, is questionable, as Finn was largely understood by children and teachers to represent an 'exception to the rule' of normativity, definitively 'Other' in being both 'like a girl' and, likely, gay:

Tyler: If there was a gay person in my class, they always come around, following yu with like, (laughing) hips shaking... and if they were gay they'd like try and kiss yu and that and I'm like/

Luke: /like Finn?! (Laughter) (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

In a revealing conversation with me on the playground, Finn's teacher, Lauren, drew a comparison between Finn's gendered anti-normativity and a child she had gone to school with herself, who had only had one arm: 'I think he's just accepted. Like with that child we never really noticed until later- oh he only had one arm!' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 12/06/15). Although (somewhat) accepted, then, Finn's transgressive boyhood was clearly understood as existing outside a 'normal' framework of intelligibility, and though revealing of heteroglossia, was used ultimately to shore up the gender binary by acting as an arbiter of 'difference' against which monoglossic 'normalcy' was judged.

. . . *Laurel*

Laurel, on the other hand, lived a very different sort of counter-normative boyhood. He was ten years old, in year five at Eastfield, and one of only two boys with long hair across both schools. Aside from this, Laurel's production of boyhood was fiercely masculine: all of his friends were male, he valorised sport and physicality, repudiated femininity and homosexuality, and responded to taunts about his appearance with violence. For Laurel, being a boy meant mediating counter-normativity through vehement alignment with otherwise masculine 'tropes', but unlike with Obasi, this did not enable him to project an impression of monoglossia. Indeed, so antithetical was 'long hair' to 'boyhood' that Laurel was unable to be anything but hyper-visible (see Patai, 1992) in his transgression, and the cost that he paid for this was high. Indeed, in their different 'aesthetic' doings of boyhood, Obasi/Finn and Laurel made clear the significance of materiality with regards to the 'liveability' of gender productions (see Francis and Paechter, 2015), with Laurel's long hair rendering him ultimately unintelligible as 'male':

Adam: I think you're a girl (loud laughter)

Laurel: Well I think you're a crazy woman!

Andy: He hasn't got long hair though! Not like you!

(I try to calm Laurel down, who is trying to fight everyone)

. . .

Adam: Laurel!

Laurel: Yeah?

Adam: Mrs! Mrs Johnson [Laurel's surname]! (Laughter) Mrs Johnson/

Dan: /y'sound like a girl!

...

Andy: Look he's got eyeshadow on like a girl!

CA: So, what's it like- [overtalking, laughter]

Laurel: I'm not a gi::rl! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Despite the almost hegemonic version of masculinity that otherwise characterised his boyhood, having long hair nonetheless 'rendered [Laurel] 'impossible' by the violent, normalising power of [the monoglossic] account' (Francis, 2012: 6). Further, without the 'strength of the group collective' (Renold, 2005: 5) afforded to Finn, this 'impossibility' appeared to be far more painfully experienced, and Laurel was known for his short temper and violent outbursts, which I saw as stemming directly from the bullying he was subject to. Despite revealing the inessentiality of gendered signifiers, then, Laurel's heteroglossic boyhood served ultimately to bolster his classmates' conviction in the gender binary, by serving as a poignant example of doing gender 'wrong'.

... *Tanish*

As the only other boy with long hair across both schools, Tanish (Eastfield, age 5), experienced counter-normative boyhood in a way that was incomparably different from Laurel. With his long hair, 'pretty' face, gentle demeanour, group of all-female friends, and love of dresses and dolls, Tanish transgressed almost all signifiers of normative masculinity:

Tanish: U::m, I wish, I could come to school in a dress or a skirt with an alice band and pigtails.

...

Kate: You're quite a different type of boy

CA: Mm hm?

Kate: Cos you've got long hair of course!

Tanish: And I like girls' stuff

Kate: And y'like girl colours

Tanish: All of the other boys have short hair, and I'm the only one who has long hair.

(DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Though his behaviour was recognised in general as counter-normative, it was Tanish's long hair in particular that challenged the intelligibility of his 'boyhood' and placed him in a precariously gendered position in the minds of his classmates. Whilst at times children's mis-genderings of Tanish were intentional and malicious ('Sebastian teases me, he cackles and goes, HA HA you're a girl' (Tanish, Eastfield)), at other times it stemmed from a genuine confusion about the 'impossibility' of his gender performance:

Owen: So:me people... think Tanish is a gi::rl
Zimran: Because he's got quite long hai::r
Yacoub: And he's go::t like... em/
Zimran: /long hair
Yacoub: No em bobbles (laughs) the girl things
...
Zimran: /if someone... said to her, Tanish, is a girl-
CA: Then what do you think Tanish would think?
Zimran: She wouldn't like it?
Yacoub: Might upset her feelings
CA: Mm hm?
Owen: Isn't a her it's a he!
Yacoub:(Frustratedly) a::rh!
Zimran: Yeah! It's a he! Not her! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

Interestingly, for some of Tanish's friends it appeared to be the extent to which he was 'like a girl' that made his performance of gender legible. Indeed, whilst Aadita (below) conceptualises a boy with long hair who plays with dolls as 'crazy', she goes on to assert that the reason for Tanish not being 'crazy' is because 'he likes girl clothes and he looks like a real gi::rl'. Thus, whilst Aadita understands association with feminine signifiers as inconceivable in relation to 'normal' boys (to the extent that she assumes this hypothetical boy must have involuntarily 'turned into [a girl]') it was, conversely, because Tanish 'looks like a girl' – that is, conformed almost fully to one side of the binary – that she was able to make sense of his femininity:

CA: What if there was a boy who had very long hair or, liked to play with dolls?

Aadita: That would be crazy (laughter)

CA: Yeah? But we know that Tanish has long hair and likes to play with dolls?

Aadita: Yeah but he likes gi:rls (laughs)

Tanish: Yeah I always play with the girls

Aadita: And he likes girl clothes and he looks like a real gi::r! (Laughs)

CA: Ok? So why would it be weird for another boy, but it's not weird for Tanish?

Aadita: I thi::nk it might be because, they don't like being a girl cos they just turned into one! (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Significantly, though, by the time he was in year two, Tanish had cut his hair from shoulder- to chin-length, and though he told me that this was because it had started to 'get in the way', I wondered if it might also be that such a significantly counter-normative symbol had become less liveable as Tanish grew older. Indeed, many children spoke about transgressions in the past that they were unable to justify now that they were old enough to 'understand' (see Jackson and Scott, 2010b), and Laurel made clear the prices paid for being an older boy with long hair. Still, though, Tanish maintained his counter-normativity in almost all other respects, and it appeared again to be the strength of the group collective, his middle-class positionality, and the support of his parents ('my mum lets me dress up in her dresses') that made his heteroglossic production liveable. However, children's mis-genderings, borderwork, and characterisation of him as a 'different sort of boy' ensured that in spite of this, monoglossia remained firmly intact.

II. (Inter)Acting Like a 'Boy'

i. Friendships

Given the extent to which the notion of essential 'difference' characterised understandings of girl- and boy-hood in school, it followed that children's friendships and play were divided largely along 'sexed' lines. Although mixed-sex friendships existed in various forms across both schools, these were not just profoundly difficult to maintain, but also largely subsumed within broader conceptualisations of girl/boy play as clearly and incorrigibly distinct. The reasoning for this distinction is encapsulated by Ellie, Josie and Laya's discussion, below, wherein the separation of girls and boys is

understood as a logical extension of their categorical ('sex') difference (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1987). The assertion that 'boys play with boys [and] girls play with girls' is substantiated here with reference to other discrete categories – pictures, houses, hair, teeth – which are understood, albeit playfully, as equally different and thus separate from one another:

- Ellie: And girls play with girls
Josie: And boys play with boys!
Laya: And pictures play with pictures! (Laughter)
[...]
Josie: House play with house/
Ellie: /hair play with hair/
Josie: /teeth play with teeth! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Further to demonstrating binary conceptualisations of gender, such reasoning also reflected what Paechter (2007: 47) describes as the 'human urge to classify the world and to relate such classifications to oneself', with 'girl/boy' representing just one of many 'excessive certainties' (Atkinson, 2003: 4) learned as part of children's enculturation into the wider social order. Much like other social divisions, this categorical distinction represented a 'truth' that structured the relationship between girls and boys accordingly, with sex-divided play understood largely as a reflection of the sexes' near impermeable opposition (see also Jackson, 1999):

- Jay: I like to play with boys. With like Hugh and Obasi and Patrick.
CA: Why do you like to play with boys?
Jay: Cos I'm a boy. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)
- Oliver: Cos boys and boys play together/
Nick: /and girls and girls
CA: Yeah? Why's that?
Oliver: Cos they're different/
[...]
Oliver: They have different things, they have different eyes, they have different mouths, they have different nostrils, they have different ears, they have

different hair, they have different legs, they have different feet. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Far from a natural distinction, though, this notion of separateness revealed itself clearly as a learned aspect of children's enculturation into masculine and feminine 'communities of practice' (see Paechter, 2007): part of the ongoing reflexive process by which gendered selfhoods were constructed and reworked. Through rememberings of past mixed-sex friendships, in particular, children revealed, significantly, that 'rather than the past determining the present, 'the present significantly reshapes the past, as we reconstruct our biographies to bring them into greater congruence with our current [here, gendered] identities'' (Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]: 13, cited in Jackson and Scott, 2010b: 816). In such moments, then, mixed-sex friendships were drawn on as evidence of children's *developing* competencies: examples of their younger (now repudiated) gendered wrong-doings:

Hugh: Girls and boys used to play with us when we were only little. And Alice, Lily and Dawn used to play with me. In our class but, it's just, when we were only babies/

Obasi: /when we were babies. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Aaron: When I was in Nursery, I always, played with the girls

Zuraib: Yeah me too

CA: And do you play with the girls now?

Aaron: Not now just when we were little! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

More than just working to police girl/boy boundaries, then, such assertions of difference served as one of the means by which children evinced their knowledge of the gendered social order. Through reflexive interactional talk, legitimate girl- and boy-hoods were established in part through a collective demonstration of 'the rules of the game' (Paechter, 2007: 74), with children's repudiations of past, 'unknowing' behaviours serving to evidence their learned understandings of 'difference'.

It was in large part this profound sense of difference that characterised the majority of girl-boy interactions in school, and manifested not just through explicit separation, but

also more implicitly through children's positionings in relation to those of the 'same' or 'opposite' sex in interaction. Over the course of the research I became increasingly struck by the sheer regularity with which lines of difference were drawn, and found these to draw stark attention to the primacy of gender as an 'integral dynamic of social orders' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 147) in relation to which children worked near-constantly to orient themselves. When sitting on the carpet, lining up for lunch, choosing partners for class activities, or constructing characters for writing exercises (below), children would almost always align themselves with those of the 'same' sex, and through this alignment demonstrate an active negotiation of their place in the gender order. '[Drawn] along the dualistic lines of me/not-me, like-me/not-like-me' (Paechter, 2007: 52), such negotiations worked powerfully to reinforce the 'interactional scaffolding' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 147) of gender opposition:

Children are asked to pair up for a Maths activity and I notice, again, that the entire class has grouped itself according to sex. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 16/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

For English, the class are writing diary entries from the perspective of children during WWII. As children tell Ms. Connell about their characters, I notice that everyone has chosen to write from the perspective of a child of their 'own' sex, except Amy who has written as a boy. This is regularly the case in writing/acting exercises: whilst girls sometimes (but rarely) choose to write from a male perspective, boys never choose to write as girls. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 25/09/15. Class aged 7-8)

Such was the salience of gender as an organising category that opportunities were found to differentiate even in the most arbitrary of situations, and children would make seemingly random sexed distinctions at multiple points throughout the school day. Through asserting for example that 'girls like sentences and boys like spellings' (Josie, Newhaven, age 5), or responding to the question 'why are you two always chatting?' (Callie, Eastfield, age 10) with the answer 'because we're better than girls' (Connor, Eastfield, age 9), children revealed opposition to structure even the most neutral of behaviours and interactions. This revealed itself further in the regularity with which children across both schools simply noted the 'sexed ratios' of the interactions in which they found themselves, with Tracy's calculation of the number of

girls/boys in the room, and Harry's observation of himself as the 'odd sex out' (below) revealing gender's salience in both structuring interaction and informing children's sense of themselves as relationally (and oppositionally) defined:

During wet play, Tracy looks around the room and says (to no one in particular) "How many boys are in here? One two three four- and how many girls? One two three four five- five girls. Five girls and four boys." (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 15/07/15. Class aged 7-8)

Children from 3Y are joining our class for Maths and the first to arrive is a single boy: Harry. He looks around the room and notices that all of the 3B group are girls, then asks "can I sit on a chair cos I'm the only boy?" (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 11/06/15. Class aged 7-8)

Further to such observations, children also actively reworked these 'ratios' in order to alleviate the feelings of out-of-place-ness that came from being uncomfortably positioned in the gender order. Below, for example, both Zach and Damien position 'being the odd sex out' as unworkable, and thus physically move tables in order to maintain the gendered order of the classroom. Such reworking appeared to be particularly necessary for boys, who – as has been demonstrated elsewhere (see e.g. Thorne, 1993; Skelton and Francis, 2003; Renold, 2005; Paechter, 2007) – had to work especially hard to avoid association with contaminating and 'abject' girlhood (Butler, 1990; Pascoe, 2005):

Georgina tells me that children are sitting at new tables, which they've chosen themselves – all but one are single sex [Paige, Tracy, Zach and Mike]. I ask Zach later how he'd decided which table to be on, to which he responds 'well I was sitting with [all boys] but then I moved here because Mike was on a table full of girls'. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 08/07/15. Class aged 9-10)

Sat at a table with Maxine, Ava, Damien and Andy during English. After a while, Andy leaves the table, leaving Damien as the only boy. Almost immediately Damien shouts after him: "Andy why have you left me here with all the girls?!" and then, "I'm all on my own!! Come back!" After about a minute, he decides he can't stay on this table and

leaves to join Andy on the other side of the room. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 16/03/15.
Class aged 9-10)

As well as being reinforced by teachers (in particular through ‘boys versus girls’ activities, and the regular collectivising of children by sex), notions of sameness and difference were further bolstered through the interactional structures of the school itself, with toilets, in particular, representing poignant markers of ‘sex’ difference (see Browne, 2004; Salamon, 2006; Rasmussen, 2009, Blackburn and Smith, 2010). The regularity with which toilets emerged as a topic of conversation across both schools was itself evidence of their marked status; positioned by children as key sites wherein difference and ‘unknowability’ (‘what’s in the girls’ toilets?!) were maintained:

CA: So is being a boy quite different to being a girl?

Jonny: Yeah! Y’get to go in the girls’ toilets! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Ray: It is quite different to be a girl and a boy. Like, boys never go in girls’, toilets!
And I wanna find out what it’s like in the girls’ toilets!

Shane: Yeah, that’s quite a good question. (Thoughtfully) What’s in the girls’ toilets?!
(DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

So significant were toilets in marking difference that children conceptualised the crossing of toilet boundaries in terms of a significant disruption to the gender order, using them often as a symbolic tool with which to shore up the gender binary. Below, for example, Jonny’s (comedic) swapping of toilet signs in his previous school, and the symbolic weight given by Ryan to going in the ‘wrong’ toilet, work to both construct toilets as emblematic of gender dualism and position (gendered) boundary crossing as laughable and taboo:

Jonny: Catherine, in my old school I changed- I changed the girls and boys toilets!

Scott: What!

Jonny: I changed the labels!

Scott: Wha::t!

Jonny: Cos the girls was on that bit, and the boys was on that bit- and there was a boy in the- (laughing) and the girls found him! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

When lining up for lunch, I notice both boys and girls messing around/arguing near the toilets – Alan [aged 9-10] shouts at one of the girls (mockingly) ‘you do realise your hand just went in the boys’ toilets!?’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 18/05/15)

It was in large part through such processes of ‘separation’ that children (as well as teachers) maintained notions of essential gender difference, which worked to both structure and delimit interactions and friendships in school. Inevitably, though, such conceptualisations were underwritten by the heteroglossic reality of mixed-sex friendships in practice, which, though complex, existed across both schools in various forms. Despite their troubling potential, though, such friendships were largely ‘done’ in such a way that they effectively maintained the gender order – subsumed within a more powerful discourse of ‘boys versus girls’ – with many forms of mixed-sex play working to emphasise difference by positioning girls and boys in distinct and oppositional roles (‘boys chase girls and girls chase boys’ (Rachel, Newhaven, age 6), see also Thorne, 1993):

Aadita and Ling are arguing over which princess role they will play at lunchtime, and agree on Ariel and Cinderella. When I join them outside, I notice that Aqib is playing too, but in the role of Cinderella’s dog. Ling tells me ‘he’s the only boy so he had to be the dog’. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 12/02/15. Class aged 5-6)

Steph, Lily, Obasi and Jess spend all of golden time in the dressing up area: the girls are all putting on dresses from the ‘home corner’. I ask Obasi if he’d wanted to dress up, but he says no. Obasi is playing mums and dads, with Steph as mum. He keeps calling ‘aunty’ (Jess) and ‘mum’ (Steph) over to feed the baby and change it’s nappy. He tells Steph: ‘the baby’s pooed, mummy, can you get a nappy?’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 01/05/15. Class aged 5-6)

Further, children frequently made claims to single-sex play that effectively ‘masked’ their heteroglossic friendships in practice, and when asked to identify friends for class activities or discussion groups, almost all would name someone of the same sex, even if in reality they played often with both. Below, for example, Mason’s denial at having played with Aadita, and Rachel’s seemingly contradictory insistence that ‘girls and girls are friends’ serve to both ‘[maintain] the illusion of a monoglossic gender dualism’

(Francis, 2010: 486) and mask the reality of mixed-sex play 'through a process of submersion, refusal and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7):

CA: /so do you play with, girls in the class as well as boys?

Mason: (Shouts) NO!/
Caleb: /it's a lie he's played with- he's played with Aadita and she's a girl!

Mason: What! I have not been playing with her.

Caleb: Yes you have/

Henry: /you have, today! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

CA: So who do you usually play with?

Rachel: Wi::th Stephani::e and Je::ss/
Jess: /and Willia::m/
Rachel: /and Willia::m

...

Rachel: Because boys and boys are friends and girls and girls are friends

CA: But you said you play with William sometimes?

Rachel: No with girls. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

...

CA: But you said you play with William sometimes?

Rachel: No with girls. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

ii. Play

A somewhat inevitable extension of such 'separate' friendships were children's categorisations of play along lines of 'sameness' and 'difference', and whilst some playground activities included 'both' sexes (particularly in the lower year groups), children's play remained divided largely according to gender:

I've noticed that the climbing frame is always occupied exclusively by girls or boys, so ask April [age 9] about this. She tells me that teachers have officially assigned each year group a different day on the frame, but that unofficial girl/boy days have been decided on by children themselves. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 24/03/15)

Significantly – and corroborating numerous other studies (see for example Martino, 2000a; Kehler, 2001; Epstein et al, 2001; Ferfolja, 2007; Larsson et al, 2011) – football remained the most divisive of playground activities at both schools, and was fiercely monopolised by boys. Aside from some mixed-sex play in years one and two, playground football games were almost entirely dominated by boy-pupils, and

reflected both boys' perceived ownership of the game and their physical domination of playground space (discussed further in Chapter 6). Indeed, such was the centrality of football to definitions of boyhood that disinterest worked to position boys outside 'normative' constructions, rendering them 'other' to their comparatively masculine peers ('I think Tom struggles a bit because of, not liking football- he kind've has to find other people to play with' (Georgina, ages 9-10 class teacher, Eastfield)):

Ryan: I'm not ve- I'm not that keen on sports

Rob: I've told a lot of people that I don't like football and they're like (makes silly noise)

CA: What do people say?

Rob: Like, you're wei::rd. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

As with discussions of looks, above, transgressions of normative girl/boy play were regularly characterised in terms of 'crossing over' the gender binary, with 'boys who like to play with dolls', in particular, understood as representing a profound disruption to the intelligible gender order ('what?! They'd be a girl! (Laya, Newhaven, age 5)). This is revealed strikingly in the extract below, where Dawei speculates as to both the sexed embodiment ('maybe they used to be female?') and sexual orientation ('they might be gay?') of such an imagined boy-child. In so doing, he reveals both the supposed impermeability of the gender binary, and the perceived interrelation of (normative) gender and (hetero)sexuality (discussed further in Ch. 7):

CA: Right? What would you think if there was a boy who liked to play with dolls?

Toby: Disgusting.

Ian: Gross.

Dawei: They might be... gay?

Ian: They're probably stupid (laughter)

Ollie: They're probably a little bit/

Alberto: /cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Dawei: Oh! Maybe they used to be female? (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

As is made evident in this extract, the distinction between 'boys' and 'girls' play was far from unweighted ('disgusting'/'gross'), and there existed a general consensus

amongst children that ‘boy stuff’ was better than girls’ (Reay, 2001). Indeed, an integral part of ‘doing boy’ involved the vehement repudiation of inferior and ‘contaminating’ (Thorne, 1993) girlhood, and the sheer number of girlhood signifiers from which boys worked to distance themselves was striking. Whilst in reality boys’ interests varied far more than their monoglossic accounts would suggest, it was nonetheless through the collective repudiation of girlhood that *impressions* of fixed masculinity were maintained. The extracts below, for example, demonstrate the force with which symbols of girlhood were rejected (‘I hate fairies!’), as well as the fundamentally collective nature of these repudiations, which worked to silence the heteroglossic reality of individual boyhood productions (y’wanna be a ballerina!?’):

During assembly, Nora asks children to think about costume ideas for Red Nose Day, and mentions that last year some people had dressed as fairies. Many boys make faces of disgust in response to this. I decide to ask two boys [aged 5-6]: “are you going to dress up as fairies?” in response to which they clasp their hands over their mouths, laugh, and look incredulous. They tell me: ‘fairies are for girls!’ ‘I hate fairies!’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 03/02/15)

Children are brainstorming ideas for their topic-work, and Brad tells me he that he has decided to focus on Billy Elliot. Wyatt overhears this and laughs: ‘y’like dancing!?’ Y’wanna be a ballerina!?’ When the class feed back to Lauren about their chosen topics, I notice that Brad has changed his mind, and that no boys have chosen Billy Elliot as a topic. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 17/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

iii. ‘Characteristics’

As well as manifesting explicitly, such repudiations also revealed themselves more implicitly through children’s *relational* characterisations of boyhood. Across both schools, the most frequently cited ‘markers’ of boyhood were strength/physicality, bravery/stoicism, and naughtiness, and it was largely in relation to these areas of identification that normative masculinities were constructed and governed. Far more than any other markers, it was strength/physicality that children most regularly cited in their discussions and definitions of masculinity (‘more boys do sporty things than girls, because they have strong muscles’ (Alberto, Newhaven, age 7); ‘We’re stronger, so we’re best’ (Tom, Eastfield, age 9)), with the extracts below highlighting both the

centrality of strength/physicality to conceptualisations of boyhood, and the extent to which boyhoods were constructed against notions of (inferior, weak) 'femininity':

CA: Can you just tell me about being a boy?

Jamie: Em, awesome/

Tom: /you can climb, trees that/

Jamie: /yeah/

Tom: /girls can't climb (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

CA: /could you just tell me about being a boy?

Nick: I like i::t!

Julian: I like it cos we can run so fast, we can run faster than gi::irls.

Oliver: I like it that I'm the fastest boy of my friends!/
/I'm actually the fastest here/

Nick: /I'm actually the fastest here/

Julian: /I'm the fastest! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Such was the centrality of strength/physicality to conceptualisations of boyhood that children worked hard to maintain an impression of its universality in the face of evident transgression. Below, for example, Ryan's group confess to 'play[ing] with Barbie dolls', 'lik[ing] Disney princesses', and disliking football, and yet continue to both characterise girls and boys as 'very different' on the grounds of their binary interests, and position sport and 'roughness' as central to boyhood. Rather than serving as evidence of gender multiplicity, then, this discussion worked instead to shore up monoglossia, by positioning heteroglossic doings outside 'normal' (acceptable) boyhood constructions:

CA: So, Ryan why do you think girls and boys are very different?

Ryan: Cos they play with Barbie dolls and/

Chris: /I play with Barbie dolls/

Ryan: /yeah but no- no, girls um, girls like- girls like Barbie, Disney Princesses, all- all that girly stuff. Boys on the other hand, like um/

Agwe: /(indignant) I like Disney princesses!

Ryan: Football, football and being rough, and like these really- I dunno these really freaky horror movies

CA: But you don't like football?

Ryan: No, I don't (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

It was partly in relation to this principal characteristic of strength/physicality that 'bravery/stoicism' – another key 'boyhood' marker – was conceptualised. As a result of their supposed strength, boys were perceived also as physically, as well as mentally/emotionally, 'braver' than girls, with Eric's characterisation of girlhood in terms of relative physical inability, and Aamir's group's parodying of boys and girls on rollercoasters (below) serving to position boyhood as relatively strong, able and protective:

Eric: It allows technically more protection, I suppose, cos say if someone's trying to mug us, em, my cousin, who's 18 now, she still has to carry a can of pepper spray with her, wherever she goes (laughs) but- I suppose we, we can probably just go- go for them unless they had a knife.

...

Kamal: U::m. If I was a girl I would just, be, um/

Eric: /I'd feel a bit weak, and unprotected. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Aamir: Girls, girls scream a lot on rollercoasters and stuff? And boys don't.

Jaaved: Yeah this is a girl on a rollercoaster: (high pitched voice) a:::h! Ee:::h!

Raajih: And boys'll be like (low voice) o:::h, coo::l (laughter)

...

Aamir: /girls scream at, scary stuff like, boys don't.

(DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

It was in part as a result of such notions of 'bravery' that children characterised various activities in terms of essential maleness, with such characterisations serving to grant boys monopoly over multiple pursuits. Below, for example, Wyatt overlooks Ava's comment ('I like them!') when insisting that it is boys' bravery that grants them ownership over horror films and video games, whilst Jamie works to maintain tree-climbing and scooters as 'male' by characterising Mona's ability at both in terms of honorary masculinity ('[she's] like a boy'):

Such entitlement also extended more implicitly into the language used by children to conceptualise boyhood, and during data analysis I became aware of the regularity with which boys and girls characterised maleness, specifically, in terms of 'getting': a word that I understand, particularly in this context, as relating fundamentally to perceived 'entitlement'. The extracts below reveal just some of many conversations during which children used the word 'get' to refer to the affordances deemed exclusive to boyhood ('boys always get cool things like they always get to play Minecra::ft, hot whee::ls' (Komi, Newhaven, age 5)), and reveal just one of multiple ways in which 'being a boy' was positioned by both girls *and* boys as 'better' (Reay, 2001):

CA: So what's good about being a boy?

Aaron: Because you get to do lots of cool stuff!

Zuraib: And you get cool toys like army toys, Spiderman toys/

Shane: /Batma::n (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

CA: Right, so what's- what's a good thing about being a boy?

Jacob: Em, we get everything we want

Luke: Y'can get more stuff (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Liz: I think being a boy would be fun

CA: Right?

Liz: Yeah because like, they get to play on like, loads and loads of/

Mona: /Xboxes and/

Liz: /just get more stuff (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

The final key way in which boyhood was characterised was in relation to relative 'naughtiness', with both boys and girls citing bad behaviour and swearing as essential characteristics of maleness. Again, it was at least partly in relation to notions of strength/physicality that 'naughtiness' was conceptualised, and discussions of bad behaviour were often grounded in perceptions of boyhood as rough and untameable. Below, for example Steph and Alice characterise (physical) misbehaviour as an inevitability of boyhood, whilst Kamal's group position drunkenness and arrest as specifically male experiences:

CA: So what do you think it would be like to be a boy?
Alice: I think it'd be scary cos, y' might go, on amber²¹, or on red/
Steph: /for fighting. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Kamal: Bad things about boys like um, they're drunk and they get arrested and/
Jason: /they get arrested more
CA: Right?
Kamal: And erm, they're a bit/
Jamie: /a lot more (laughter)/
Tom: /naughtier (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Again, it was in the face of evidence to the contrary that children maintained an impression of fixity with regard to mis/behaviour, where in John's narrative below, girls' own 'misbehaviour' is subsumed within a monoglossic account that continues to position 'bad behaviour' as characteristic of boyhood:

And girls sometimes can be attached to the boy things, cos like Dawn... she likes boy, um, swear words because one day she actually called me 'well you're a little bastard' in front of her mam and my mam and me, she said 'you're a little bastard. Cos I called her a freak and she called me a bastard! (John, Newhaven, age 6)

iv. Mixed-sex friendships, gender transgressive play

Of all the ways in which notions of 'separateness' were maintained, it was children's fierce regulations of gendered behaviour (what Thorne (1993) and Davies (1989) describe as 'borderwork' and 'category maintenance work', respectively) that most profoundly delimited mixed-sex friendships and gender-transgressive play. Across both schools, there were few children whose friendship groups were consistently mixed, and all of them spoke of the difficulties involved in this perceived transgression. Below, for example, Finn draws attention to the delimiting effects of others' borderwork on liveable girl-boy friendships, whilst Ava's frustration at 'boys expect[ing] boys to be boys' highlights the interrelation between 'proper' boyhood and single-sex play:

²¹ 'Traffic light' style behavioural markers at Newhaven: Green = good behavior, Amber = warning, Red = bad behaviour

Finn: So sometimes I just don't like playing with girls because people say that I'm a girl/

[...]

Ava: /yeah we say this every time but em, boys, expect boys to be boys. And girls, expect girls to be girls. (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

As well as running a near-constant risk of heterosexualisation (discussed further in Chapter 7), children – and particularly boys – who played consistently with those of the 'opposite' sex were also subject to relentless teasing on the grounds of their gendered 'wrong-doing'. One particularly poignant example of this was the case of Aqib, in year one at Eastfield, who was subject to such regular bullying on the grounds of his 'feminine' manner and girl-friendships that he had resigned himself to playing alone in order to lead a more liveable life. Below, Zuraib and Aaron's mocking accusations ('he plays with girls!') and characterisations of Aqib as having effectively crossed the gender binary ('he's acting like a girl, and he's a boy') work to position Aqib's gender production firmly outside of the acceptable, monoglossic order. Unable to resist the force of this positioning, Aqib effectively participates in shoring up monoglossia by conceptualising himself as a wrong-doer ('I just sometimes play with girls, and I'm not meant to') who has failed at being 'normal'. Aqib's expressed desire in the second of these two extracts 'to just look like a boy and act more [like a boy]' is particularly striking given that it was communicated during a group carried out purposefully with two other children (Tanish and Varsha) who also consistently transgressed gendered expectations. Rather than expressing, like the others, a wish to play and act freely without regulation, Aqib had so internalised the norm of the 'monoglossic gender-sexuality order' that he wished only to 'fit', to be rendered a 'possible' subject and thus lead a more liveable life (see Francis, 2012: 8).

It is important to note here that the following extracts betray an abandonment of least adulthood on my part, and show me utilising a definitively teacherly role when insisting that Zuraib (who laughs consistently at Aqib) 'listen' and stop being 'so rude'. Though this stands directly at odds with what was intended to be an entirely non-authoritative research positionality, I found it impossible in these moments to remain silent, and felt that doing so would even more firmly cement Aqib's already strong

conviction (strengthened by both his peers *and* his parents) that his friendships and behaviours were wrong. Significantly, though, I chose *not* to intervene in Laurel's discussion groups (see pp. 118-19) in part because of his assured confidence in his own counter-normativity. I cannot be sure though that the right decisions were made here, and I see this moment as representing just one of many inevitable 'imperfections, disappointments and angsts' (Horton, 2008: 364) that characterise the doing of ethnographic research. To quote Horton (2008: 365): 'I am uncertain about what I should have done for the best in [this] situation, and I am uncertain about *how* I could ever know what to do for the best'.

This said, I quote the following extracts at some length to give justice to the poignancy of Aqib's narrative, which draws stark attention to both the force with which gendered borders were policed, and the power of the monoglossic account to 'render 'unintelligible' lives 'unliveable'' (Francis, 2010: 488):

Aqib: Sometimes, people say that- that I'm a girl (others laugh)

CA: Do they? Why?

Aqib: Because, I dunno why because I just, act like a girl, for no reason?

Aaron: Cos he play- cos plays with girls!

Aqib: Cos they call me a girl because I'm acting like one?

CA: How do you feel when people say that?

Aqib: I feel sad (Zuraib laughs)

CA: So it's not a nice thing?

Aqib: Yeah because (Zuraib continues laughing)/

CA: /Zuraib listen. Aqib's talking don't be so rude.

Aqib: Because, I don't like it I just, feel sa:d (Zuraib laughs)

Aqib: And I just, I just stop being a girl but I, keep on, doing it again, over again and again/

Zuraib: /and why do you play with girls?

Aaron: (Accusingly) he plays with girls

Aqib: I just sometimes play with girls, and, I'm not meant to.

...

CA: So what do you do when people say, that it's silly to play with girls?

Aqib: I just, I just say that, I'm not playing with girls? But I actually am? But now I don't play with girls, because my mum and dad doesn't like it.

CA: Why don't they like it?

Aqib: Because... I don't have any friends (others laugh) so I play with girls. Now I just, don't have any friends I just, walk around.

...

Aaron: Catherine? It's- it's because he's, he's acting like a girl, and he's a boy. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

CA: Aqib what would you like- what do you wish you could do without being teased for it? Like Tanish says he'd really like to wear a dress and have an alic band?

Aqib: If I/

CA: /if nobody would be teased

Aqib: Just, look like a boy and like, act more [like a boy].

CA: What do you mean?

Aqib: So they can't- so, like- like, I don't act like a girl I just act normal like a boy? Because some- sometimes my cousin tease me? For, acting like a girl? I just wish for that. (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Aside from Aqib – whose narrative of gender transgression was by far the most pained of all the children that I spoke to – Tanish (Eastfield, age 5) and Finn (Newhaven, age 10) (see pp. 116-21) were the only other boys I met whose friendships and play appeared to fall consistently outside of normative boyhood definitions. In contrast to Aqib, though, Tanish and Finn's transgressions appeared comparatively liveable, with both children defending their counter-normativity in the face of disapproval. One factor that I would posit as having contributed to this 'liveability' was parental support, discussion of which stood in stark contrast to Aqib's narrative of both parental and peer disapproval. In the extract below, for example, the support of Tanish's mother and grandmother stands profoundly at odds with Aqib's parents' position ('they just say... don't play with girls play with boys'), and hints at the power of parental/adult support to 'legitimise' children's more heteroglossic identity constructions ('if your mum and dad say you're allowed to then you are' (Julian, Newhaven, age 5)):

Tanish: Yeah [my parents] think, when I had my long hair it was beautiful! [...] and what I do is, um, I ask my mum if I can wear these special high heels and, she says yes? And then/

Aqib: /sometimes she says no?/

Tanish: /they're in grandma's bedroom I sneakily go and put them on. And then when grandma comes up I say, can I wear your high heels! She's got, loa::ds

...

CA: What do your parents say when you say that you want to play with the girls?

Aqib: They say that- they just say that, don't play with girls play with boys. But I don't have any boyfriends so that's why I play with girls. (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Equally, Finn's gender non-normativity appeared to be made 'liveable' at least in part by both parental support ('my parents just tell me, it's good to be different!' (Finn, Newhaven)) and 'the strength of the group collective' (Renold, 2005: 5), which for him took the form of a (female) friendship group maintained since the beginning of primary school. Thus, whilst Finn and Tanish appeared emboldened in their counter-normativity by familial and friendship networks ('I'm gonna have a talk with [the boys who tease Tanish]' (Aadita, Eastfield, age 5)), it appeared at least in part to be Aqib's comparative lack of support that rendered his transgressive behaviours particularly impossible to maintain ('now I don't play with girls, because my mum and dad doesn't like it').

In addition to the relatively consistent gender transgressions of Aqib, Finn, and Tanish, there were many other boys who spoke more fleetingly about the heteroglossic reality of their boyhood 'doings'. The two extracts below, for example, are reflective of many more moments wherein boys were able to 'confess' to non-normativity in small, supportive friendship groups, where children's gender productions were often revealed as underwritten by (tentative) multiplicity. First, Ryan's cautious query about his friends' enjoyment of 'Barbie movie[s]' effectively enables the other group members to confess to their own transgressions, whilst Ray's group's discussion of fairies reveals both the prices paid for transgression ('people, sometimes laugh at me') and the (resultant) measures taken by children – boys in particular – to render such transgressions liveable ('I just only play fairies at home'):

Ryan: Guys. I wanna tell y'something. Do you, do you ever, watch/

Rob: /Uh huh?

Ryan: ...a Barbie movie.
Rob: Er, yeah/
Agwe: /yes! Everyone does
Sam: Yeah I have too!
Ryan: Ok, alright. Good. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Ray: We:ll, people, sometimes laugh at me that I like, fairies and princesses
Russell: Aw I like fairies!/
Ray: /but I just only play fairies at home
CA: Yeah?
Tom: Me too!
Russell: Abracadabra! (Makes 'whooshing' noise) (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Inevitably, though, such 'confessions' were not always supported by other group members, and it was more often the case that heteroglossic moments were subsumed by more dominant discourses of ridicule and/or disapproval. Below, for example, Alfie's claim to 'lik[ing] dollies and Barbies' is disparaged by Riley, Komi and John, whose stated dislike of girls extends to a disapproval of association with 'girls' toys'. Thus, whilst Alfie effectively troubles normative 'boyhood', the wider group still cement the monoglossic account by both rendering his position laughable, and reinscribing an inextricable link between dolls and (abject) 'femininity' ('Because I don't like girls!'):

CA: Right? Who likes Barbies? (A few hands go up)
Alfie: I like dollies.
Riley: I think I'm gonna faint!
Alfie: I like dollies and Barbies!
Komi: I think I'm gonna fai:::nt!
CA: Why are you going to faint?
John: Because he doesn't like girls! Because I don't like girls! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Finally, it was as often through a process of refusal that boyhood's heteroglossic realities were rendered invisible, where children demonstrated again a 'remarkable capacity to keep the idea of the dualism intact by ignoring individual deviations'

(Davies, 1989: 20). This is encapsulated by Ania, below, who in spite of Purdil and Robyn's insinuations to the contrary, continues to maintain the incommensurability of boys and 'femininity'. Indeed, Ania is so sure in her conviction of normative boyhood that her and Purdil's play is revealed as having been delimited by such understandings, where it is normative discourses ('boys don't like Frozen') rather than individual realities ('I like Frozen') that have informed their resultant interactions:

Ania: /boys, don't like dolls. Only gi:rls

Purdil: I like dolls

CA: You like dolls?

Robyn: My dad- I like dolls. My dad loves dolls. He plaits dolls hairs/

CA: /why do you think boys don't/

Ania: /my, brother. Don't, like dolls.

CA: Mm hm? And Purdil what do you and Ania like to play together?

Ania: Just, not, Frozen, boys don't like Frozen. We don't play Frozen/

Robyn: /my dad loves Frozen/

Purdil: /I like Frozen (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Thus, whilst children's definitions of boyhood conformed largely to normative discourses, almost all boyhood productions were revealed in practice as underwritten by subversion and multiplicity ('What I don't like about being a boy is, always you get the Hot Wheels car from McDonalds? And I just want the Hello Kitty²²' (Russell, Eastfield, age 8)). It was, however, through ongoing processes of 'submersion, refusal and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7) that such transgressions were continually invisibilised, with monoglossic understandings remaining largely untroubled by tentative, mitigated, and fleeting moments of heteroglossia.

v. Conclusions: Boyhood, normativity, transgression

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the multiple and contradictory ways in which 'boyhoods' were constructed and policed at Newhaven and Eastfield, and identified the various ways in which heteroglossic realities were invisibilised by more powerful monoglossic accounts. With regard to looks, children defined boyhood in relation to a

²² 'Feminine' cat character produced by Japanese company, Sanrio

concerted lack of interest in appearance (such that boys with long hair, dresses, or makeup were rendered laughable and/or unintelligible), with this rejection acting as part of the process by which 'masculine' identities were *relationally* produced. Despite being undermined at various moments by 'confessions' of counter-normativity, though, the incommensurability of 'looks' and 'boyhood' remained largely untroubled across both schools, with transgressions positioned firmly outside 'normative' boyhood definitions.

Equally, whilst definitions of 'boyhood characteristics' conformed primarily to monoglossic understandings – with 'maleness' conceptualised in relation to various forms of superiority and entitlement – children's doings of boyhood in practice were far more heteroglossic, and revealed boys as feeling in many ways constrained by rigid discourses of masculinity. Nonetheless, it was again through processes of 'submersion, refusal and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7) that monoglossia ultimately maintained its dominance, working effectively to ridicule, overpower, and/or deny boys' diverse realities in practice.

6. Doing Girlhood

In the previous chapter I discussed the significant role played by 'looks' in understandings of normative girl- and boy-hood, and demonstrated that for boys it was in part through the repudiation of feminine physical signifiers that masculinities were constructed and policed. For girls, in contrast, it was primarily through association with such symbols that 'femininities' were produced and regulated, and monoglossic discourses around hair/clothes/makeup remained key to discussions and enactments, despite the heteroglossia of individual girlhood(s) in practice. The current section therefore begins (following a discussion of 'ethnicity', and 'class') with an exploration of the ways in which girls negotiated the perceived inextricability of 'girlhood' and 'looks', and demonstrates how deviations, whilst significant, were largely subsumed within a more powerful monoglossic account. Following this, I move to a discussion of the workings of girls' interactions more broadly, and consider the role of girlhood 'communities of practice' (Paechter, 2007) in both creating and disrupting normative 'femininities'.

i. 'Ethnicity' and 'class'

Again, whilst I was concerned to explore differences in children's doings of gender and sexuality across intersections of 'ethnicity' and 'class', (hetero)gender norms appeared to cut across demographic differences at both schools, structuring the interactions of children from all 'classed' and 'ethnic' backgrounds. In relation to girls in particular, though, conclusions around the workings of ethnicity were difficult to draw, given the notably lower number of 'non-White' girl pupils in my sample²³. With regard to those included, though, I observed no significant differences in 'doings' of gender or sexuality according to either 'ethnicity' or 'class', and was not aware of any systemic Othering of non-white (or indeed, 'working-class') girl pupils at either school (with the exception of Asiyah, discussed below). The following extracts, for example, reveal the active role played by White (W), Chinese (CH), Mixed White-Asian (MWAS) and Black

²³ At Newhaven, my sample included only two Mixed White-Asian (Aafa, Aisha) and one Chinese (Mei) girl pupil/s. At Eastfield my sample included four South Asian (Fatima, Fariah, Asiyah, Sabra), two Black African (Jamila, Imani), two Mixed-White Asian (Aadita, Varsha) and one Chinese (Ling) girl pupil/s (see Appendix D).

African (BAFR) girls in cultures of gender/sexuality, with each of these girls positioned, and positioning themselves, as equal participants in (hetero)gender constructions:

- Jess [W]: I have boyfriends.
CA: You've got boyfriends Jess?
Mei [CH]: I've got a boyfriend/
Mandy [W]: /who!
Mei: William! [W] (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)
- Jenny [W]: Remember! You said you were gonna marry me the last time/
Tanish [MWAS]: /I'm gonna marry Aadita [MWAS] not you now!
Aadita: Yeah! Yeah, he made a trick on you (laughter)
Tanish: (Laughing) I love playing tricks on people!
Jenny: (Laughing) he:::y! (DG, Eastfield. Boys and girls aged 5-6)
- Jamila [BAFR]: My crush is on Conker.
Liam [W]: Who's Conker!
Jamila: Alison [W] knows! (Laughing)
Amy [W]: It's Harris:n! [W]
Jamila: It's no::t!
Liam: And she's going to ask him out! (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Although in part an inevitable outcome of my sample (which precluded, for example, the observation of any distinct South Asian girl-friendships comparable to those discussed in *Boyhood*, p. 99), girls' friendship groups were nonetheless 'mixed' across both schools (see Appendix D), with little clustering along 'ethnic' or 'classed' lines, as has been found elsewhere (see e.g. Tatum, 1997; Connolly, 2003; Thomas, 2005).

One discourse that was broadly shaped by 'ethnicity', though, was that of 'beauty' and its centrality to girlhood, with constructions working in some moments to 'racialise' conceptualisations of hetero-femininity. This was most evident during readings of *King and King*, where children almost unanimously abhorred the various female suitors that precede the final 'beautiful' princess (something that the book somewhat encourages in its narrative (see De Haan and Nijland, 2002)). Through children's valorising of Princess Madeleine (who is thin, White, and blonde) and repudiation of Other ('fat',

'geeky', non-white) 'undesirable' princesses ('look at her big, fat, ugly, body!' (John, Newhaven, age 6)), 'ideal' femininities were constructed in these moments as at least partly 'raced'. In the first extract below for example, Aadita (Mixed White-Asian) appears to take offense at Tanish's suggestion that the Indian Princess Rajmasputin looks like her, and agrees with Ling (Chinese) that Madeleine is the 'prettiest'. Equally, in the second extract, Jamila (Black African) is emphatic in her desire to 'be' Princess Madeleine, and demonstrates an understanding of normative White femininity as the 'obvious' ideal:

Tanish: She [Princess Rajmasputin] looks like you Aadita!

Aadita: No it doesn't!

Ling: I like this girl [Princess Madeleine]

Aadita: Me too

Ling: Because I like to have blonde hair!

Aadita: And I like- and I like her dress, and she's just the prettiest (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

CA: If you were going to be one of these characters who would you be?

Liam: (Vehemently, pointing at Princess Aria) not her! She just looks s:o ugly!

Jamila: (Turns to page) her her her

CA: Princess Madeleine? Why her?

Jamila: Cos obviously! She's the best! (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Notwithstanding the significance of these constructions in reifying (particularly gendered and 'raced') inequalities, it is important to note that the 'idealised' femininity that Princess Madeleine encapsulated was one that many (including White) girls positioned as unattainable. Thus the desire felt by Aadita, Ling, and Jamila to 'be' Princess Madeline cannot be separated from that of their White peers ('Oh I would just wish I was he:r' (Alice [W], Newhaven, age 6); 'I want to be that one she's s::o pre::tty!' (Amy [W], Eastfield, age 7)), and I was therefore wary about imbuing some girls' desires with excessive ('raced') significance (especially given that these desires stemmed at least partly from the book's clear narrative positioning of Madeleine as 'the best'). Equally, it was striking that such constructions – whilst problematic – did not appear to extend to actual practices of hetero-romance in school, where both non-

White and White girls were active participants in hetero-cultures, and positioned by boys and girls as subjects/objects of desire ('I have two girlfriends! Ling [CH] and Carly [W]! (Pete [W], Eastfield, age 6); 'Yea:h Eric fancies Rosie [W] and Imani! [BAFR] (April [W], Eastfield, age 9)). It seemed that in the context of heterosexual 'doings', hetero-gender norms broadly cut across demographic distinctions, with all girls seemingly subject to (and participating in) normative interpellations by virtue of their girlhood, which preceded other axes of identity.

Inevitably, though, processes of Othering did occur at both schools, and were most often directed at girl pupils. However, these processes were far from exclusively 'raced', working rather to reinscribe various notions of both 'difference' and 'femininity'. Indeed, of the girls in my sample, it was Asiyah (South Asian), Kelly (White British), Paula (White British) and Ivy (White British) who were most notably 'Othered' by peers, with these girls' various 'differences' working to set them apart from normative 'girlhoods'. Thus whilst Asiyah was one of two South Asian girls in her class, it appeared in particular to be her visible 'cultural' difference (albeit racialised in the popular imagination, see e.g. Garner and Selod, 2014; Moosavi, 2014) – inscribed on her body through headscarf and 'modest' dress – that positioned her, and not Sabra (South Asian), as 'Other', whilst for Kelly it was her physical size that located her 'outside' constructions of normative femininity. Indeed, in the excerpts below, Asiyah and Kelly are equally positioned as the butt of Adam and Laurel's hetero-sexist teasing, with 'undesirable' girlhood and homosexuality ('Laurel loves Jami:::e!') employed as equal threats to boys' (hetero)masculinity:

Adam: Laurel loves Jami:::e! (Laughter)

Laurel: He's a boy you flipping, moron!

Adam: Can I say something about Laurel!

Laurel: Adam you go out with Asiyah so it's fine (Loud laughter)

...

Andy: I'm at [inaudible] with my girlfriend tonight!

CA: Is the/

Laurel: /are y'gonna go out with Kelly?!

Andy: Shut up Laurel!!

Laurel: (Singing) Andy loves Kelly Andy loves Kelly! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

For Paula and Ivy, it appeared broadly to be their 'unpopularity' (which may have stemmed in part from their 'class' location: both were participants in outreach work at Newhaven) that rendered them gendered and sexual Other (however, see pp. 177-8 for a discussion of the ways in which Paula and Ivy resisted this abject positioning). Whilst hinting at the intersections between 'class' and gender/sexuality, though, the greater number of 'working class' children at Newhaven who acted as equal participants in hetero-culture made it difficult to draw any clear links between 'class' and gender/sexuality, as did the lack of any significant difference between Paula and Ivy's (or indeed, Asiyah and Kelly's) own gender/sexuality constructions compared with those of their peers. Indeed, in the case of Paula and Ivy, it seemed to be primarily their perceived 'aggressiveness', rather than class status, that rendered them 'unfeminine' 'Other'.²⁴

In light of these recognitions (and notwithstanding my choice of pseudonyms, which provide some insight into the 'ethnic' makeup of friendship groups), the following pages do not highlight 'ethnicity' or 'class' in particular as informing 'doings' of gender or sexuality. Rather, they serve to demonstrate the broadly similar ways in which girlhoods were constructed, contested, and reified by children across various 'demographics', and reveal hetero/gender norms as somewhat overriding 'ethnic' and 'classed' distinctions²⁵.

²⁴ Significantly though, other girls (e.g. Sophie, pp. 194-5) were able to draw on 'totemic motifs' (Francis, 2010) such as 'prettiness' and 'popularity' to perform similarly aggressive girlhoods without being rendered unfeminine.

²⁵ I make this assertion whilst recognising the inevitable limits of my sample, particularly at Newhaven

I. Looking Like a 'Girl'

CA: So what's good about being a girl?

Mei: (Singing) girls are pretty!

Alice: (Singing) and boys are not pretty! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

i. Looks bringing girlhood into being

Across both schools, by far the most cited signifier of girlhood was 'looks', with long hair, makeup and dresses referred to in all discussion groups as centrally defining features of female identity ('boys like boys' things and girls like, makeup and stuff' (Aqib, Eastfield, age 6)). In responding to the question 'tell me about being a girl' by referring first to physical symbols of girlhood, girls highlighted the significance of 'the material' in both defining and constituting their sense of gendered 'self' (see Francis and Paechter, 2015). More than just feminine signifiers, these symbols acted as 'part of the process whereby femaleness becomes inscribed in girls' bodies' (Davies, 1989: 15), and demonstrated that for the majority of girls, girlhood was experienced primarily as something that is fundamentally 'worn':

CA: What's it like being a girl?

Aadita: Good! Good good! Cos y'can have any type of hair.

CA: Yeah?

Ling: Yeah y'can ha::ve, like my hair!

Jenny: Dyed hair!

Ling: Curly hair/

Aadita: /plaits! (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: What's it like being a girl?

Sian: I think girls are pretty really

Bella: Yeah cos we can wear like, dresses which are really nice and like, hairstyles but boys can't. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

More than just distinguishing girlhood, 'looks' and 'beauty' occupied a central part in the process of bringing gender into being (Davies, 1989; Butler, 1990), with long hair in particular understood as powerfully constitutive of intelligible femininity. This was particularly evident in children's characterisations of physical transgressions as

'crossing-over' the gender binary, demonstrated in the previous chapter, and in Bella, Robyn and Zoe's conversation, below ('she can put on high heels as well'):

Bella: Cos we can wear like, dresses which are, really nice and like hairstyles but boys can't/

Robyn: /a boy can wear a wig and just pretend to have makeup on and then they can be a girl!

Zoe: She can put high heels on as well! (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 5-6)

Such was the significance of 'looks' – and long hair in particular – in constituting girlhood that children worked hard to maintain an impression of normativity in the face of visible transgression. This was perhaps most evident in children's drawings, which regularly shored up normative understandings whilst contradicting the actual appearance of the person depicted. During my time with 3Y at Newhaven, for example, I noticed that the class teacher Imogen, whose hair was short, was always depicted by children with long hair. When I asked Imogen about this, I was told that this was how she was always drawn and that if an explanation was ever given it was that long hair made her look 'beautiful'. Such drawings worked therefore to both 'mask [the] contradiction and dissonance' (Francis, 2012: 7) that characterised Imogen's gender production and affirm the position of 'beauty' as central to (depictions of) femaleness. Such 'masking' made itself evident at various other moments, with children at both schools regularly depicting teachers and each other as far more normatively gendered than was the case in reality. The following extract, for example, shows children's ability to overlook an individual deviation in the process of maintaining the 'monoglossic façade', as well as the hyper-feminine way in which girlhood was often conceptualised:

During free play, I sit with Sophia, Clare and Hayley [aged 7-8] who are drawing pictures of each other. All of their pictures depict the subject as hyper-feminine with huge eyes, eyelashes and sweeping fringes. Clare tells Hayley [who has relatively short hair, to her chin] that she's going to draw her, and then specifies '...with long hair'. She then pauses and checks, 'do you want long hair?' Hayley says yes. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 05/06/15)

Equally, John, Jonah, and Alfie, below, follow their discussion of female superheroes with a shoring up of normative hyper-femininity, engaging in a 'process of submersion, refusal and disguise [that serves] to mask (or trivialise) gender heteroglossia' (Francis, 2012: 7) by subsuming it within a more powerful, and here repudiative, account. Girlhood, in this instance, can only be imagined briefly by these children as powerful, before reassuming its (hyperbolic, hyper-feminine) place within the monoglossic order ('I would like to be a prince:::ss/I believe I'm a Ba::rbi::e!')

Jonah: D'you know, I actually like Spidergirl and Batgirl, and Supergirl

John: Me too

CA: What do you think it'd be like to be a girl?

John: (In high-pitched voice) Wheee I'm a girl! (Laughter) I really like to be a gi::rl!

Alfie: I would like to be a prince:::ss!

John: I believe I'm a Ba::rbi::e! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

This process of subsumption within hyper-feminine accounts was something that I was subject to myself, and children's drawings of me often stood at odds with my appearance in reality. Despite the fact that I wore trousers and tied up my hair every day during fieldwork, I was still almost always depicted by children with long hair, dresses, and accessories, with the picture below (where I am depicted with long curly hair, a dress, and a bun) being one that I found particularly interesting:



Figure 18. 'Catherine'

Although I had never worn a dress or untied hair in school, I did wear my hair in a bun almost every day. This is therefore acknowledged in the drawing, but not at the expense of additional (somewhat incongruous) feminine signifiers, which I would suggest were included in order that my 'girlhood' could be brought fully into being. It

appeared to me that in creating this drawing, a decision had been made around balancing my heteroglossic reality with the monoglossic order. As a bun was such a regular feature of my appearance it would be hard to ignore this in my depiction, and yet as I am a 'girl' it is necessary for my gender to be constituted intelligibly through feminised hair and clothing. This drawing and others like it served therefore to highlight the constitutive power of 'looks', as well as to reflect children's 'remarkable capacity to keep the idea of the dualism intact by ignoring individual deviations' (Davies, 1989: 20).

ii. Looks as community of practice

In addition to acting as a constitutive feature of girlhood, 'looks' also played a central role in children's daily performances of gender, and throughout my fieldwork I gained increasing insight into the multiple feminine 'communities of practice' (Paechter, 2007) in which girls across both schools engaged. With regard to looks, I was struck from my earliest moments in the field by the almost universally normative ways in which girls 'wore' femininity, with uniforms, accessories and makeup acting as near ubiquitous signifiers of female identity. Of all the girls that I worked with (seventy-five in total), all but two (Varsha, Eastfield, age 5; Aafa, Newhaven, age 5) had long hair, and almost all wore skirts, dresses and other accessories to further mark their 'femininity'. Thus, whilst resistances were made to the demands of physically normative femininity (discussed later), most girls nonetheless 'wore' their gender in a manner that cemented firmly monoglossic understandings.

Further to this, it was 'looks' that girls most regularly cited in discussions about their favourite aspects of girlhood, and greater freedom with regard to clothes, hair and makeup was by far the most frequently discussed 'benefit' of being female. Further, references were often made to the enjoyment gained from 'doing' looks, particularly in spaces where 'prettiness' was rewarded or valorised. Below, for example, Lily cites 'get[ting] to put a dress on to look beautiful' as a benefit (and defining feature) of girlhood, whilst Alice and Kara refer to weddings and restaurants, respectively, as spaces wherein the performance of 'pretty' femininity is enabled and enjoyed:

CA: Can anybody just tell me about being a girl?

Lily: Em, you know when you be a girl you like- you know you can actually get a dress on instead of just getting a shirt on and then, some trousers. Instead of putting that- that's how a girl actually gets to put a dress on to look beautiful. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: So what's your favourite thing about being a girl?

Alice: I like being a girl because girls', em, weddings, get to be a bridesmaid but boys just have to stand around. (Agreement) (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: What's it like being a girl? What's good about it?

Kara: Y'can go out to dinner and look all pretty?

Amy: Yeah and boys, boys don't get to look as pretty as you because like, they don't have long hair to do hairstyles and, they don't getta wear... really pretty clothes. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

Through such assertions, girls made clear both the value placed on normative femininity and the limited ways in which girlhood was often conceptualised. Indeed, whilst the previous chapter highlighted the frequency with which boys spoke about 'getting' in relation to masculinity's varied privileges, girls' use of this word (which, again, I understand as relating fundamentally to perceived 'entitlement') referred most often to participation in beauty cultures, involvement in which was largely considered the 'best' thing about being female:

CA: So what do you think are some good things about being a girl?

Mona: Em, y'get like stylish clothes and y'get nail varnish/

Ellen: /y'get to do y'hair!

Mona: Yeah y'get makeup/

Freya: /and um, y'can like, I think y'have more choice of clothing. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

CA: What do you like about being a girl?

Paula: It's cos y'get to fiddle around with y'hair and everything

Ana: I getta have different things in my hair (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 9-10)

Although such conversations revealed the at times pleasurable nature of feminine construction, they also demonstrated a stark division in perceived benefits of girl- and boy-hood, with conceptualisations of beauty as the single 'best' thing about girlhood seeming significantly limited in contrast to the varied privileges afforded to males ('Em, we get everything we want/y'can just do more stuff' (Jacob/Tyler, Newhaven, ages 9-10); 'So what's your favourite thing about being a boy?/Everything!' (CA/Jamie, Eastfield, age 10)). Indeed, whilst children in all groups made reference to the multiple enabling capacities of boyhood, it was only ever in reference to 'looks' that girls (or boys) characterised girlhood in terms of choice or possibility:

CA: Do you think there are any good things about being a girl/

Tom: /em, no

Eric: I think, um, there's more clothes options/

Tom: /oh yeah (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Despite their arguable restrictiveness, though, it was largely through practices that drew on and affirmed such understandings that girls demonstrated their 'embeddedness' in wider cultures of femininity (see Paechter, 2007: 6). Indeed, over the course of my fieldwork I found the majority of girls at both schools to be engaged daily in beauty-centred practices (discussing favourite hairstyles or clothes; plaiting each other's hair on the carpet; miming the application of lipstick with glue sticks) that worked to solidify a sense of collective girlhood wherein 'looks' were positioned as central. As Paechter (2007: 23) notes, it is in large part through the act of shared repertoire that legitimate membership in communities of practice is established, and the extract below makes clear the significance of such repertoire in the construction and reification of 'femininities'. Here, Jess, Steph and Laya draw on a range of 'feminine' scripts (including those of heterosexuality – discussed further in Chapter 7) to create a space wherein a distinctly collective (and competitive) looks-based girlhood is performed. Here, it is fundamentally through 'situated social interaction' (Jackson and Scott, 2010b: 817) that 'girlhood' is defined, rehearsed, and brought into being (see also Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]):

Steph is in the dressing up corner putting on a tight pink leotard and tutu. Jess tells her 'that looks nice. That looks really nice on you Steph', then tells her 'my friend told me I

looked beautiful.’ Steph then begins trying on a long cape and laughing, then tells Jess ‘it looks like Elsa’s cape [from Disney’s *Frozen*], can we find a blue thing so I look like Elsa?’

[...]

Steph displays her cape to the group and Mei [who had been observing the dressing up from afar before asking to join] tells her, ‘oh yeah it’s lovely.’ Steph checks a new dress with the group: ‘do you think this would look nice?’ to which Jess responds (stroking her current dress) ‘I like this one’ and then: ‘ok we’re just getting ready for the wedding, I’m going to change my clothes’.

[...]

Steph tells Jess ‘ok now it’s your wedding day – put this on, chop chop’ and gives her a white dress. She then wonders aloud whether to stuff her top, asking Jess (smiling) ‘do you want me to have big thingies?’ When Jess is dressed, Mei tells her ‘I think white actually goes with you Jess’. Mei then tells Steph [about her pink leotard/tutu] ‘I do actually like that on you Steph’. Steph asks ‘did you like it on Jess?’ ‘Yeah’ ‘Who do you prefer it on?’ (Mei doesn’t answer). Jess then tells us all, ‘I need shiny shoes don’t I, I need white shiny shoes’. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 01/05/15. Class aged 5-6)

The competition that permeated some of these interactions was striking (‘who did you prefer it on?’) and revealed even further the high status afforded to ‘beauty’ within (normative) feminine cultures. Below, for example, long hair is not only used by Amy to pit girlhood against boyhood (‘boys don’t get to look as pretty as you’) but also by Fariah to pit girlhoods against one another (‘mine’s longest!’), whilst ‘prettiness’ is given such high status in Lixie’s group that it is explicitly fought over:

Amy: Yeah and boys- boys don’t get to look as pretty as you because, they don’t have long hair to do hairstyles, and, they don’t getta wear/

Fariah: /you::r hair isn’t long/

Amy: /really pretty/

Fariah: /mine’s longest! Mine, is long! And Fatima’s [Fariah’s best friend] is longe:::r!
(DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

At playtime, I notice Lixie, Jane, Clare and Natalie [ages 7-8] arguing with another group of girls. When I ask them what’s going on, Lixie tells me “we’re having a fight because she says she’s prettier than me and has nicer clothes”, and then whispers

“have y’seen her though, she’s the ugliest person ever”. All then tell me enthusiastically about their planned response: “we’re going to say to her, yeah your clothes might be nicer but have y’seen your *shoes*?” (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 20/05/15)

As a female researcher, I found a certain level of participation in these cultures hard to avoid, and it appeared at least in part to be as a result of my own ‘girlhood’ that girls at both schools so quickly involved me in their friendships. This was particularly the case with younger children, and I found that my first days with year one (aged 5-6) or year three (aged 7-8) at either school would always involve me being quickly recruited into a female friendship group and invited into their play. Significantly, a key aspect of this involvement was the collective centring of ‘looks’, and I was regularly assumed as ‘grown up girl’ to share in this valuing of beauty practices. Whilst at various points this enabled rich insight into school cultures, at others I became concerned about the implications of this involvement in terms of affirming certain normative femininities. The fieldnote extracts below recall just some of many times during which my own physical ‘girlhood’ informed children’s interactions with me, and reflect Paechter’s conviction that it is through such shared gender performance that ‘communities of masculinity and femininity practice *mutually* identify and cohere’ (2007: 15, my italics, see also Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]):

Bella, Jenny and Zoe have become very territorial of me, clustering around me and being very touchy – are they gaining ‘girl capital’ through being my friend (as I am an established member of the girlhood community)? Bella in particular is keen to compliment my earrings, necklace, hair, etc. Keeps taking my necklace out from underneath my jumper and telling me “it’s pretty, it looks nicer when people can see it”. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 10/02/15. Class aged 5-6)

During Maths, children are given the task of deciphering sentences using a number alphabet. Three girls came up separately to give me their sentences to decipher. Prisha’s reads “Kathrin is pretty”, another girl’s (who I hadn’t met) reads “you look lovely” and the third, “you pretty”. When a boy asks if he can decipher this last one, he’s told “no it’s just for girls!” I ask why and she answers, “because boys aren’t... this” [pretty] (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 09/07/15. Class aged 9-10)

Whilst mostly I attempted to resist these feminine interpellations as far as possible, there were other times when I found myself complicit in the reproduction of normative girlhoods through participation in femininity cultures. The effort that went into resisting the urge to compliment feminine performances (for example, when girls showed me their jewellery or painted nails) revealed sharply my own internalisation of monoglossic 'girlhood/beauty' discourse, as well as the extent to which this informs interactions between adults and (girl) children. At other moments, I would catch myself in the almost unconscious act of playing with someone's hair on the carpet, and recognise how ingrained such shared repertoire had become to my own collective doings of 'gender'. Such repertoire revealed itself even more sharply in the interactions between girls and female teachers, which often worked to solidify looks-based discourse in both explicit and implicit ways. Most explicitly, (female) teachers would often compliment girls on their productions of femininity ('your hair looks pretty today'/'is that a new dress'), and develop relationships that drew specifically on shared, tactile femininity-practice such as holding hands, or stroking/playing with girls' hair. At other times, it was in more implicit ways that female teachers 'modelled' discourses of girlhood, with the extracts below reflecting just some of many moments wherein teachers demonstrated 'what it means to take on the identities that go with [being female]' (Paechter, 2007: 6):

Ms Chapman tells children to 'sit properly' on the carpet, and then says "I can't sit properly today because I'm wearing a skirt, I'll have to sit like this" (with legs uncrossed). Children are learning here what it is to be a grown up woman and how this impacts on the ('decent'/'modest') comportment of their bodies, as well as the contradictions inherent in expectations of dress and bodily regulation in school. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/02/15. Class aged 5-6)

Ms Connell is drinking out of a Cinderella mug, which she sets down on the desk to take the register. Amelia points out the mug to Jamila, and reads the message to her in a whisper: "once a princess, always a princess!" Jamila replies "true!" and both sit up straighter, smooth down their skirts, and smile up at Ms Connell demurely. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 11/09/15. Class aged 7-8)

iii. Looks as best and worst

What I found perhaps most striking with regard to conceptualisations of girlhood, though, was the dual position that 'looks' occupied as both 'best' and 'worst' thing about being female. Whilst looks were by far the most frequently cited response to questions about girlhood's benefits, it was also most often in relation to looks that children discussed its essentially delimiting nature. Beauty culture appeared to be understood as at once enabling and constraining, and it was striking that the single 'best' thing about girlhood (indeed, almost the only thing cited as advantageous) was at the same time so fraught with negativity. These negative aspects of 'beauty' culture were discussed broadly in relation to two (overlapping) areas: first, the painful and pressurising nature of feminine construction, and second, the complexities involved in resisting looks-based girlhood.

a. 'Looks' as painful/pressurising

Despite being characterised across all girls' groups as one of the primary advantages of girlhood ('you can have gorgeous hair!' (Harriet, Eastfield, age 9); [the best thing is] long hair!' (Amy, Eastfield, age 7)), long hair was also one of the most regularly cited topics in conversations about femininity's negative aspects. Discussions around the pain and difficulty associated with long hair featured across almost all groups, and revealed the 'benefits' of this signifier to be almost inextricable from its related tensions. The extracts below reflect the key ways in which long hair was negatively characterised: namely, in terms of the pain involved in its maintenance; the pressures of unwanted feminine construction; and the limits imposed by long hair on physical freedom:

Lily: Yeah what d'you wanna be a boy for

Rachel: Well, because, my mammy always hurts me! Cos when she brushes my hair!

CA: So if you were a boy would that be different?

Rachel: Yes cos boys got short hair and girls have got long hair. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: Jenny what's your least favourite thing, did you wanna say/

Jenny: /em because my sister always does my hair when I say n:::o (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

- CA: What's good about being a boy?
- Jason: Oh! You don't have problems with long hair
- Eric: Most em- em when y'go swimming, y'hair doesn't get in y'way (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Significantly, though, all but two girls across both schools continued to wear their hair long, and the vehemence of these negative characterisations did not appear to outweigh the importance of long hair in constituting 'acceptable' girlhood. The necessity of maintaining long hair in spite of these disadvantages is encapsulated by Amy, below, who cites its gendered significance as overriding its multiple disadvantages, and highlights again the primacy of reflexivity ('once I knew really what was happening') to constructions of (gendered) 'selfhood' (Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]):

- CA: Is there anything that's not good about being a girl?
- Amy: (Gasps) hair, long hair- long hair. Something rubbish is definitely long hair.
...
- CA: So why is it that you have long hair/
- Amy: /well when I was about four, I had really short hair but then, once I knew, really what was happening I wanted it to be longer.
- CA: Yeah? Would you like short hair now?
- Amy: No! No cos I'd look like a boy! (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

These physical limitations and pressures were also discussed in relation to other feminine signifiers, with makeup and clothes in particular – despite being highly valued – referenced frequently in conversations about the constraining nature of girlhood ('it's all boring, y'have t'put makeup o::n' (Noah, Newhaven, age 8)). This appeared particularly to be the case for older girls (aged 7 upwards), who often spoke vehemently about the physical constraints associated with normative femininity. However, whilst such conversations troubled monoglossic conceptualisations to the extent that they revealed normative ('frilly'/'princessy') girlhoods to be highly contested, such troubling was largely undermined by its existence alongside the continued centring of looks to girlhood. Indeed, both of the extracts below come from discussion groups wherein looks, clothes and prettiness remained highly valued topics

of conversation ('y'can do y'hair, y'ca:n, wear jewels and accessories y'can wear makeu::p' (Ava, Newhaven, age 9); 'Y'get like stylish clothes and y'get nail varnish' (Mona, Eastfield, age 9)). Further, whilst revealing resistance as characterising many girlhood doings in practice, such discussions worked still to shore up monoglossia by resolving unwanted aspects of femininity through the rejection of (flawed) girlhood, and alignment with (preferred) masculinity ('I'd like t'just be a boy'/'I just buy all boy stuff instead'):

Mona: It's bad [being a girl] because, y'mum gets like, to choose y'clothes like frilly dresses (laughter) that's horrible/

Ellen: /ar that's horrible I hate dresses, and me mam's like, ah y'should wear a dress y'should wear a dress, y'don't wanna look like a bo::y

Mona: I'd like t'just be a boy so I don't wear a dress (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Rosie: At shops it's always- they think all girls are like princessy and they like, jewellery and stuff/

Ava: /the boys are pirates and stuff like, what the hell

...

Ava: /in the girls' section there are like, sequins, on every shirt [...] frills on them and I just look at them in disgust, and then, I move onto the boys' section and/

Rosie: /I just buy all boy stuff instead. (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

Aside from their homogenising implications ('they think all girls are like princessy'), it appeared also to be due to discourses around (female) 'modesty' that older girls complained more vehemently about the constraining nature of feminine signifiers. Indeed, I noticed that at both schools, many girls in year three and above wore shorts under their school skirts to enable participation in physical games on the playground (hanging upside down on the gymnastic bars, doing cartwheels) without being accused of indecency. This did not seem to be the case, though, for girls in years one or two, who appeared less aware of the perceived immodesty of 'showing your knickers'. As Ava (cited above) told me: 'some of the younger ones do cartwheels on the field and y'can see their knickers! It's so wrong'. In the extract below, the regulation of Phoebe's 'immodesty' by an older group of girls demonstrates both the learned nature of this 'wrong-ness' – understood and enforced by more established members of the girlhood

'community' – and the rules of bodily comportment and sexual modesty to which girls, in particular, must learn to adhere. Mark's assertion that 'boys can see! It looks like you're having sex!' further reveals this interaction as positioned within wider scripts that (hetero)sexualise (specifically girls') bodies and play:

Phoebe [age 7] is wearing a summer pinafore and swinging upside down on the bars, unconcerned that her dress has ridden up above her waist and her knickers, bare stomach, and legs are on show. Initially, there's no reaction from Mark or Scott [ages 7-8] about this, except Mark tells her 'I can see your knickers' and Phoebe replies 'so what?' and continues. However, a group of year six [ages 9-10] girls are watching from a distance and laughing at Phoebe, whispering 'look at that girl!' They come over and watch, exchanging awkward looks – Phoebe is keen to show them what she can do on the bars but clearly her knickers are the elephant in the room. After a minute or so, one of the girls says to me in an undertone: 'she needs to put her knickers away.' Mark, having gauged the reaction of the older girls, then tells Phoebe: 'u::r Phoebe people can see your knickers!' and then: 'boys can see! It looks like you're having sex!' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven. 04/06/15)

Through various moments like this one, girls learned that expectations of 'appropriate' bodily comportment represented a significant part of 'what it is to be treated as [female] and what the expectations of [girls] are in the communities of which they are members' (Paechter, 2007: 6). Significantly, by responding to these expectations by wearing shorts under their skirts, girls effectively challenged physical constraints and guarded themselves from accusations of indecency, whilst at the same time maintaining a normative impression of physical girlhood. Indeed, I came to see shorts under skirts as representing a useful analogy for the workings of hetero- and monoglossia in action, with shorts as the heteroglossic contradiction/resistance that jostled beneath and against the skirts' monoglossic façade.

b. Resisting looks-based femininity

In addition to its painful and constraining elements, 'beauty' culture was made all the more complex by its inherent contradictions, which appeared to position 'looks' as at once highly valued and abject. Indeed, 'girly girls' (see Reay, 2001) – those apparently 'overly' embedded in cultures of femininity – were referred to across a number of

groups in negative terms, and girls largely (but not wholly) worked to resist association with this label. For many, doing girlhood involved ensuring status and intelligibility through normative feminine signifiers whilst simultaneously avoiding the derogatory label of 'girly girl' through the rejection of 'over-' girliness ('I like wearing dresses and hairstyles but I'm not, a girly girl like- ooh I chipped a nail!' (Harriet, Eastfield, age 9)). This complex process of negotiation is encapsulated by Molly (age 8), below, who – despite performing gender in distinctly 'girly' ways at other moments – nonetheless repudiates 'girly girl' status through 'lobbing the epithet' (Pascoe, 2005: 338) at Lottie. Through this seemingly contradictory performance, Molly reveals the complexities inherent in identifying, and managing, acceptably 'feminine' femininities:

At lunch, Molly tells Lottie (distancing herself from this persona) 'you're a girly girl cos you wear skirts and dresses'. Lottie denies this, but Molly asserts 'if you weren't a girly girl then you wouldn't be wearing that skirt. You *are* a girly girl.' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 11/05/15)

For other girls, it was through occupying the positions of 'girly girl' and 'tomboy' simultaneously that 'acceptable' versions of girlhood were maintained. Indeed, as feminine signifiers represented both constitutive and contaminating (Thorne, 1993) aspects of girls' identity construction, it appeared for some to be through such dual-identification (and mitigation) that the problem of feminine 'over-identification' could be resolved. Whilst such positionings revealed a multiplicity of gender discourses to be at play, though, they nonetheless served ultimately to shore up binary understandings by continuing to position 'girl things' and 'boy things' as distinct:

On the carpet, Lixie asks Ella 'are you a girly girl? Or a tomboy?' Ella replies 'I don't know, what are you?' to which Lixie responds 'both. I like girl dressing up things and I like boy things. I like boy things too.' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/05/15. Class aged 7-8)

I'm a bit like Tracy Beaker [fictional character]. She's really like tomboyish and strong and I'm a bit like that, but on the other half of her inside she's a bit of a girl- I'm not exactly a girl but I'm a bit of a girl [...] Tomboy things, is probably, street dancing- and the girl things I probably do is just- dressing up. And makeup. (Sophia, Newhaven, age 7)

Such discussions of 'girly girl' and 'tomboy' identities brought the perceived inextricability of gendered behaviours and sexed bodies particularly sharply into view, with each of these subjectivities discussed unanimously in terms of their relationship to embodied male- or female-ness ('my mam says that I'm like a girl, and a boy... I like some girl things but boy things as well' (Paige, Eastfield, age 10)). This was particularly the case for girls who identified fully as 'tomboys', whose conversations worked both to challenge and reify gender norms by simultaneously resisting and complying to the notion of a rigid gender dualism (see Reay, 2001). In their characterisations of themselves as tomboys, girls largely positioned 'girlhood' as an abject category that they worked to reject, and gave weight to conceptualisations of femaleness as fundamentally lesser. Below, for example, Meg is described as 'hating' girlhood and being 'more like a boy', whilst Paige and Freya identify themselves as tomboys because of the perceived limitations and opportunities of girlhood and boyhood, respectively:

Ella: Meg hates being a girl because, she doesn't like pink and anything like, girly
girly, cos- once for her birthday, somebody got/

Sian: /her a Barbie/

[...]

Ella: /and then she pulled the head off and then threw it out of the window!

(Laughter) She's more like a boy Meg's/

Sian: /more like a boy (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Paige: /like me I wanna be a girl, but, I wanna be sort of a boy as well (laughter)/

Freya: /we're like a tomboy

CA: In what way?

Paige: Because, gi:rls, like/

Freya: /makeup and gi::rly/

Paige: /yeah and it's like a bit, bo:ring all the toys, and stuff/

Freya: /but boys play with like, Nerf guns and/

Paige: /yeah it's more, exciting. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Despite these perceived limitations, all girls but one continued to ‘wear’ girlhood (through long hair, skirts, accessories) in a manner that reified normativity²⁶, and it was perhaps through such physical conformity that other behavioural transgressions were made ‘liveable’ (Francis, 2010; Butler, 1990). Just as over-identification with femininity risked accusations of ‘girly-girl-ness’, under-identification ran equal risks in terms of unintelligibility and disruption to the gender order. Thus, in continuing to align themselves broadly with ‘looks’ despite desires to the contrary, girls ensured that ‘the accentuation of particular, resonant, signifiers of gender...mask[ed] or distract[ed] from other aspects of production which might otherwise disrupt the monoglossic façade’ (Francis, 2010: 486).

iv. Varsha

One exception to this, though, was Varsha, a five-year-old girl at Eastfield whose performance and presentation of gender was almost wholly ‘masculine’. Varsha had short hair and trousers, all male friends, and no apparent interest in discussions or enactments of ‘looks-based’ femininity. Further, she was the only girl I met at either school whose challenges to girlhood came with no ‘masking’ or mitigation. For the first few days in her class I read Varsha as male, and when speaking about her desire to be a boy – which was unrelenting – it was often in relation to the undesirability of physical ‘female’ signifiers²⁷:

- CA: Is there anything that you like about being a girl?
Varsha: I don’t like being a girl
CA: No? Why?
Varsha: Because if you have long hair I don’t like long hair
CA: Yeah? So you like to have short hair?
Varsha: Yeah- just like a boy (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

²⁶ Whilst both Varsha (below) and Aafa (Newhaven, age 5) had short hair, Aafa differed in her material girlhood construction by being comparatively ‘authentically’ bodily inscribed’ (Francis, 2008: 217) with femininity via school skirt and hair accessories.

²⁷ Given the frequency with which girls spoke about the desirability of boyhood, Varsha’s production could be read as one that simply put into practice a desire that many other girls acknowledged in theory.

Although Varsha's production appeared largely accepted by her teacher²⁸ and peers at the time of research, I wondered for how long such (particularly material) counter-normativity would be able to continue unregulated. It seemed at both schools, as I have suggested, that gender non-conformity was accepted to a greater degree amongst younger children, and that one thing thought to come with age was a more acute (that is, normative) understanding of 'really what was happening' (Amy, above). Thus, older children were more likely to repudiate past 'wrong-doings' and regulate the performances of younger peers from an apparent position of greater knowing (see Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]; Jackson and Scott, 2010b), and as I suggested in the previous chapter, I thought it likely that part of the reason for Tanish's shorter hair was his entry into year two, where gendered borderwork was likely gaining increasing force. Indeed, Tanish was already suffering regulation for his long hair from 'older boys' at the time of the research, and Laurel represented one example of the significant repercussions of older long-haired 'masculinity'. I was also struck to find that the only other short-haired girl at Eastfield (who I did not work with directly) told me immediately when we met, 'I'm a girl by the way' (Callie, age 10), ensuring my 'correct' reading of her as 'female' (see Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Francis, 2008). I wondered therefore how 'liveable' Varsha's short hair would remain as she went through school, and whether there might come a point where demands with regard to intelligibility might outweigh her desire to distance herself from unwanted symbols of girlhood.

II. (Inter)Acting Like a 'Girl'

Further to its construction through such looks-based communities, 'girlhood' was produced equally through girls' play practices and interactions, which both drew on and reinscribed monoglossic understandings of 'female' behaviour. Notwithstanding the actual heteroglossia that characterised these practices, the majority of children

²⁸ Strikingly, Varsha's teacher described Tanish (see previous chapter) to me as 'a girl trapped in a boy's body', but made no comparative comment about Varsha's non-conventional production of girlhood. This supported much previous research around the un/acceptability of 'sissies' and 'tomboys' respectively (see Epstein, 1998; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2004; Paechter, 2012).

across both schools still worked to maintain and police dualistic understandings by positioning various toys and activities as the preserves of girl- and boy-hood respectively. For Mandy below, for example, it is dolls (cited regularly as a defining feature of girlhood) that contribute to girls' and boys' incorrigible difference, whilst Ray and Shane's references to knights/princesses, activity/passivity, and rough/gentle play work to situate boys and girls on either side of a distinct behavioural binary:

Mandy: They're different. Because, they don't look the same. And, boys don't have dollies and girls do.

CA: Right? So boys and girls are quite different?

Mei: Yep very different. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Ray: Boys like, mm, knights. And, girls kind of like, princesses?

Shane: I think girls like sleeping a lot and boys like em, getting active and doing.

Ray: Yeah and, like, boys normally like, playing, really rough games. And girls normally like playing gentle games. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Across both schools, the most frequently cited signifiers of 'girlhood' (aside from its material characteristics) were dolls; fantasy play; dancing/singing; and 'gentleness/sensitivity', discussions of which worked to categorise girls' and boys' interactions along clear lines of difference. The extracts below, for example, represent just two of countless moments wherein children cited and solidified purportedly 'feminine' signifiers. Significantly, though, heteroglossia is evident in each of these narratives, where the monoglossic exterior of 'lip gloss club' masks its somewhat heteroglossic ('scientific') interior, and the supposed female-exclusivity of dance club is maintained in spite of boys' participation:

Poppy [age 6] tells me about 'lip gloss club', which is strictly for girls only, and involves putting on and trading lip-glosses. At lunchtime, Poppy is in a corner of the playground with 3 other girls, deep in lip-gloss negotiations. 8 lip-glosses are scattered around them, with the girls huddled around choosing. When I ask what they're doing, I'm told they're 'doing science with them': smelling them and seeing what they smell like. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/03/15)

Lily: My favourite bit [about being a girl] is because y'actually get to go to dancing.
Because boys don't do dancing

Aafa: Yeah that's why I like being a girl.

CA: Boys don't do dancing?

Rachel: Yes they do!

Poppy: They do::'nt/

Rachel: /they do go to dance club. One of them does in our class. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Given the firmly dualistic nature of these constructions, it came as little surprise to find that for the majority of children, sex-divided play was understood as a taken-for-granted aspect of informal school worlds ('you'd play with gi::rls if you were a girl' (Scott, Newhaven, age 7)), and understood as a logical extension of girls' and boys' incorrigible difference. Indeed, each of the extracts below – much like the previous assertion that 'boys play with boys... girls play with girls... house play with house... teeth play with teeth' – demonstrate an understanding of boys and girls as categorically different, and of single-sex play as following inevitably from this distinction ('so they play with each other'):

Kara: A girl and a girl, are the same type so they play with each other

Amy: That's what I was gonna say/

Kara: /and a boy and a boy are the same type/

Amy: /but, like. That's what I was gonna say cos like, they're like the same, kind of people so they would wanna play with each other. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

Matt: It's their nature- girls act like girls so, it's their nature t'like, be together and like, play like girls, together

CA: Yeah?

Matt: And boys play like boys so it's their nature t'play with boys

Robert: Cos girls are the same and boys are the same (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

As with the looks-based girlhoods discussed above, the organising force of girls' interactional practices was such that as a female researcher, it was often difficult to resist being positioned as a member of these gendered communities. Beyond working

to form relationships with me based on shared beauty practices, girls also used tactility (holding my hand, linking arms) and 'girlhood' repertoire (see Lorna, below) to establish friendships with me that stemmed in large part from a notion of our perceived 'sameness':

Throughout assembly, Lottie [age 7] has her head on my shoulder and holds my hand, and links arms with me on the walk out. She refers to me repeatedly as 'mine' and 'my Catherine'. Like many other girls, she is almost territorial in her attachment to me. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 04/03/15)

Walking back to class after playtime, Lorna [age 7] runs to catch up with me and takes my hand. She asks me: 'what's your favourite hairstyle, favourite thing to do, and favourite shoes?' She tells me that hers are plaits, horse riding, and her new high heels. We chat all the way back to the classroom and she tells me I'm her 'best friend'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/03/15)

In addition to my own recruitment into these cultures, girls' relationships with female teachers were often based equally in notions of gendered commonality. Whilst relationships between younger girls and female teachers tended to take an almost 'motherly' form (a dynamic that many older girls employed in their interactions with younger children), older girls formed 'girl-friendship' bonds with teachers that centred around shared repertoire and the discussion of common 'feminine' interests. Significantly, such notions of commonality were actively maintained by teachers themselves, and many drew on 'girlhood' repertoire (not least heterosexuality, discussed in Chapter 7) in forging specific relationships with girl-children:

I notice that Lucy, Rachel and Alice [ages 5-6] have spent all of their break time clustered around Nora. They are all intermittently holding her hand and Nora interacts fondly with them, stroking their hair and smiling. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 20/04/15)

Well y'know what I'm a bit like with me shoes (laughs) and matching clothes, so that's always a big conversation with the girls (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

In year five at Eastfield, in particular, I noted that the class teacher, Georgina, would refer to girls as 'girlies' throughout the day ('where are my girlies'/'come on girlies'), and I wondered about the implications of this nickname in terms of both its exclusivity, and its particular formation of girlhood. 'Girlies' as a word, I would argue, has connotations of particularly cosseted femininity, and denotes a familiarity and closeness that in this case stemmed from notions of specifically gendered commonality. In referring to girls in this way, Georgina established a relationship with female pupils that both reflected and reinforced girls' and boys' separation. This was evidenced perhaps most clearly on the final day of term, when I watched a group of girls cluster around Georgina's desk as she received a card that they had spent a number of consecutive lunchtimes making. In creating and giving this card, these children revealed, first, the continued prevalence of norms around 'feminine' diligence and care, with this representing just one of many moments wherein girls dedicated their free time to (albeit enjoyed) 'emotional labour'. Second, and significantly, the gendered exclusivity of this moment revealed clearly the particular relationship formed between Georgina and her girl-pupils, with Georgina representing an 'established' member of the community in which these girls were learning, eagerly, to position themselves as part (see Paechter, 2007).

i. 'Girl play' and heteroglossia

Whilst for the majority of children across both schools, girlhood was understood in terms of distinct and exclusive 'feminine' characteristics, it was significant that almost all such discussions were permeated by contradiction. As with characterisations of boyhood, though, this did little to trouble girlhood's perceived fixity, and children worked to maintain an impression of homogeneity in the face of transgression ('my sister plays with my toys as well/no girls don't play with boys' toys!' (Scott/Mark, Newhaven, ages 7-8)). In the extract below, for example, Julia effectively cements the gender binary by positioning 'Minecraft'²⁹ and 'Ever After High'³⁰ as boys' and girls' games respectively, and in so doing subsumes her own (and Hayley's) heteroglossic practice within a more powerful (but fictive) monoglossic account:

²⁹ Adventure video game

³⁰ An American fashion doll franchise and web-series, which some girls at Newhaven incorporated into their fantasy play by taking on the roles of its princess characters

- Julia: I think um, the girls wanna play Ever After High, and stuff and the boys wanna play Minecraft
- Dawei: (Play fighting in the background) kill kill kill!
- Toby: You like playing Minecraft
- Julia: Yeah I like playing Minecraft [overtalking] I really like playing Minecraft but then I like playing girly games
- CA: Mm hm?
- Julia: Because, em, I normally play with Lottie like, Ever After High and stuff, but I normally play- I normally play Minecraft with Hayley (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

In this instance, it was by drawing on monoglossic understandings that the supposed 'fixity' of girl/boy play was maintained, where for Julia, a game characterised by violence and technology could be understood only in relation to (honorary) boyhood ('boys like video games, girls don't' (John, Newhaven, age 6); 'boys like... games with guns' (Jaaved, Eastfield, age 8)). Thus, regardless of the actual 'sex' of their players, 'girls' and 'boys' games remained understood largely in terms of their 'gendered' characteristics, which both reflected and reinscribed monoglossic understandings. This (false) fixity is demonstrated further in the extract below, where Hugh somewhat incongruously describes his sister's Ninja Turtles bed sheet (typically coded as masculine) as representing evidence of her gendered other-ness. For Hugh, the girl/boy dualism is maintained – and corroborated by Jay – via reference to incorrigible 'difference' ('me and my sister have the same beds but different'), in spite of his example (Ninja Turtles) standing at odds with his initially more normative characterisation ('[girls] watch Barbie'):

- CA: What do you mean girl stuff?
- Hugh: Girl stuff's just different like, Barbie things that they like- they watch Barbie. Like my sister, and me. Because me and my sister have the same beds but different. Cos hers is Ninja Turtles and mine's Star Wars.
- Jay: Yeah! Boys' stuff's just like Star Wars and everything kind of transformers (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

As with boys' play, it was largely in relation to such notions of 'difference' that girlhood was conceptualised: understood as much by what it 'was not' as by what it 'was' (see Butler, 1990). This was made perhaps most evident in discussions of 'strength' and 'weakness' (and related bravery/fearfulness), which, as discussed in the previous chapter, were almost universally characterised by children in terms of masculinity and femininity, respectively. Again, though, such characterisations were frequently underwritten by contradiction, and it was striking that the monoglossic discourse of girls' comparative 'lack' endured despite evident contradiction ('boys are more faster than girls- except Alison she's the fastest' (Aamir, Eastfield, age 8)). In each of the extracts below, for example, strength/physicality and bravery are cited as defining characteristics of boyhood, and it is again through a process of 'submersion, refusal, and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7) that heteroglossia is invisibilised:

Laya: I don't want to be a girl. Cos I want to climb a house.

CA: And can girls not do that?

Laya: No, boys.

Ellie: I'm good at climbing!

Laya: No, boys. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Kamal: Um, girls always get scared of the dark and boys don't. (Agreement)

Tom: I do only if I hear like, something outside and I- if I'm in my house by myself and then it's really dark, that's when I get scared (Others agree)/

Jamie: /yeah me too cos y' mind just thinks, there's somebody there/

Kamal: /yeah. Girls are most scared though

Others: Yeah (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Equally, whilst conceptualisations of girlhood in terms of 'good behaviour' were frequent across both schools ('girls are just more sensible' (Eric, Eastfield, age 10); 'boys are more naughtier!' (John, Newhaven, age 6)), many discussions of classmates' behaviours in practice revealed the falsity of this dualism whilst again doing little to trouble its perceived fixity. In the extracts below, for example, relative 'naughtiness' is understood as such a defining feature of boyhood that Alice conceptualises 'being a boy' and 'going on amber' (a mark of bad behaviour at Newhaven) as inextricable,

before going on to identify three girls in her class who have been subject to this penalty:

Alice: Em, it would not be nice [to be a boy] because, you might not like to go on amber, but you would go on amber.

CA: Are boys on amber more?

Alice: Yeah because they're naughtier/

Jess: /and Dawn's on amber

Alice: Dawn's always on amber.

Steph: And, once Ellie said I'm never on amber, and then on that day she went on amber.

Mei: Lucy has been on amber.

Jess: I've never ever been on amber.

Others: I've never. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

ii. Girlhood and repudiation

As has been demonstrated consistently elsewhere (see e.g. Epstein, 1998; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2004; Paechter, 2012), this perceived difference between 'boy' and 'girl' (inter)activity was far from equally weighted, and whilst boys' games were rarely, if ever, subject to repudiation on the grounds of their 'boyishness', 'girls' games' were frequently repudiated by boys and girls, where (over-) association with 'femininity' represented a contaminating threat for many (see Thorne, 1993). The following extract from my fieldnotes is representative of many of my initial discussions with children, where girls' enjoyment of 'boys' and 'girls' things stands starkly at odds with boys' vehement repudiations of girlhood. Also striking here is the fundamentally contradictory nature of this interaction, wherein heteroglossia is at once recognised ('many children put their hands up for both'), and denied ('boys like Batman and girls like princesses'):

During my introduction of the project, children tell me: girls like playing mums and dads and boys like playing football; boys like Batman and girls like fairy princesses; girls like pink and boys like blue; boys like video games and girls like reading. When I asked who liked each of those things (who likes football? who likes video games?), many children put their hands up for both, though few boys put their hands up for 'girly'

things, with numerous performative 'urgh's in response to, in particular, fairies and pink. When introducing the project to each new class, there always seems to be this contradiction, where children maintain the monoglossic façade ('boys like this/girls like that') whilst simultaneously recognising their own subversion of it ('actually, I like that'). The heteroglossic reality of boyhood, though, remains relatively unseen here, with the whole-class nature of this discussion necessitating a very definite, public repudiation of 'femininity'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/02/15)

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the frequency with which 'girlhood' signifiers were repudiated was striking, and there were many moments during each school day where boys (and girls) would make a point of stating their dislike, or disgust, of 'feminine' symbols ('I put a bead in my ear before... so I didn't have to hear the teacher reading a story about, Angelina Balleri::na! (Josh, Newhaven, age 9)). Of these, it was the colour pink – profoundly representative of contaminating, abject girlhood – that was subject to the most regular and vehement repudiation, with its marked status making it near impossible for children to maintain a neutral stance towards it. Indeed, discussions of pink seemed always to take on an almost political manner, with children's position in relation to the colour needing always to be defensively positive, or more often, fiercely negative. This is made evident below, where pink's marked status leads Lorna to physically push it away from her, and (literally) distance herself from over-association with abject, 'girly' femininity:

There's a pink piece of paper on the table – Lorna tells me fiercely, 'oh I hate pink, I just hate it – urgh', pushing the piece of paper away. I'm aware of this being something of a performance for my benefit (she's been very keen to demonstrate her 'tomboyhood' to me), but am still struck by the symbolic power of pink as a colour: it is never able to be treated neutrally. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 01/06/15. Class aged 7-8)

Equally, Poppy's insistence (below) that 'there's no such thing as boy colours and girl colours' is followed by a vehement – and somewhat contradictory – repudiation of pink on the grounds of its association with 'girly girls'. Whilst critical of the rigidity of gender norms, then, Poppy still maintains an understanding of pink as inextricable from abject hyper-femininity, and implicitly shores up the pink/blue binary by following her stated hatred of pink by asserting her love of blue. Through this

assertion, Poppy reveals both the force of the 'pink-girlhood' association, and the comparative valorisation – or at least relative neutrality – of 'boy stuff' (blue):

Poppy: (Confidently) There's no such thing as boy colours and girl colours!/
Lily: /pink and blue!

CA: Does anybody like pink?

Poppy: No. I hate it/
Aafa: /I like it a little bit/

Poppy: It's for- it's for girly girls

Lily: I hate it.

Poppy: I like blue! (DG, Newhaven. Girls age 5-6)

Aside from children's own repudiations, there were also various moments wherein teachers themselves worked to cement discourses of 'contaminating' femininity. Below, for example, Mr. Jackson draws on these to pose a (joking) threat to Stuart's 'masculinity', both reinscribing notions of girlhood as abject, and contributing to the already somewhat hostile relationship between boy and girl pupils. Significantly, I find it hard to imagine this scene playing out similarly – or indeed happening at all – with the genders reversed, and recognise this as reflective of the scenario's specifically misogynist basis, where it is girlhood in particular that holds negative symbolic power:

There is a hair scrunchy in the classroom and Mr. Jackson (supply teacher) is trying to work out who it belongs to. He asks Stuart, jokingly, if it's his. There is laughter from the class, and Stuart replies 'it's definitely not mine because I'm not a girl'. Mr. Jackson teases, 'are you sure it's not yours?!' and waves it at Stuart, who slaps it away vehemently. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 11/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

Another example of such institutional repudiation was revealed to me when looking through children's (aged 7-8) English workbooks at the end of one school day at Eastfield. Doing so, I noticed that numerous boys had cited 'stinky girls', 'pink stuff' and 'boring princesses' as examples of 'stuff I don't want in my [writing project]': strikingly unanimous repudiations that belied the relatively transgressive gender productions of some of their authors. When I asked the class teacher about this, I was told simply that these examples came from the original story-writing resource (*My*

Brilliant Book (Broad, 2009)), in which the male protagonist compiles a similar list of 'girl things' in his own 'stuff I don't want' section. For these children, then, girlhood-repudiation was not limited to informal spaces, but was also formally sanctioned via a resource that drew on and cemented a specifically misogynist gender divide. This was particularly discouraging given that a small group of boys in this class were relatively subversive in their gender productions and, I thought, unlikely to have so explicitly abhorred girlhood without such normative (sexist) guidance.

iii. Tomboyhood

As discussed in the previous section, the most common means by which girls avoided femininity's 'contaminating' implications was via appropriations of 'tomboy' status, which, though in some ways transgressive, worked largely to cement girlhood's position as 'lesser'. Without exception, children defined a 'tomboy' as 'a girl who likes boy things', and used this subjectivity as a means by which to claim participation in the various activities over which boys held undue monopoly. In so doing, girls (and boys) largely reinscribed rather than troubled binary understandings, by situating tomboys as (albeit accepted) gender transgressors whose participation in 'boy' activities did little to disrupt the social order. This is made clear in the extract below, where Ella's vehement repudiation of Barbies ('I flushed its head off!') reveals the particularly contaminating status of girlhood signifiers, as well as the perceived inextricability of dolls and girlhood. Despite her own (and others') dislike of Barbies, their incorrigible link to girlhood remains intact, with Ella's claims to 'tomboy' status reflecting the rejection of an abject, monoglossic femininity ('girls always play with Barbies') that stands at odds with the lived experiences of many girls in practice (including herself):

Ella: My worst thing about being a girl, is that, em- girls always play with Barbies and once for my birthday, em- someone gave me a Barbie doll, and guess what I done with it? (laughing) I put it down the toilet! (Laughter) I flushed it's head off!

Colin: Cos Ella just hates girl stuff/

Ella: /yeah cos I'm a tomboy (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

As I discussed in the previous chapter, though, by far the clearest play over which boys held monopoly was football, and girls were regularly and explicitly excluded on the

grounds of boys' purported 'ownership' ('the boys won't let us play' (Sophie, Newhaven, age 9)), and girls' perceived inability ('they say you're not good enough' (Amy, Eastfield, age 7)). Indeed, for some children the notion of girls playing sports represented a near-impossibility, with monoglossic conceptualisations rendering strength/physicality and girlhood mutually exclusive. This is particularly evident in the first two extracts below, where Dawei and Molly question the imaginability of female 'physicality' in relation to football and skateboarding, respectively. Equally striking is Tanish's suggestion in the third extract that Aadita might 'get hit in [the] head with [her] lo::ng golden hair' if attempting to play football with the boys: a characterisation that works – despite Aadita's actual appearance – to homogenise girlhood through notions of (specifically, blonde and Westernised) 'beauty'. In each of these narratives, children position girlhood and sport as incommensurable, whilst simultaneously ignoring the heteroglossic reality of lived girlhoods in practice:

CA: Ok? What if there was a girl in your class who liked playing football?

Toby: Gross!

Alberto: She'd b::e a/

Dawei: /oh! She might have been a boy before? (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

During wet playtime, Clare begins playing on a skateboard in the classroom. There's no teacher present, but some children tell her she's not allowed. Mark complains 'you're not allowed! That's Lottie's!!' in response to which Molly asks scornfully, 'how can it be Lottie's she's a girl' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 12/05/15. Class aged 7-8)

Aadita: I wish I could play football!

CA: Yeah?

Aadita: But I don't wanna do it

CA: No? Why not?

Aadita: Because I get- I get embarrassed! Because, the boys are always just looking at me

Tanish: Or you might just see the football and just- it might hit in your head with your lo::ng golden hair!

Aadita: I don't have long golden hair?! (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

iv. 'Girl play' and liveability

Notwithstanding girls' evident exclusion from a range of male-dominated activities, I was still struck by the relative liveability of girls' as opposed to boys' gender transgressions, and the implications of this for mixed-sex interaction and play. Indeed, whilst girls did face repercussions for transgressing normative femininities ('they always make fun of me, just cos I'm playing a boyish game! (Paula, Newhaven, age 9); [they say] y'can't play football because you're girls' (April, Eastfield, age 9)), the comparatively valorised nature of 'boys' play' rendered 'tomboy' positionalities significantly more liveable than the transgressive boyhoods discussed in the previous chapter. As such, girls' play across both schools tended to be more diverse than boys', with girls able to switch between 'tomboy' and 'girly girl' positionalities ('I really like playing Minecraft but then I like playing girly games' (Julia, above)) without significant threat posed to their liveable gendered identities.

It was likely due to this comparative liveability that girls and boys often appeared to take on the roles of 'initiator' and 'gatekeeper' respectively when negotiating mixed-sex interaction, a pattern made evident by girls' references to boys 'letting them join in' ('sometimes the boys'll be soft on us and let us play' (Harriet, age 9, Eastfield)), as well as by comments made around boys' 'moods', and the influence of these on girls' participation ('Could the girls play football at lunchtime if they wanted to?/Depends what type of mood th'boys were in' (C/Liz, Eastfield, age 10)). Indeed, Paige's (Eastfield, age 10) recognition that 'we ask [boys] if they want to play, they don't ask us' hinted strongly at the different implications faced by boys and girls who sought mixed-sex interaction, with the extracts below demonstrating the heightened threat that such interactions posed to constructions of 'masculinity':

Finn: Yeah sometimes I just don't like playing with girls 'cos people say I'm a girl

Ava: Yeah/

Finn: /but girls play with boys and that's alright with them but then when boys play with girls, they say it's weird/

Ava: /we say this every time, boys, expect boys, to be boys. And girls expect girls to be girls. Y'know what I mean? (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

During consent groups, Adam asks 'why do boys and girls hate each other?' Dan replies 'I don't hate all girls! I don't hate April, or Paige, or Catherine', in response to which Adam scoffs, 'e::h that's because you're a girl! And I hate you!' (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 24/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

Notwithstanding the lesser need felt by girls to repudiate boyhood, there were nonetheless some moments (albeit significantly fewer) where girls expressed comparative hostility towards boyhood ('because boys are just, stupid!' (Harriet, Eastfield, age 9)). Most often, though, such repudiations occurred as part of a broader valorisation of conventional femininity, and thus effectively shored up discourses that positioned girlhood as inextricable from, in particular, fashion and 'beauty'. Below, for example, it is boyhood's incommensurability with valued feminine characteristics (being pretty, wearing dresses) that renders it abject, with boys positioned in opposition to comparatively 'pretty', 'flowery' girlhood:

Steph: Girls are pretty and boys just, stink of rotten old eggs! (Laughter)

Alice: And girls get to wear dresses and boys don't!

Jess: Yeah boys are smelly wellies/

Steph: /they are smelly and girls would never be smelly/

Alice: /yea::h they would girls smell of- of flowers! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Significantly, more vehement repudiations of boyhood appeared to come largely from girls who were positioned as 'low status' by their peers: revealing not only some girls' more forceful responses to being so abjectly positioned, but also the different implications of girl- and boy-hood repudiations, respectively. Indeed, whilst boys' hatred of girlhood worked often to cement masculinity, it appeared that a similarly forceful dislike of boyhood had the opposite effect for girls, threatening intelligible (hetero-) 'feminine' identities ('you don't like boys? You're a freak' (Sophie to Kay, Newhaven, ages 9-10)). For Jacob's group below, for example, it appears at least in part to be Paula's hostility towards boys that renders her a 'freak', despite these same boys' equally emphatic, and untroubled, hostility towards girls. Further, Paula's specifically hetero/sexually charged 'attacks' seemed to me to represent a form of tactical resistance to her abject positioning ('I always chase them and hug them!'),

where being rendered 'undesirable' placed her in a powerful position from which her 'contamination' could be used to her advantage:

Jacob and Tyler are singing: 'y'got no friends, y'got no friends': a teasing chant that I've observed at both schools. Tyler insists that he has, then starts talking about how Paula 'has no friends' and 'everyone hates her cos she's always attacking the boys – she hates the boys!?' The group agree that Paula is a 'freak', and jokingly accuse each other of being romantically involved with her. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 18/03/15. Class aged 9-10).

Ivy: I like having long nails so you can attack boys/

Paula: /boys are scared of us so it's very good! Well they're scared of me because I always hug them all the time! (Laughs)

Ivy: They're scared of me cos [inaudible]

CA: Why do you do that Paula?

Paula: To annoy them! And I chase them as well!

...

Jen: I love having long hair

Paula: Cos it's good t'hit boys with (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 9-10)

Notwithstanding these moments, it was largely recognised to be boys who most strongly repudiated mixed-sex friendships ('cos [boys] hate girls...I never hate boys' (Rachel, Newhaven, age 6)), and despite the relative diversity of their interactions in practice, boys' friendship 'narratives' worked still to maintain an impression of fixed, and often repudiative, separation:

Jevaun: Actually, I don't like being a boy.

CA: Yeah? What don't you like about being a boy?

Jevaun: Because girls, always play with you! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Noah: Em, I like being a boy because/

Toby: /y'get to/

Noah: /(in disgusted voice) you don't have to play with the gi:rls.

Toby: Yea::h! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

v. Conclusions: Looks, play, and communities of practice

Though this chapter has been split into two halves – exploring the ‘material’ and ‘interactional’ workings of girlhood in turn – it is important to note here that ‘looks’ and ‘play’ should be understood as fundamentally interrelated categories, which worked together to constitute understandings and doings of ‘femininity’. Indeed, whilst I began with an exploration of the ways in which looks brought girlhood into being *physically* (where long hair and dresses acted as constitutive features of femininity), ‘looks’ were identifiable equally in girls’ *interactions*, with material discourses drawn on frequently in conceptualisations and doings of friendships and play. Equally, it was through participation in female communities of practice that girls both learned and reinscribed looks’ significance, revealing looks and interaction as both jointly bringing one another into being, and working together to constitute and solidify conceptualisations of ‘girlhood’. For boys, in contrast, a purposeful lack of concern with physical appearance rendered ‘looks’ a relatively insignificant aspect of play activities, which lead in turn to understandings of boyhood practices as comparatively unhindered (‘it’s all boring! Y’have t’put makeup o::n’ (Noah, Newhaven, age 8)). The role of aesthetic norms in delimiting understandings and doings of girlhood was therefore significant across both schools, and lead to conceptualisations of femininity as by definition more constrained:

CA: Ok, why wouldn’t you like being a girl?

Mason: Cos! Cos y’wear lipstick/

Caleb: /oh y’wear makeup/

Pete: /oh, oh oh! And y’have long hair. And if y’tryin’ to play something, it would flick in y’face! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

Notwithstanding this inequity, I have highlighted throughout this chapter the various ways in which girls resisted discourses that positioned them as ‘lesser’, as well as the heteroglossia that permeated all purportedly monoglossic doings of girlhood. Whilst many of these resistances – particularly appropriations of tomboy status – worked largely to reinscribe normativity by cementing binary understandings (‘[being a boy is] just more, exciting’ (Paige, Eastfield, age 10)), girls’ challenges to gender inequity

nonetheless revealed a critical awareness and desire for change, which might be effectively harnessed by teachers in future work on equalities:

Sometimes boys just get more respect than girls? Just because they're boys. (April, Eastfield, age 9).

7. Doing Sexualities

Ruth: So, Tracy and Connor, like each other. Peggy and Nick. Em, Jake likes Paige but Paige doesn't like Jake. Some people have like, random crushes/

Rosie: /I think, Sam likes Liz a bit/

Kelly: /n::o Adam likes Liz (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Because the girls, want a boyfriend and then the bo::ys- the boys want a girlfriend.
(Julian, Newhaven, age 5)

Considering the wealth of research that has revealed the centrality of (hetero)sexual cultures to children's informal social worlds (see e.g. Thorne 1993; Kehily 2002; Skelton and Francis 2003; Blaise, 2005; Robinson, 2013; Paechter, 2015) it should have come as little surprise to find hetero-sexual and -romantic discourses structuring peer group interactions at both Newhaven and Eastfield. In analysing both discussion/story group and observational data, I found heterosexuality to be by far the most frequently recurring of all themes, shaping children's interactions and 'permeat[ing] almost every facet of school life' (Renold, 2005: 1). Above, Ruth, Rosie and Kelly's conversation encapsulates the complex 'heterosexualised social and cultural network' (ibid: 95) that framed children's interactions across school, whilst Julian's assertion that 'girls want a boyfriend and...boys want a girlfriend' positions heterosexuality as an incorrigible truth shaping gendered relationships. In spite of the often heteroglossic nature of children's gendered and sexualised 'doings' in reality, heterosexuality maintained a firmly monoglossic position in school, acting as the norm against which all 'Other' identities and relationships were both positively and negatively measured.

Throughout this chapter, I explore the complex and multiple ways in which children negotiated discourses of sexuality in school. Section one focuses on productions of (and resistances to) normative cultures of (hetero)sexuality, whilst section two investigates children's conceptualisations of non-heterosexuality, in relation to both peer group discourse and group readings of De Haan and Nijland's (2002) *King and King*.

I. Cultures of (hetero)sexuality

i. Structuring school culture

For children at both Newhaven and Eastfield, (hetero)sexual discourse was one of the most pervasive features of informal school culture, and despite being acutely aware of this probability, I found myself struck still by both the immediacy and regularity with which it revealed itself. From my earliest days in the field, I was made privy to countless hetero –sexualised and –romantic moments that showed ‘hetero-discourse’ to both explicitly structure interactions, and more implicitly suffuse in-school worlds. Over the course of the average school day I would hear frequent talk of boyfriends, girlfriends, dating and dumping; witness the heterosexualisation of multiple seemingly neutral objects and actions (‘Lynne tells Jane [ages 7-8]: ‘look, my pen’s a boy and yours is a girl!’ and then presses them together as if they’re kissing’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 04/06/15)); and observe an array of heterosexual and romantic themes permeating games and relationships. The following two extracts are taken from fieldnotes written during my first day at Newhaven, and illustrate both the prevalence, and immediate visibility, of ‘boyfriend-girlfriend culture’ (see also Connolly, 2003; Paechter, 2007, 2015; Martin, 2011):

On the playground, two girls come over to chat to me. One tells me unprompted: “guess what? My brother is in love with someone in his class and she’s his girlfriend”. Her friend whispers to her (coyly): ‘tell her about me’. I’m told that the friend is in love with Sam – a boy in her class – and that it’s a big secret and she has an engagement ring.

...

At lunch, Daisy tells me: ‘you know Millie’s boyfriend is Daniel? Mine is Gabriel’. Rosie tells me she has two boyfriends but ‘hasn’t decided which one to marry yet’. Charlotte then chips in – ‘my boyfriend is Alfie! When he came to this school absolutely all the girls were dying to marry him... but he wanted to marry me, because he thought I was the prettiest!’ (Fieldnotes, Newhaven. 02/02/15. Children aged 5-6)

Across all year groups, hetero-relationship culture was a key feature of informal interaction, manifesting not only through the explicit discussion and enactment of boy/girlfriend-ships but also in a range of more implicit ways through children’s

interactions and play. The extracts below encapsulate just some of countless moments wherein (hetero) familial, romantic, and normative themes were drawn on within children's peer groups. First, discourses of hetero-romance are enacted (and reinforced by Ms Gibson) in Laya, Steph and Jess' wedding-play, wherein Jess plays the role of 'beautiful bride'. Although in reality Steph is playing the role of groom (likely due to boys' relative reluctance to participate in such 'feminising' hetero-play (see also Renold, 2005; Wohlwend, 2012; Gansen, 2017)), Jess nonetheless insists that she is marrying Hugh, thereby maintaining a façade of monoglossia despite the wedding's heteroglossic casting:

Laya, Steph and Jess all get into the 'car' (made from rows of chairs) to go the wedding. Ms Gibson passes and tells Jess 'aren't you a beautiful bride!' Komi asks if Steph (who is dressed as the 'groom') is marrying Jess, to which they respond 'no Hugh is!' The three girls then parade, performatively, through the main space of the classroom (where Hugh is playing Duplo on the floor with Jay and Obasi). Nick watches from a distance with (smiling) intrigue. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 01/05/15. Class aged 5-6)

Whilst it was generally younger children who engaged in such fantasy play – regularly taking on bride/groom, mum/dad and prince/princess roles – older children reinscribed hetero-discourse through a range of other jokes, games, and interactions. Below, for example, Lixie and Jane (ages 7-8) employ discourses of (hetero-) chasing and courting (as well as notions of predatory male sexuality) in their game of kiss-chase, whilst Alison and Jamila (ages 7-8) use hetero-romance as a tool for (light-hearted) teasing. For the latter two children, the heterosexual structure of the '1000 boyfriends' game goes unquestioned, and results not only in a switch to '1000 girlfriends' for Stuart and Liam, but also in their conclusion that in reality I must have just one boyfriend, this being an incorrigible facet of (grown up) girlhood:

Lixie and Jane run up to me laughing and shouting "protect us!!" I ask from what and they tell me 'kissing! From Scott, Mark and Jonny!' When asking about this later, they tell me straightforwardly: 'the girls chase the boys and the boys chase the girls' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 16/03/15. Children aged 7-8)

On the field, Alison and Jamila are putting their hands above my head to indicate 'how many boyfriends' I have (I have to put my hand over my mouth to stop the number rising). They laughingly tell me that I have 1000 boyfriends, then later 'no not really she just has one'. I ask why they think I'd have a boyfriend, in response to which they shrug and say 'because you look like you do. Because you're a girl!' When Stuart and Liam join in the game, they switch to '1000 girlfriends'. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 10/03/15. Children aged 7-8)

Moments such as these permeated my time across both schools and corroborated a wealth of existing research that has revealed the ever-presence of hetero-discourse to children's informal worlds. Through heterosexualised chasing, teasing and fantasy-play, as well as truth or dare (wherein girls and boys were asked who they 'fancied', and were dared to kiss each other) and classroom interactions ('Eoife and Rob [aged 9-10] are accused of 'going out' because they're sitting next to each other' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 18/06/15)), children both drew on and reinscribed monoglossic discourses of heterosexuality in a range of complex ways. Further, as adult female researcher I was often included in these heterosexual interpellations, with the extract above ('you look like you [have a boyfriend]') representing just one of many moments wherein heterosexuality and adult girlhood were positioned as inextricable ('which of the boy teachers do you fancy?!' (Mona, Eastfield, age 9); 'you look like you're married' (Nick, Newhaven, age 5)).

Further to structuring interactions and play, hetero-discourse was also central to conceptualisations of gender. When asking children to simply 'tell me about being a girl/boy', for example, answers frequently referred to heterosexuality ('Well, I've got about:~t, ten boyfriends!' (Poppy, Newhaven, age 5)), and many children conceptualised their gendered selfhood in terms of (heterosexual) opposition and relational 'Otherness'. This perceived interrelationship of sexuality and gender is encapsulated in the two extracts below, where Aafa positions 'having a boy...[and being] in love' as a defining feature of girlhood, whilst Robert and Tyler define boyhood in terms of (hierarchical and heterosexual) opposition ('y' not female'/'y' can get, girls' phone numbers'):

CA: So could anybody tell me what it's like being a girl?

Aafa: Em, I feel like being a girl is that, y'know when boys come up to you, and girls tell to the boys that they love them so- being like a girl, having a boy with them, makes them in love and that's how, I love to be a girl. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: Right so what's- what's a good thing about being a boy?

Robert: (Thinking) a good thing about being a boy. Y'not a female (laughter)

Tyler: A good thing about being a boy is, y'can get, girls' phone numbers. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Given such relational understandings – where girls were perceived by boys as both gendered *and* sexual 'Other', and vice versa – it followed that girl-boy relationships were framed primarily by heterosexual matrices of intelligibility (see Butler, 1990). Below, for example, both Lucy and Jevaun respond to my question about 'opposite sex' friends in heterosexual terms, whilst Julian's comment serves to both disrupt and reify the heterosexualisation of girl-boy friendships. By insisting 'I like playing with girls but I haven't got a girlfriend', Julian both acknowledges and resists the conceptual link between 'gender' and 'heterosexuality', and despite his platonic girl-friendships, is still compelled to position himself in (albeit oppositional) relation to a monoglossic discourse of girls-as-sexual-other:

CA: So are you friends with boys and girls?

Lucy: Yeah Gabriel's my friend that's why I love Gabriel. Cos sometimes- sometimes, if you're friends to them, they will marry you. (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: Right, and do you like playing with girls too?

Jevaun: I like playing with girls I've got a girlfriend!

Julian: I like playing with girls but I haven't got a girlfriend. I haven't got a girlfriend.

Jevaun: I have got a girlfriend. And Oliver's got a girlfriend and it's Alice! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Contrary to many adults' impressions of young relationships as resembling (sexually) 'innocent' platonic friendships ('I don't think they understand really- it's just like being best friends' (Nora, Y1 teacher Newhaven)), the romantic structure of boy/girlfriend-

ships was clear across all year groups ('sometimes I kiss my boyfriend' (Aafa, Newhaven, age 5)), and kissing, marrying, holding hands and 'going on dates' were key to discussions of hetero-relationships. Both extracts below are representative of countless romantic conceptualisations of in-school relationships, whilst Oliver's claim that girlfriends are chosen on the basis of being 'beautiful' demonstrates their explicitly hetero-gendered framing:

CA: So what does it mean if you've got a boyfriend, what do you do with them?

Ania: Kiss, them! (Laughter)

...

CA: So is it about, just being very good friends?

Robyn: No, more than being friends (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: So how do you decide if somebody's your girlfriend?

Oliver: Mmm, because they look beautiful!

Jevaun: Yes! (Giggles) That's it!

CA: So do you ask them to be your girlfriend?

Oliver: No! We just- we just blow them kisses! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Whilst the form that hetero-relationships took differed significantly across age groups, their distinction from platonic friendships ('there's a huge difference!' (Dawei, Newhaven, age 7)) – alongside their fundamentally counter-school and secretive nature ('it's very secret- people kiss behind the football pitch/and behind the trees' (Eli/Zach, Eastfield, ages 5-6)) – remained constant. Further, conceptualisations most often reflected distinctly heterogendered understandings of relationship practice. Further to the heteronormative discourses reproduced by younger children through (hetero-) marriage and fantasy play, older children drew equally on conventional heterosexual trajectories and gendered notions of 'courtship' in discussions of dating culture:

Tyler: Y'get born, y'go to school, y'get a girlfriend, later on, you/

Jacob: /get married/

Robert: /or y'just get dumped/

Jacob: /then y'have sex, then (laughter)

Tyler: Then y'have a baby and that goes back to square one! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Ava: Em, I like being a girl, because, it's usually the boy, going to the girl/

Kay: /yeah, yeah I love that as well/

Ava: /so you're the one that gets all the attention/

Kay: /and y'get more presents

Ava: And u::sually the boys propose to the girls (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 9-10)

Whilst children recognised and at times supported non-heterosexual relationships and identities (discussed later), heterosexuality nonetheless maintained a central position as the norm against which Other, 'marginal' sexualities were understood. Further, hetero-conceptualisations not only suffused children's peer group cultures, but also shaped teachers' discourse and interactions. Through off-hand comments about their own (hetero) relationships ('Ms Simons is getting married in two weeks and tells the class [aged 9-10] about her wedding plans and how her fiancé proposed' (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 15/06/15)) and the heterosexualisation of children's behaviours ('Nick [aged 5] gives Ms Gibson a heart-shaped pendant at the end of the year as a thank you present. She responds 'ooh you're going to be such a little heartbreaker!' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 30/06/15)), teachers worked equally to maintain a heteronormative social order that positioned women/men and girls/boys as gendered and sexual 'opposites'. In each of the extracts below, for example, hetero-discourse is drawn on in teachers' interactions with children and in their structuring of class activities:

For English project work, Tracy has written a fact file about Arnold Schwarzenegger. Ms Lambert comments provocatively (and loudly, addressing the whole class) "Tracy's really into talking about Arnie's bulky muscles aren't you!" There is a resounding "ooh!" from the other children. Tracy tells the boys next to her, defensively (and embarrassedly) "er, he's like 60 and he's already married". (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 09/07/15. Class aged 9-10)

Kelly and April tell me about how the girls and boys often fight over who gets to play on the bars at lunchtime, and that some had got into trouble for fighting with each other. Kelly tells me "Ms Simons told us that fighting with each other means that we fancy each other!?" (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 25/03/15. Class aged 9-10)

Significantly, each of these extracts come from fieldnotes taken at Eastfield, where heterosexualised comments and class activities were notably more frequent than at Newhaven, where 'equalities' discourse was woven more profoundly into formal school culture and practice. Indeed, whilst teachers at Newhaven undoubtedly participated in the reproduction of various hetero-norms (discussed further in Chapter 8), there did still appear to be a greater awareness here of heteronormativity's workings, which seemed to lead in turn to a less normatively-infused learning culture.

ii. Variations: age, gender, status

A consistent feature of hetero-culture across all year groups was its markedly gendered nature, and girls' and boys' relationships to discourses of heterosexuality took notably different forms. As has been demonstrated elsewhere (Reay, 2001; Renold, 2005), girls largely took dominant roles in negotiations of hetero-romantic networks, with heterosexual practices representing a 'central and compulsory component of the ways in which [some] girls were 'doing girl'' (2005: 95). Whilst for boys, the simultaneously masculinity-confirming and -denying (2005: 144) nature of association with the 'opposite sex' made heterosexuality an acutely complex arena to navigate, hetero-culture was for many girls central to constructions of socially normative girlhood ('um you're supposed to have boyfriends in year five!' (Sophie, Newhaven, age 9)), constituting perhaps 'the one arena within the social context of their schooling lives where they could...assert their dominance without rendering themselves unfeminine' (2005: 103). As such, hetero-romance was characterised by many children along (repudiatively) 'feminine' lines ('Girls are gross and they just love kissing!' (Jevaun, Newhaven, age 5)), and it was largely girls who orchestrated practices of gossip, fancying, and dating/dumping ('Girls just like picking boys and then dumping them the next day' (Tyler, Newhaven, age 10)). However, whilst in many ways hetero-romantic practice appeared to positively structure and solidify girl-friendship networks, the complex, shifting, and crucially 'secret' nature of hetero-culture meant that friendships also faced difficulties when negotiating hetero-associations and betrayals ('Sophie tells me that she and Maxine have fallen out because Maxine told everyone about Sophie's relationship with Freddie' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/06/17. Children aged 9-10)). For many girls, then, the centrality of hetero-discourse to the working of girl-friendships was something both positively and

negatively experienced, providing a means by which to solidify platonic relationships and assert dominance over boys whilst simultaneously fuelling fall-outs, reinscribing hetero-norms, and creating hierarchical friendship boundaries (see Epstein et al, 2001). Further, whilst many boys were able to draw on anti-romance discourses (e.g. characterising primary school as ‘too young for relationships’ (see also Renold, 2005)) whilst maintaining intelligible – albeit ‘lower-status’ – boyhoods, girls appeared compelled to ‘stand outside’ of girlhood in order to make such claims, describing themselves as ‘tomboys’ or ‘like a boy’ on the grounds of their lack of interest in heterosexuality. Thus, notwithstanding girls’ differing levels of participation in hetero-culture, the perceived inextricability of girlhood and (romantic) heterosexuality remained largely untroubled (‘being a girl is rubbish cos they all just love kissing and boys and it’s so gro:::ss!’ (Meg, Newhaven, age 7)).

Further to this, hetero-culture took markedly different forms across year groups, conceptualised in somewhat fluid and shifting terms in year one and becoming increasingly concrete, and monogamous, through years three and five. For younger children, multiple girlfriends and boyfriends (‘I’ve got lots of boyfriends! (Rachel, Newhaven, age 6)), and the sharing of partners with other classmates (‘Komi is my boyfriend as well!’ (Poppy, Newhaven, age 6)) implied an understanding of heterosexuality as structuring almost all male-female relationships. Jess (Newhaven, age 5), for example, positioned not only boys in her class, but also ‘[her] Daddy and Grandad and Uncle Simon’ as boyfriends³¹, thereby conceiving of almost all males as distinct from same-sex friends and imbued with a (somewhat ineffable) sense of ‘specialness’ (‘the boyfriends are much more specialer than the girlfriends’ (ibid)). It was, perhaps, the largely abstract nature of young boyfriend-girlfriend relationships that compelled Jess to define ‘Daddy and Grandad and Uncle Simon’ in these terms, enabling her to make claims to heterosexual knowledge and related ‘maturity’ in lieu of a ‘real life’ boyfriend in practice. This relative abstraction was further evidenced by young children’s positioning of classmates as girl/boyfriends without their knowledge

³¹ I was attuned throughout the research to issues of safeguarding, and interpreted this as a reflection of Jess’ profound investment in romance culture, and not an indication of exploitation. Young children quite often refer to family members in ‘romantic’ terms (‘I am going to marr::y... my daddy!’ (Aadita, Eastfield, age 5)), and indeed I myself, as a child, persuaded my mum to dress as a groom and marry me in front of a congregation of teddies.

(‘Alice is my girlfriend but she doesn’t know that!’ (Oliver, Newhaven, age 6)), and revealed many young hetero-relationships to be in some ways more theoretical than concrete. For many children in year one, it seemed, hetero-relationship culture was not so much a grounded practice as a conceptual framework for understanding oneself in relation to the ‘opposite sex’, as well as a means by which to stake claims to relative adulthood (‘well me and Lottie have been on a date and we went to the park by ourselves’ (Alfie, Newhaven, age 6; see also Paechter, 2015)).

By year three, hetero-relationships were understood in more concrete terms, with children generally ‘going out with’ or ‘fancying’ only one person. Further, the simultaneously compulsory and threatening nature of hetero-association made the ‘doing’ of crushes and relationships a practice characterised by both status and embarrassment. This is revealed below, where Liam describes Amy’s ‘wedding’ as her ‘big secret’, Jamila gives her ‘crush’ a code name, and Jaaved makes prodigious claims to heterosexuality whilst simultaneously insisting that such relationships remain a secret. The threatening potential of hetero-association is revealed further by Liam, whose denial at having participated in Amy and Russell’s imagined wedding (‘no I don’t/I was lying’) intimates the risks associated with (feminising) hetero-play, and reveals the power of monoglossic claims (‘ew gross, I was lying!’) to subsume and diminish heteroglossic practice (‘he wants to be the ring person’):

Amy: Oh oh oh oh! I’ll tell ya who I’m married to!

CA: (Laughs) who are you married to?

Amy: Russell.

Liam: Amy! That’s your big secret!

Amy: And I’ll tell them your secret! He wants to be the ring person that gives us rings/

Liam: /no I don’t!

Amy: Ah yes y’do!

Liam: Ew gross, I was lying.

Amy: No you weren’t.

Liam: I was.

Jamila: My crush is o::n- my crush is on Conker.

CA: Who’s Conker?

Jamila: Alison knows! (Laughing) (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8.)

CA: So what does it mean if you've got a girlfriend or boyfriend at school?

Jaaved: Well I've had loads of girlfriends! But I keep it- I keep it as a secret, I don't let anyone know/

Brad: /me too

Jaaved: And like, if people, if like someone else like, fancies someone, then I keep it like a secret, that they're like, a couple (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Whilst the relative fluidity of year one relationships meant that children were often unaware of their status as girl/boyfriends, older relationships tended to follow more 'adult' practices of 'asking out' that required active participation from both parties. For this reason, relationships in year three and five were somewhat harder to secure, and it was largely 'high-status' children who were able to make claims to real-life girl/boyfriend-ships, with others staking claims to hetero-culture via practices of fancying, gossip, and hetero-play. Such practices were shaped profoundly (as in younger year groups) by heteronormative discourses, with Aamir's group discussion, below, demonstrating both the more monogamous/concrete ways in which older hetero-relationships were conceptualised, and the distinctly hetero-gendered nature of such conceptualisations ('it's a battle...for who gets her'):

Aamir: If y'have two girlfriends right, y'can only pick one/

Jaaved: /em, if y'see like, the person you love, with a different person, then, sometimes, the two, men, like start fighting. Over the girl/

Raajih: /yeah yeah cos, you love Marissa and you/

Aamir: /I love Marissa

Brad: Yeah so it's a battle. It's a battle then. For who gets her.

CA: And then how d'you decide that somebody's your girlfriend or your boyfriend?

Aamir: Em, they have to say each other/

Jaaved: /y'have to ask them, like I did to Marissa. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Despite such comparatively concrete understandings, though, 'going out' in years three and five rarely involved physically going anywhere (see also Skelton and Francis, 2003; Renold, 2005). Indeed, couples often purposefully avoided one another in order

to circumvent the attention (simultaneously feared and enjoyed) that came with 'relationship status' ('I'm not going [to the school play] cos everyone will just be staring at me and Freddie' (Sophie, Newhaven, age 9)), and children's awed discussions of 'actual' in-school relationships ('they actually go to each other's house you know!' (Ava, Newhaven, age 9)) were just one indication of their rarity. Nonetheless, hetero-discourse (if not actual relations/hips) remained near-compulsory to older peer group culture, and the costs of non-participation were often high ('I don't know if Ross is [gay]- he probably is he hasn't got a girlfriend' (Tyler, Newhaven, age 10); Maxine asks Aisha [ages 9-10] who she fancies, to which Aisha replies 'I don't fancy anyone'. Maxine looks at her despairingly and tells her: 'you're a freak' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/03/15)). Further, the particularly sexual nature of hetero-conceptualisations at this age was notable, with sexual – as well as romantic – knowledge working to bolster claims to 'adult' maturity ('Apparently Tyler's had thingy off a girl' (Luke, Newhaven, age 10); 'I've got a girlfriend I had sex when I was three years old!' (Adam, Eastfield, age 10)). In the two extracts below, for example, the significance of romantic/sexual knowledge to socially 'competent' gender production is made clear, where Ava and Kay laugh at their less knowing younger selves (see also Gagnon and Simon, 1974[1973]; Jackson and Scott, 2010b), and Sophie ridicules Neil and Chris for not 'know[ing] what going out means'. In the latter excerpt, Chris's insistent claim to sexual/romantic knowledge and experience makes clear the near-compulsory nature of hetero-discourse to 'competent' doings of boyhood, as well as the punitive consequences of non-participation:

Kay: (Laughing) um, when I was like three, I thought, when people were going out- I thought randomly (laughing) they were just like going outside like to the shop or something/

Ava: /that's what I thought too! (Laughter) (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Sophie is making fun of Neil, shouting to others, 'he doesn't know what going out means he thinks it's like going to town or something!' She then asks Chris, 'do you know what going out means?' He replies 'yes', and then 'I'm not saying'. She teases 'you don't know what it means cos you're not going out with anyone!' to which he replies (unconvincingly, whilst walking away) 'I am actually'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/03/15. Children aged 9-10)

The specifically sexual nature of older children's peer group discourse was further evidenced through frequent references to things being 'wrong', a slang term used across both schools to indicate sexual 'excess' or 'inappropriateness' ('The biggest thing, in our year, is people saying, 'that's wrong'' (April, Eastfield, age 9)). Positioning things as 'wrong' served both as a demonstration of 'adult' (sexual) knowledge and as a tool for sexual teasing, with children running the risk of having even the most seemingly banal behaviours characterised in sexual terms ('Like every move that you do, they say "that's wrong"/they just think everything looks wrong' (Aisha/Ava, Newhaven, ages 9-10)). Similarly to the 'fag' discourse analysed by Pascoe (2005), 'wrong-ness' represented an 'abject position infus[ed]...with regulatory power' (2005: 333), which threatened to over-sexualise almost any action or behaviour. Thus, for year five children, the ever-present spectre of 'wrong-ness' (Pascoe, 2005; Butler, 1990) combined with the near-compulsory nature of (vaguely defined) sexual and romantic knowledge and behaviour made (hetero)sexuality a particularly complex arena to navigate. This simultaneous status and threat of sexual knowledge is encapsulated below, where Sophie boasts about her ('adult') knowledge of 'sex and stuff like that' before being accused of being 'wrong' (that is, *too* explicit/knowledgeable) by Ava. In response to this accusation, Sophie 'lobs the epithet [at Wyatt] in a verbal game of hot potato' (Pascoe, 2005: 338), deflecting her own negative interpellation through the (homo)sexualisation of someone else ('you said a dirty word u:::r!')

CA: So what does it mean if you're going out with somebody in school?

Sophie: It means like (overtalking, shouting) SHUT IT I know about sex and stuff like that!! (Laughter) So basically, they go, to, somebody's house, well one of their houses/

Finn: /and then hide behind the bed!

Sophie: No they go in the bed man! (Shouting, inaudible)

Ava: Sophi:::e that's so wrong!

[...]

Ava: But the thing is when you're boyfriend and girlfriend at school, it's/

Finn: /it's quite embarrassing/

Ava: /and they always tease you/

Finn: /except no one messes with Tyler/

Wyatt: /I do, I mess with Tyler

Sophie: U:::R that's wrong!

Wyatt: Not like that!

Sophie: You said a dirty word u:::r! (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

The difficulties involved in negotiating discourses of 'wrong-ness' appeared particularly acute for girls, for whom the status associated with sexual knowledge was 'often overcast by the shadow of a highly contradictory sexual double standard' (Renold, 2005: 63). Indeed, whilst boys appeared relatively able to participate in explicit hetero-discourse without repercussion (interpellated as 'wrong' for homo- rather than hetero-sexual associations), girls' participation was clouded by the ever-present threat of 'slut/tart' interpellation ('I'm not a slut though Maxine is!' (Sophie, Newhaven, age 9)), which necessitated the production of a competent heterosexual girlhood that was somehow both sexually knowledgeable/attractive and demure. As with the 'tarty but not too tarty' discourse discussed by Renold (2005), girls in year five (and below) were both valued and devalued for their (hetero)sexuality ('em I like girls because they're sexy' (Tyler, Newhaven, age 10); 'd'you know I think, girls look good with makeup but not loads like slutty- like slutty girls' (Mike, Eastfield, age 10)), and were thus compelled to construct femininities that simultaneously embodied and repudiated hetero -discourse and -desirability. Below, for example, Mona makes a claim to 'adult' bodily knowledge by recognising (aloud) the sexual connotations of '[taking her] top off'. However, by insisting that the 'rugby dude' leave the room on these grounds, she positions him, rather than herself, as sexually desirous (or 'wrong'), thereby demonstrating sexual knowledge whilst maintaining (feminine) 'decency':

The class are getting ready for rugby with an external (male) coach. Mona is waiting to get changed, and says loudly, and provocatively, 'bye rugby dude, I've got to take my top off now'. (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 15/06/15. Class aged 9-10)

The complexities involved in negotiating such contradictory discourse were perhaps most clearly demonstrated by Sophie (aged 9) at Newhaven, whose identity construction appeared to centre around the proud assertion of sexual and romantic knowledges ('I know about sex and stuff like that!'; 'do you even know what jizz is!?!'), alongside the seemingly contradictory repudiation of (vaguely defined) over-sexuality

('I'm not a slut though Maxine is!'; 'U::r I'm not doing that dance move it's wrong!'). Whilst claims to hetero-knowledge and participation provided Sophie with relative 'adult' status (see Paechter, 2015) and access to the subject position of 'girlfriend', they also appeared to necessitate mitigation in order to avoid unfavourable positioning as 'over-sexual' or 'slut'. It seemed that Sophie, like many others, was attempting to 'obey the rules of discourse that are themselves contradictory' (Rossiter, 1994: 6) by distinguishing between 'legitimate and illegitimate sexual displays' (Renold, 2005: 50) in her own sexualised production of hetero-girlhood. For boys, it seemed, over-association with heterosexuality did not pose a comparative threat to productions of 'acceptable' gender.

iii. Delimiting mixed-sex friendships

When a girl and boy, are playing together they only accept it when they're boyfriend and girlfriend or married. But why can't we just play, together? (Aisha, Newhaven, age 10)

Across both schools, the pervasiveness of hetero-discourse was such that mixed-sex friendships were acutely difficult to negotiate and maintain. As I discussed earlier, children's reflexive characterisations of girl-boy friendships as a feature of their younger childhoods worked to position gender-division as characteristic of 'competent' girl- and boy-hoods, and thus older (platonic) girl-boy relations were both rare, and subject to regular teasing. Such was the prevalence of hetero-discourse that children ran the risk of having even the most banal of cross-sex interactions heterosexualised, and almost all girl-boy interactions appeared imbued with tension. In the extract below, the pervasiveness of heterosexualisation is revealed in Sophie's positioning of Phil and Paula as 'lovebirds' for sharing a croissant. In response to this accusation, Phil returns the insult to Sophie ('no you two are'), before the two accuse one another, in turn, of hetero-association with 'undesirable' (and same sex) classmates, who are used as scapegoats for the deflection of gender/sexual threats:

For languages day, Ms Johnson brings in croissants for a 'French café'. Phil and Paula are given a croissant to share, and so split it between them. Sophie comments loudly

'URR LOVEBIRDS!' and then whispers to the person next to her 'they're snogging behind their croissant!' Phil responds, 'no you two are', Sophie tells him 'you and Ryan', and then Phil – 'nar, you and Paula'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 19/06/15. Class aged 9-10)

During the research process I witnessed countless moments like this, which revealed heterosexualising discourse to both structure and inhibit girl-boy interaction in school ('Sophie chooses Wyatt for her Maths partner, and Eoife whispers to Nicola: 'do you think she fancies him?' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 11/06/15. Class aged 9-10)). The impact of this discourse on the 'liveability' of mixed-sex friendships was striking, and as children got older, platonic girl-boy relationships became increasingly difficult to maintain ('Mark tells me that his best friend is Clare. Bethan overhears, and snorts: 'best girlfriend more like' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 12/05/15. Class aged 7-8)). Indeed, I was saddened to note that two children (Ava and Wyatt), who had been close friends during my pilot study two years before, seemed by year five to be relatively uncomfortable in one another's presence, their interactions overcast by the threat of heterosexualisation ('Robert shouts over for Wyatt to join in his football game, and jibes: 'ok you can stop sitting with your girlfriend now!' Ava rolls her eyes, both look embarrassed. Wyatt joins Robert for football' (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 04/03/15. Children aged 9-10)). This inhibiting power of hetero-discourse is demonstrated further by Obasi's group, below, who reveal not only the difficulty, even in year one, of maintaining cross-sex relationships outside discourses of hetero-romance, but also the complex interplay of repudiation and desire that characterised (particularly boys') discussions of the 'opposite sex' ('e::w girls/because they're beau::tiful'):

Obasi: I like playing with boys and girls/

Jay: /e::w girls!

Obasi: Like, Megan/

Jay: /ew that's your girlfriend!

Obasi: Ehh, and A::fa, and Lil::y

CA: Yeah? And why do you like playing with them?

Patrick: Because they're beau::tiful!

Obasi: No because they find the minibeasts. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

It therefore came as little surprise to find cross-sex friendships, where they existed, to be particularly plagued by the threat of hetero-interpellation. It appeared, as Jay and Patrick indicate above, that the relationship frameworks available to 'opposite sex' children were primarily ones of either hatred ('e::w girls!') or romance ('because they're beau::tiful'), and platonic girl-boy friendships thus existed almost on the outskirts of intelligible interaction ('Do you like playing with girls too?/Yeah I have a girlfriend!' (C/Jay, Newhaven, age 5)). Below, the perceived inextricability of girl-boy play and heterosexuality is encapsulated by Kara and Amelia, who insist that Alec must have a girlfriend because he '[goes] to her house', whilst Colin and Meg give voice to the profoundly frustrating and delimiting effects of pervasive heterosexualisation:

Alec is telling me about his best friend who lives in Liverpool. Kara and Amelia overhear and start teasing Alec for having a girlfriend. He denies this, but they tell him adamantly 'you do! You told us, you go to her house!' (Fieldnotes, Eastfield: 13/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

CA: Yeah? Why do you think that girls and boys don't play together very often?

Meg: Em because people tease them and think that they're girlfriend and boyfriend and stuff like that!

Colin: It's stupid!

...

Colin: /yeah because- everybody says that they're gonna be kissing in a tree. So like/

Meg: /yeah, cos people do that to us all the time! On the way back from playtime!

Colin: Yeah, I was about to swear I was so angry! (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

As well as inhibiting girl-boy friendships, hetero-discourse worked also to fuel gendered separation through taunts and play, with games such as kiss-chase characterised as much by antagonism as pleasure ('I hate girls because they always chase you' (Nick, Newhaven, age 5)), and 'asking out games' serving at least in part to terrorise and embarrass their subjects. Though in some ways enabling mixed-sex interaction, chasing games and other 'girl versus boy' activities were not just heterosexually-charged ('girls chase boys cos they fancy them!' (Poppy, Newhaven, age 6)), but also appeared to fuel, rather than diminish, gendered opposition ('and

because they hate them!’ (ibid)) One striking example of heterosexuality’s antagonistic potential was that of Paula and Ivy (ages 9-10, Newhaven), who I discussed in the previous section as having been deemed ‘freakish’ and romantically undesirable by their classmates (‘them two are proper freaks man and they’re always trying to kiss all the boys!’ (Maxine, Newhaven, age 9)). As aforementioned, Paula and Ivy used antagonistic heterosexual practices (for example, unwanted kissing, hugging and chasing) to terrorise boys and ‘momentarily position themselves as powerful sexual Other’ (Renold, 2005: 152), and in so doing railed (albeit problematically) against their positioning by playing on their gendered and sexual marginality. Whilst striking, though, such ‘tactical’ retaliation from within (de Certeau, 1988) was rare, and for most girls, being positioned as sexual Other represented a significant threat to be avoided at all costs.

Notwithstanding these divisive effects, hetero-discourse and relationship culture did in many ways enable mixed-sex interaction via the subject positions of ‘girlfriend’ and ‘boyfriend’ (‘It’s nice to have a boy that likes you, for once’ (Abbie, Newhaven, age 7)), with many children drawing on hetero-frameworks to justify otherwise threatening mixed-sex friendships (‘I don’t play with girls, just girlfriends’ (Adam, Eastfield, age 10)). Mark (aged 7) at Newhaven, for example, was subject to regular teasing on the grounds of both his female friendships and enjoyment of dressing up (‘Oh my go::d Mark used to like put on lipstick and play with dolls and stuff it was s::o weird!’/‘Mark’s always playing with Phoebe! Phoebe and Mark sitting in a tree!’ (Meg/Lixie, Newhaven, ages 7-8)) and appeared at various points to use hetero-discourse as a means by which to legitimise ‘anti-normative’ boyhood productions. Below, for example, Mark attempts to counteract the feminising and homosexualising connotations of ‘play[ing] with all the girls’ by positioning girls as girlfriends, and works to maintain a firmly monoglossic ‘boys versus girls’ position in the face of his own heteroglossia. Further, in the second extract Mark first denies and then agrees with Clare’s accusation that he fancies her, hinting at the greater ‘liveability’ of heterosexual, rather than platonic, mixed-sex relationships:

Jonny: Mark’s a girl cos he plays with all the girls! (Laughter)

Mark: Hey! I like girls cos I go:t a girlfriend!

CA: Yeah?

Mark: Everybody calls me ga::y because I've got a left ea::ring/

Jonny: /cos he's got a earring in and he plays with girls!

Mark: The left one isn't gay, actually and I have a girlfriend

[...]

Mark: Ok boys don't like girls. I don't like dressing up now. I don't like girls just girlfriends. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Clare and Mark are chatting about birthday parties. Mark lists his birthdays, all of which Clare has been to. Clare comments (almost accusingly) 'I've been to all your birthdays', then after a pause, 'cos y' fancy us'. Mark denies this, but Clare asks 'why would y'invite us then?!' Ultimately Mark agrees: 'yeah I know'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 02/06/15. Class aged 7-8)

As Mark's experiences attest, association with the 'opposite sex' was particularly complex for boys, for whom cross-sex relationships had the potential to both confirm and deny claims to masculinity (see Renold, 2005). Considering that monoglossic conceptualisations of boyhood demanded boys simultaneously demonstrate heterosexuality and repudiate abject girlhood, it was unsurprising to find many boys' discussions of girlhood to be characterised in large part by fluctuating discourses of desire and disgust:

Jevaun: Actually, I don't like being a boy.

CA: Why's that?

Jevaun: Because girls, always play with you!

Oliver: And kiss you!

[...]

Oliver: But I actually do have a girlfriend. (Laughter)

A few: Me too!

Jevaun: My girlfriend's Millie! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

CA: So do you play with boys and girls?

Jacob: Nar/

Luke: /nar Finn does

Tyler: Aye cos he's a girl!

[...]

Tyler: Aye of course boys wanna go out with girls!

Luke: Cos y'think they're hot!

Robert: And y'fancy them/

Tyler: /yeah I fancy my girlfriend (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

It was likely due to this abject positioning of girlhood, as well as its perceived interrelation with hetero-romance, that boys' conversations were in the most part more sexualised than girls', with sexualisation representing a means by which to make claims to heterosexuality whilst avoiding the feminising connotations of romantic practice ('Sam fancies Mona cos she's got big boobs!' (Adam, Eastfield, age 10); 'Maybe the girls in Barbie will take off their trousers and pants! And show their fairies!' (Eli, Eastfield, age 5)). Each of the extracts below, for example, is taken from group discussions wherein girlhood was both fiercely repudiated and explicitly sexualised, making clear the complex and contradictory discourses of dislike ('girls are horrible creatures') and desire ('cos they're sexy!') that structured negotiations of 'liveable' hetero-masculinity:

CA: What does having a girlfriend mean?

Hugh: It means we're in love!

Jevaun: And, kissy kissy!/
Obasi: /means you're gonna kiss them! Kiss them!

Jevaun: (Quietly) and snog them/

Hugh: /I smack them in the bum! (Laughter)

Obasi: Kiss them/

Hugh: /and, I show them my muscles and push them in the [inaudible] (DG,

Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Zach: No I never play with girls in the whole wide world

CA: Why not?

Eli: No y'do! Cos Marissa's a, hot chick! (Laughter)

CA: Why don't you play with girls?

Zach: Because girls are, horrible creatures.

Eli: Y'do! Because they're sexy! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

Inextricable from this sexualisation was the 'surplus visibility' (Patai, 1992) ascribed to girls' bodies, which unlike boys' were subject to often demeaning gendered and sexualised evaluation ('boys call y'fat and stuff so it just makes y'feel kinda bad about y'self' (April, Eastfield, age 9)). Whilst girls' evaluations of boys and boyfriends were based, however problematically, on a variety of factors ('cos he's so popular, and hilarious!' (Clare, Newhaven, age 7); 'everyone fancies Adam cos he's dea:d funny' (Kelly, Eastfield, age 10)), boys' 'romantic' discussions were in the most part physically informed, with girls' desirability based primarily on notions of 'beauty' and 'sexiness' ('if a girl just, does, exercise all the time...it means they lose weight like this and just look s::o sexy! (Mason, Eastfield, age 6)):

Kelly: No Mel and Tushar used to be, together but Mel broke up with him/

Imani: /because, Tushar started to call Mel fat and stuff?

Kelly: So, Mel broke up with him and then they got back together, and, they're not together now. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Mark: My girlfriend- my ex girlfriend is big- I mean she has this belly like this!
(Laughs)

Jonny: Fa::tty!

Mark: And I dumped her! I dumped her because she was, fatter! So, so I said, next!
And I saw this, beautiful girl with lo::ng ha::ir, that goes everywhere and I said,
yes please! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Further to revealing the (sexist) imbalance that characterised children's relationships to hetero-culture, conversations such as these exposed also the damaging implications of the conceptual link between 'looks' and 'girlhood'. Indeed, it appeared to be at least in part as a result of the perceived centrality of 'beauty' to 'femininity' that girls were rendered so vulnerable to evaluation, with this heightened visibility further exacerbated by boys' attempts to 'masculinise' heterosexual claims via explicit (often degrading) sexualisation.

II. Negotiating Non-Heterosexuality, Reading *King and King*

E::h there's a thing where y'just go up to somebody and say "you dropped your gay card!" and then if they look you just start laughing and run away. (Shane, Eastfield, age 8)

Ava: People ask the little kids if they're straight or bent. Like tell them to tilt their head and shoulders down and if they're bent over, little kids always say they're bent/

Wyatt: /bent's being gay- it's like if you're straight or if you're not. (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

Inextricable from the hetero-cultures discussed above – which worked at least in part to maintain heterosexuality's position at the normative 'centre' of peer group interaction – were children's conceptualisations of Other, non-heterosexual relationships and identities. Notwithstanding some key differences in the forms that they took across the two schools, homophobic language and behaviour permeated peer group interaction at Newhaven and Eastfield; structuring games and teasing ('you dropped your gay card') and acting as a marker of 'older' sexual knowledges ('little kids always say they're bent'). I begin my discussion here with an exploration of the ways in which homophobia worked to shape – particularly boys' – interactions, before turning to a consideration of the key themes that underwrote these doings; the means by which children resisted them; and the ways in which formal school discourses differently shaped homophobic conceptualisations and enactments at Newhaven and Eastfield.

i. Homophobia as ever-present

Over the course of my fieldwork, I witnessed countless moments wherein homosexualising discourse was used to negatively interpellate other children, regulate 'acceptable' friendship-relationships, and structure generational and peer group hierarchies. Each of the extracts below, for example, reveals 'gay' as a word infused with almost wholly negative connotations, and draws attention to the regularity with which it was used ('he says it to everybody'), as well as the near-constant, arbitrary threat of its usage ('Dan will call y'gay for most things y'do'). Significantly, whilst

homophobic language represented a feature of almost all discussion groups, it was in particular high status boys (here, Dan, Adam and Tyler) who were referred to by other children as key perpetrators of homophobic abuse. Indeed, this greater frequency and vehemence of 'popular' boys' homophobia was made evident during my own observations, and corroborated previous research (see Connell, 1987; Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Renold, 2002; Pascoe, 2005; Eliasson et al, 2007) that has revealed its centrality to constructions of 'high status' or hegemonic masculinities ('[you'd be called gay] for being unpopular', below):

CA: Do people talk about people being gay at school?

Paige: Yeah but they make it as a joke/

Kelly: /well. Adam keeps saying it t'Harriet, cos Adam doesn't really like Harriet and keeps bullying her

Paige: And Adam said to Tracy because, Tracy was sitting next t'Mona. That, em, Mona and Tracy were gay. (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

CA: /so do people say it [gay] at school a lot?

Mike: Yeah/

Rob: /I don't like it

Agwe: Tyler says it a lot to me, like, you're ga::y

CA: Does he?

Agwe: He says it to everybody (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

CA: So why do people get called gay?

Eric: For being unpopular

Tom: Yeah. Dan says that a lot, he just says it for fun to make people em, feel ashamed

Laurel: But, Dan will call y'gay for, most things y'do

CA: Who would he call gay?

Laurel: Me all the time- me and, I would say it to Eric! He's gay!

Eric: I'm not gay! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

It is significant that in this third extract, Laurel (who himself suffered homophobic bullying on the grounds of his own anti-normativity) fires the 'gay' insult at Eric after lamenting his own homo-interpellation, and that Eric denies this so vehemently ('I'm

not gay!'). Here as in many other interactions, gay identity represented 'a hot potato that no boy [wanted] to be left holding' (Pascoe, 2005: 339), leading Laurel to engage in a 'discursive contest' that worked to deflect homosexuality away from himself and onto another (ibid). Much like the 'fag' discourse analysed by Pascoe (2005), the 'threatening spectre' of homosexuality worked in powerful ways to regulate behaviours in school, both defining acceptable gender productions and policing 'appropriate' peer group interaction. Below, for example, Ava's group's discussion of 'roughness' as both confirming and threatening masculinity exposes the fragility of boys' close-friendship interactions, whilst Eric and Tom's use of masculinising discourses ('like a bro hug') to defend male closeness works to both challenge and reinscribe notions of 'acceptable', bounded hetero-masculinity:

CA: And what do people call each other gay for?/

Ava: /o::h like, say, a boy tackled a boy, and then- say Finn like jumped on top of him, they'd be like, oh you gay boys- they'd be like/

Finn: /u::r you're ga::y!

Aisha Cos y'know how boys fight a lot, and sometimes you kind've topple over each other and they just think, oh you're gay now you're gay with that person.
(DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

CA: So what would you get called gay, for doing?

Tom: Maybe, hugging another boy or something, like, say if you were sad, then y'kind've hug somebody else/

Eric: /like a bro hug/

Tom: /yeah like a bro hug, Dan'll call y'gay for that
(DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

In spite of defending their own right to close (but crucially bounded) male friendships, though, Eric and Tom nonetheless went on in this same group to homosexualise the close male-friendship of two other boys in their class, revealing again the complex interactional work involved in negotiating and resisting 'gay' interpellation. Significantly, it was Adam – a 'high status' classmate who himself perpetrated homophobia regularly – who was the subject of Eric and Tom's exchange, homosexualised on the grounds of his non-aggressive friendship with another

classmate. Through their 'accusation' of homosexuality, therefore, Eric and Tom both railed against and reaffirmed Adam's hegemonic (and homophobic) masculinity; divesting him of some of his dominance, but only through working within (hetero)normative discourses that conflate 'roughness' with acceptable 'boyhood':

Tom: No it was Adam and James that are gay

Eric: Yeah so gay! To be honest they did act a bit/

Laurel: /gay/

Eric: /mm, merry around each other. And Adam doesn't act that way, with anyone else, at all. He acted quite merry and they- they quite often do things which, Adam normally wouldn't do to other people

CA: Yeah? Like what?

Eric: Well, em. The way he played with him and, em he wouldn't fight, with James or at least, not like, a proper fight. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Given the centrality of homophobia to peer group interaction across both schools, it followed that children talked with certainty about the bullying they imagined a non-heterosexual classmate would suffer ('in our school, you'd be, almost certainly bullied for being gay/it would be chaotic' (Eric/Tom, Eastfield, ages 9-10)), and whilst the perceived acceptability of gay parents and teachers was indeed greater at Newhaven (discussed later), repudiative discussions of hypothetical gay classmates were consistent across both schools. Indeed, considering the vehemence with which many children worked to avoid abject gay positioning themselves, it was perhaps inevitable that imagined gay peers were so repudiated; acting as fictional recipients of the unwanted 'hot potato' onto which children could deflect threats to their own productions of (hetero-)gender:

CA: So what If there was somebody in our class maybe, who was a boy who wanted t'kiss another boy?

Chris: I would just run/

Stuart: /I would just slap him in the face, slap them on the face

Jamila: I'd tell them t'move, tell them to, move to a gay school (laughter)

Chris: Yeah get outta this school! (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: Mm hm? And what if there was a boy in your class who fancied another boy?

Jacob: We'd go, ga::-ay ga::-ay! (All join in: ga::-ay ga::-ay!)

(DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

ii. Interrogating homophobia

On analysing such discussions more closely, I found that homophobic attitudes at both schools appeared to be underwritten by two key (at times overlapping) themes: namely, Intelligibility and Disgust. These themes framed general discussions around gay relations/hips and identities (as above), as well as more focused group conversations regarding De Haan and Nijland's (2002) *King and King*, which was used during storybook sessions as a means by which to initiate peer group discourse around non-heterosexuality.

a. Intelligibility

They're weirdos! ... Why would a prince- why would a prince, want a prince!?! (Oliver, Newhaven, age 5)

A prince with a prince?! ...Why would a prince marry a prince?! (Laurel, Eastfield, age 10)

During group readings of *King and King*, by far the most common reactions to the story's ending – where the two princes fall in love and get married – were confusion, amusement, and disbelief, a set of reactions that reflected an interpretation of 'gay princes' as broadly *unintelligible*: unimaginable; laughable; impossible. This was particularly the case for children at Eastfield, as well as for younger (aged 5-6) children at Newhaven, for whom discussions of non-heterosexuality appeared relatively unfamiliar. For many of these children, the normalcy of (particularly romantic, fairy tale) hetero-relationships was so firmly cemented that man/man and woman/woman pairings were near impossible to (at least seriously) conceptualise. Below, for example, Alice and Mandy take issue with the disruption that two princes cause to the intelligibility of a wedding cake, where the princes' 'sameness' is understood to contradict the usual 'difference' of conventional hetero-marriage. Equally, Laurel's confusion at two princes marrying one another positions marriage as only intelligible

within a heterosexual frame. Whilst he is able to imagine what it is to be 'gay', this appears nonetheless conceptually (and perhaps practically) incompatible with marriage, a practice reserved in his mind for women and men ('why would they be gay if they wanted t'marry each other?!'):

CA: 'Congratulations!' And there's the prince and the prince/

Alice: /mm. Boring.

CA: Yeah? Why boring?

Alice: Because I don't want- I don't really like two princes/

Mandy: /that looks a bit silly. That looks a bit silly on the cake

Alice: Because there's two boys, and they're exactly the same (SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Laurel: (indignantly) cos! Why would a boy, marry a boy!

Tom: Because he's gay ok!

Laurel: Exactly!

Tom: They're very gay!

Laurel: But, why would they be gay if they wanted t'marry each other!? (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Underwriting these discussions was a collective understanding of the incorrigible 'normalcy' of heterosexuality, which represented the benchmark against which non-heterosexual relations/hips were rendered troubling and 'Other'. Characterisations of homosexuality as 'strange' and 'unsettling', for example, revealed heteronormativity as structuring conceptualisations of intelligible relations/hips, and exposed a clear link between *familiarity* and *intelligibility* with regard to making sense of non-heterosexual identities ('it's so weird cos I've never seen a boy and a boy together!' (Rachel, Newhaven, age 6)). Below, for example, Varsha's group explain their amusement and neutrality towards a homosexual and heterosexual kiss, respectively, on the grounds of their relative familiarity with gay versus straight relationships, whilst Sophia's group describe gay relationships in terms of 'unsettling' the more comfortable heterosexual order:

CA: Would that be funny if- if this was a prince and this was a princess?

Varsha: No/

Owen: /no

CA: No why not?

Owen: Because... they normally get married

Zimran: But boys don't get married in the first, place. (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

Abbie: It just. It just doesn't feel right how a boy kisses a boy

CA: It doesn't feel right?

Sophia: Yeah cos you've got- you normally have, um, one man one woman? But when it's just two women – like my mum's friend is married with another woman.³² You kind've feel a bit unsettled. But if it's a man and a woman I think, I feel a lot- a lot more settled. (SB, Newhaven. Girls aged 9-10)

As well as framing discussions of *King and King*, themes of 'intelligibility' also permeated more general conversations around (hypothetical and real life) homosexualities ('wh::y would a boy love a boy?!' (Oliver, Newhaven, age 6); 'that's just cooking my brain!' (Mason, Eastfield, age 6)). When asking children to imagine that a child in their class fancied someone of the same sex, for example, many (most often at Eastfield, or in younger year groups at Newhaven) either failed or refused to make sense of this scenario. In the first part of the extract below, Hugh and Jay continually subsume my question about 'a boy who [wants] to have a boyfriend' within a more dominant heterosexual discourse ('a girlfrie:::nd!'), and reveal a near inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to conceive of a relationship outside a heterosexual frame. In their continued re-writing of this imagined scenario, these children appear almost unable to accept the discursive pairing of 'boy' and 'boyfriend', lacking the available language to join the two together intelligibly. In the final three lines, though, Obasi explicitly condemns the pairing on the grounds of its impossibility, and demonstrates the power of heteronormativity to structure (and invalidate) conceptualisations of

³² It is significant that whilst homosexuality is characterised as 'unsettling' here (that is, disruptive to hetero-normalcy), it is still nonetheless *conceivable*, with Sophia able to reference a 'real life' family friend in discussing her feelings towards hetero- and homo-sexualities, respectively. Sophia's (Newhaven) understanding can therefore be understood as distinct from that of the majority of children at Eastfield, for whom homosexuality was comparatively *inconceivable*. I discuss this in more detail towards the end of this section.

same-sex relationships ('if there's another boy wearing a lady's wedding dress...y'have to tell them to stop')

CA: What if there was a boy in your class who wanted to have a boyfriend?

Hugh: A girlfrie:::nd!

Jay: A girlfriend.

CA: What if he wanted to have a boyfriend?

Hugh: A girlfriend, a boyfriend!

Jay: Em, if a girl wants a boyfriend it's because they're in love.

CA: What if a boy wants a boyfriend?

Jay: Em, I've forgotten.

Obasi: You can't have two boyfriends.

CA: Why not?

Obasi: Because because, because I saw it at the internet. If there, if there's another boy wearing a lady's wedding dress, then it means y'have to tell them to stop. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

This perceived inconceivability of boy-boy/girl-girl relationships revealed itself across a number of groups, and it was most often in relation to heterosexual norms that gay imaginings were rendered laughable or Other. Below, for example, Amelia, Kara and Jane draw on the supposedly hetero-romantic narrative of 'dating' (and more specifically, the famous 'spaghetti sharing' scene from Disney's *Lady and the Tramp*) to position a girl-girl relationship outside imaginable romantic structures. Here, Amelia's ambiguous use of pronouns ('someone gave them roses...and then someone said, thanks darling!') suggests a linguistic as well as conceptual struggle, wherein 'she gave her roses' would be an almost impossible sentence to speak. For these children, the notion of two girls 'sitting in a restaurant, on, a two table, with a candle' represents not only a laughable disruption to intelligible dating discourse, but also a discursive impossibility:

Amelia: I know what gay means and it's two people dating but they're both boys and both girls? And, it would be so creepy, if I just saw, two girls, sitting in a restaurant, on, a two table, with a candle, and, and, and like (laughing)/

Kara: /and flowers/

Amelia: /and they had a, drink, and, and someone, gave them roses and they sniffed them, and then someone said, thanks darling! (Laughs)

Jane: I've got an e::ven, more weird thing they had spaghetti and they both had the same bit and they just sucked on it! (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

For many of these children, the inconceivability of same-sex relationships was managed via the re-writing of imagined gay couples into more intelligible hetero-scripts. As with Obasi, above, it was most often by imagining one of the two partners dressing as the 'opposite sex' that unintelligibility was allayed, with the excerpts below exposing the conceptual monopoly that heteronormativity held over imaginable relationships and identities:

CA: So what would you think if there was a girl in your class who wanted to have a girlfriend?

Daris: Oh the girl could dress up as a boy? (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Robyn: Um, um sometimes boys dress, dress up as womans? Because they want- they want to marry another boy, so they just dress up as a woman? (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: So what if there was a girl in your class who loved another girl?

Aamir: Em, it'd be weird because/

Raajih: /it'd be weird, jump out the window/

Aamir: /they'd both have skirts so one could dress as a boy (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

As well as pointing to the significance of 'sex' difference to the perceived intelligibility of romantic relationships, such re-writings worked also to strengthen discourses that conflated sexuality and gender more broadly ('gay people would have their thingy chopped off!' (Tyler, Newhaven, age 10)). Below, for example, Mark and Jonny respond to my question about a 'boy with long hair' by first hyperbolising his gender transgression ('and red dresses and high heels!') and then positioning him derogatively as a 'poof', whilst Dawei interprets the notion of 'a boy playing with dolls' as both a gendered and sexual transgression ('he'd be a girl/he might be gay'):

CA: So imagine if there was a boy in your class, who had/
 Mark: /girl hair!
 CA: Who had really long hair.
 Mark: And dress! And red dresses and high heels! And wears skirts (laughter) and,
 and talks like a girl!
 Jonny: He'd be a poof! (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

CA: What if there was a boy in your class who, liked to play with dolls?
 Noah: He would be/
 Toby: /(shouting) disgu::sting!
 Noah: /he would be weird.
 Dawei: He'd be a girl.
 [...]
 Dawei: He might be gay. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Such connotations were evident also in children's attitudes towards gender-transgressive peers, and whilst the fluidity of projected 'gay' identity meant that nearly all children (particularly boys) faced the risk of 'gay' interpellation (see also Pascoe, 2005), those most regularly 'accused' of homosexuality were children who transgressed the boundaries of normative gender (see also Connell, 2002; Renold, 2002). Such was the rigidity of normative masculinity, in particular – and its associated repudiation of girlhood and 'effeminacy' – that it was transgressions of intelligible boyhood that most often resulted in 'gay' interpellation ('Gay people go, (high pitched voice) 'hello girlfriend!'/ 'Like Finn!' (Luke/Tyler, Newhaven, ages 9-10)). Mark and Laurel below, for example, were both subject to semi-regular homophobic taunts on the grounds of their anti-normativity, where in this instance Mark's 'left earring' (alongside his relatively gentle manner, and friendship with girls, see pp. 198-9) and Laurel's long hair (see pp. 118-19) represented seemingly profound disruptions to both gendered and sexual normativity ('everybody calls me gay!'/ 'he just wants to play with his boyfriend!'). Such taunts were painfully experienced by both children, and led often to even greater repudiations of homosexuality ('I hate gay people!' (Mark, Newhaven, age 7)) and assertions of masculinity ('you're insulting my maleness!', below) on their parts:

Mark: Everybody calls me everybody calls me ga::y because I've got a left ea::ring.

CA: Why do they say that?

Mark: Becau::se/

Scott: /he's got a earring in!

Jonny: (Quietly) gaylord. (SB, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Andy: He's got a girlfriend and, he's got a girlfriend, and (to Laurel) he just wants to play with his boyfriend! (Laughter)

Laurel: You little! (Jumps up to fight Andy)

(Overtalking, laughter)

Laurel: Now you're insulting my maleness! He's insulting me being a male and having long hair! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Interestingly, though, there appeared for some children to be a distinction drawn between gay as 'wounded identity' (Youdell 2006; 2009) and gay as abject, feminine Other, with the latter understood as deserving of derision due to its refusal to conform to 'the rules of the game' (Paechter, 2007: 74). It was this distinction that enabled some children (e.g. Matt and Tyler, below) to simultaneously support homosexuality as a 'legitimate, if marginalised, social identity' (Pascoe, 2005: 337) and repudiate effeminate 'gayness' for its failure to do boyhood 'right'. In this group, a clear difference is perceived between 'the same sex lov[ing] each other' and 'a boy...acting really girly', the latter of which is understood as deserving of gender-based (but nonetheless homophobic) bullying:

CA: So what if there was a boy in your class and they wanted t'have a boyfriend

Tyler: That would be ok/

Josh: /it would be, exactly! It would be homosexual

Matt: Gay's, more like, a boy like, acting all girly like... boys, suit being rough and that, but if a boy had like pink on, and, acting really girly we'd probably call that, gay?

[...]

Matt: Homosexual's when, the same sex love each other, but then... like gay is more like just acting like the other sex. That's the difference between homosexual and gay. (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

The fact that this conversation occurred during a discussion group at Newhaven – where gay parents and teachers were visible, and sexualities equality was embedded profoundly into the school ethos – suggests that children were negotiating ‘equalities’ discourses here in particularly complex ways. For these children, the recognisability of gay as marginal but legitimate identity did not preclude homophobia on the grounds of gendered ‘deviance’, providing in this instance a means by which to evince pro-gay attitudes whilst still fiercely regulating the wider hetero-social order. Further, these same boys’ relative acceptance of gay princes (‘it would be, oka::y’ (Tyler, Newhaven, age 10)) in contrast to their vehement homophobia towards imagined gay peers (‘we would go, ga::y, ga::y!’ (ibid)) suggested a conceptual distinction between abstract gay partnerships and concrete gay classmates, who perhaps in their imagined proximity represented a more tangible threat to local, ‘intelligible’ productions of gender and sexuality.

Notwithstanding the multiple ways in which notions of un/intelligibility permeated discussion and story groups across both schools, the *visibility* provided by *King and King* did nonetheless appear to assist in making same-sex relationships conceivable for some children. Whilst many were unshifting in their refusal to accept the story’s two princes, other children used this explicitly to substantiate homosexuality’s legitimacy, with each of the excerpts below highlighting the significance of ‘actualisation’ (Sanders, 2018) to the perceived intelligibility of ‘Other’ identities:

CA What would you think if there was a boy in your class and the person that he wanted to go out with was another boy?

Lily: Catherine? You know, that book we read? That actually had a boy and a boy, marrying, so that’s just like- so that’s just like you said. If a boy and a boy would go out, that’s the same as that book/

Rachel: /yeah the King and the King! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

CA: So do you think a boy can have a boyfriend?

Yacoub: No

Owen: Yeah

Zimran: Yeah

CA: Yeah? No? Why d’you think yes Owen?

Owen: Because, cos in this story two men get married! (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

b. Disgust

Obasi: That's gross!

CA: Why's that gross do you think?

Obasi: Because! Because the wedding is so disgusting and all the book, I'm getting sick! (SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

That story is sick. (Laurel, Eastfield, age 10)

Another of the most common responses to *King and King* was repudiative disgust, with the quotes above encapsulating just two of numerous moments wherein homosexuality was characterised as 'gross', disgusting, or wrong ('it would be so gross if a boy married a boy in our classroom'/'that wedding is s::o ugly!' (Lily/John, Newhaven, ages 5-6)). For boys in particular, vehement repudiation represented a central aspect of hetero-masculine construction, and thus many more boys than girls expressed abject revulsion in response to real or imagined gay identities. Below, for example, Laurel's reaction to the notion of a hypothetical gay classmate is indicative of both the normalising force of heterosexuality ('that would be sick/that's natural') and the visceral disruption caused by homosexuality to 'comfortable' or intelligible conceptualisations of gender. Further, it is significant that in this excerpt Tom seems at first to challenge Laurel's homophobia before going on to 'lob the epithet' (Pascoe, 2005) at Laurel himself: an interactional progression that reflects boys' need to mitigate gay-supportive attitudes to avoid over-association with 'abject' gay identity:

CA: So what if there was a boy in your class, who fancied another boy?

Laurel: U::r that would be sick. If I ever found out about that/

Tom: /why would it be sick?

Laurel: I'd feel sick

CA: So what if there was a boy who fancied a girl?

Laurel: That wouldn't bother me, cos that's natural

[...]

Tom: Y'never know if you might be gay when you're older! Stop being gay!

Laurel: I'm not gay/

Tom: /yes you a::re (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Further to strengthening productions of hetero-masculinity, repudiation worked also as a means by which to reject abject girlhood through the conflation of 'gayness' and effeminacy. It is striking that in the first excerpt below, it is Mark (discussed above as suffering regularly from gender-based homophobia) who most vehemently abhors homosexuality, suggesting a compulsion on his part to position himself firmly as 'not gay' via particularly emphatic repudiation. Further, in the second extract Ian and Alberto conflate ('gross') 'effeminacy' with homosexuality, and thus simultaneously repudiate abject gayness, and inferior, contaminating girlhood:

CA: So can anyone remember what *King and King* was about/

Jonny: /it's about two gaylords

Mark: Two- two- princes! And they (shouting) MARRY each othe::r it's SO GRO::SS!

CA: It's so gross? Why's that gross?

Mark: It's e:m, I don't like, them because, if they kissy kiss that means they're ga:y

CA: Right?

Mark: And I don't like gay people because I don't like them they're rubbish (SB, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

CA: So what did you think about this story?

Ian: It was s:::o gro::ss!!

CA: So gross? Why did you think it was gross?

Alberto: Because/

Ian: /it's just so gross being like ('effeminately') I love Barbi::e! (laughter) (SB, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

Reactions such as these were perhaps most vehement in response to the final page of *King and King*, where the two princes are shown kissing. Whilst some children (particularly boys) did indeed express disgust in response to kissing in general ('all love is just disgu::sting (Ian, Newhaven, age 7)), children made clear in their elaborations that it was, in particular, the same-sex nature of the kiss that fuelled such fierce repudiation.



Figure 19. *King and King* (De Haan and Nijland, 2002)

This stood in contradiction to the impression of many teachers – particularly at Newhaven – who (perhaps hopefully) rationalised children’s reactions on the grounds of their supposed revulsion towards kissing in general (‘I think it’s just kissing that you find gross isn’t it?’ (Imogen, Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 20/05/15)). The excerpts below, though, reflect just three of numerous moments wherein a clear distinction was drawn between the perceived acceptability of ‘opposite’ versus ‘same’ sex kissing. In each extract, it is the princes’ kiss in particular that is understood as a ‘disgusting’ disruption, with the vehemence of John and Mason’s reactions revealing again the significance of homo-repudiation to productions of hetero-boyhood:

(I turn the page to reveal the princes kissing)

All: U::::::::::rrrr!

Josie: What’s a boy and a boy!! (Laughter)

Obasi: What’s a boy doing! U:::rr (laughter)

(All laughing, making noises of disgust. John imitates being sick) (SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 5-6)

CA: So why is it that everybody thinks that kiss is so gross?

Brad: Because- because it’s two men instead of like a woman and a man

CA: Mm hm?

Jaaved: I mean it would be- it would be, normal, if it was a man and a woman

Aamir: Yea:h (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

CA: So would you listen to this story again?

Mason: I would not listen about, the kiss, because I’m like (coughs and splutters)

CA: Yeah? Why not? (Mason makes vomiting sounds)

Pete: Cos I do not like, boys and bo::ys, kissing (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

iii. Shifting positions, voicing support

a. Homophobia as interactional

Notwithstanding the constancy of homophobia across both schools, a significant feature of almost all discussion and story groups were children's *shifting* positions towards non-heterosexuality, with almost all children altering their stance at some point (and to varying degrees) over the course of any one conversation. What was revealed through such fluctuations was the fundamentally interactional nature of homophobia, with peer group conversation representing a space wherein dominant/subversive scripts were variously *co*-constructed, negotiated, and affirmed. Corroborating Renold's (2005: 5) observation that it is often the 'strength of the group collective' that makes dissent possible, it appeared largely to be in groups where more than one member vocalised pro-equalities attitudes that gay-supportive positions were most strongly maintained. Equally, it was within groups with minimal peer support (or indeed institutional support, discussed later) that such attitudes were more likely to be subsumed by homophobia. During the group conversation below, for example, it appears to be Lara's support of non-heterosexuality (maintained throughout) that leads Molly to position homosexuality as 'fine', a stance made possible (or perhaps necessary) by the stated attitude of her best friend. Later in the conversation, though, Lynn and Lottie's more vehement homophobia works to subsume Molly's support within a more powerful, counter-equalities discourse. Importantly, I see these fluctuations as having little to do with issues of 'authenticity' (see Atkinson, 2013), but consider them, rather, to both reveal children's attitudes as fundamentally interactional and situated (see Jackson and Scott, 2010b), and highlight the significance of *an available positive discourse* to making dissenting attitudes 'speakable':

CA: So what do you think about the two princes marrying?

Lara: I think it's fine!

Molly: Yeah I think it's fine too

[...]

Lynn: It's gro::ss! Becau::se, they're gay. Because they're gay because they're gay because they're gay!

Lottie: It's shit

Molly: Yeah, I agree I don't like it (SB, Newhaven. Girls aged 7-8)

In line with Kenway et al's (1997: 35) observation that 'difference seldom wins out over dominance', however, it appeared in the most part to be homophobic positions that subsumed anti-homophobia, with the latter representing a particularly difficult position to maintain. As I go on to discuss, those who appeared most able to sustain gay-supportive attitudes with minimal repercussion were largely (some) girls (for whom homosexuality represented a lesser threat to liveable productions of gender) and (some) children at Newhaven, for whom institutional support appeared to provide a basis for resistance.

b. Transgression and dissent

Aside from the dissent made possible by the support of the 'group collective', two other factors that appeared to influence children's ability to support, and enact/imagine, homosexuality were age and gender. Due to the threat that homosexuality posed to 'liveable' boyhoods, girls were not only more regular defenders of gay relationships, but also relatively able to make claims to their own same-sex relations and imagined futures, with a number of girls across both schools imagining, and at times actualising, romantic relations/hips with other girl-pupils. Alice and Mandy (significantly, ages 5-6) at Newhaven, in particular, spoke regularly about their girlfriend-ship and future wedding, and often spent playtimes enacting marriage scenes with the help of their (female) friends:

On the yard, I join Alice, Mandy and Mei who tell me they're practising their wedding: Alice and Mandy are getting married and Mei is the celebrant. The two brides are walking hand in hand down an imagined aisle while Mei sings the wedding march. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 16/03/17. Children aged 5-6)

Mandy: (Coyly) Me and Alice have something to sa:y!

Alice: We're both girlfrie::nds! (All giggle)

CA: Yeah? What does that mean?

Alice: We're actually going to marry!

Mei: And I'm gonna say, "you can kiss now!" (Laughter)

Mandy: She's going to be the one that reads the thing out.

[...]

CA: What does it mean if somebody's your girlfriend?

Mandy: (Coily) It means we've had dates at my house and Alice's house! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

As well as reflecting the asymmetric implications of homo-association, Alice and Mandy's relationship also represented a means by which these girls repudiated masculinity via the valorising of hyper-feminine girlhood. Indeed, in discussions of their relationship and 'wedding', regular references were made to the importance of 'prettiness' to romantic practice, with boys positioned as comparatively 'not-pretty', oppositional Other. Through such positionings, these girls at once challenged and reified heteronormative structures, by simultaneously queering marriage norms, and reinscribing a girl-boy binary wherein 'beauty' remained central to girlhood:

CA: So would you rather have girlfriends than boyfriends?

Alice: Yeah, yeah/

Mandy: /yeah yeah yeah cos boys stink and girls are pre::tty!

Mei: And boys are no::t pretty!

Alice: And then we both get to wear dresses!

Mandy: And look s::o pretty! (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Further to the relatively 'concrete' relationship evinced by Alice and Mandy, girls across both schools were also relatively able to make fleeting or hypothetical references to same-sex relations/hips or identities ('I would love marrying Ellie!'/ 'Cool!' (Laya/Ellie, Newhaven, ages 5-6)). Whilst it was, significantly, only girls in the youngest year groups who made claims to actual girlfriend-ships ('Me and Poppy are girlfriends!/and does that mean that you want to marry each other?/yes please!' (Rachel [aged 5]/C, Newhaven)), references to same-sex 'imaginings' were made by girls of all ages, and indicated the profoundly gendered nature of homophobic interpellation. Whilst in general boys worked hard to distance themselves from 'too close' association with homosexuality, girls appeared able to interpellate their own relationships as gay in order, for example, to substantiate discussions around equalities, identities and prejudice. Amelia and Tracy's comments below ('I'll marry Kara!'/ 'say me and Paige liked each other') strike me as almost unimaginable in a

discussion group of similarly aged boys, and reveal (notwithstanding Tracy's 'age appropriate' imagining of a gay relationship) the different ways in which homophobia operated in girls' versus boys' interactions:

Mel: Everyone thought (laughing) he was gonna marry the princess at the end/

Kara: /but a boy and a boy can marry each other and a girl and a girl can

Jane: Yeah. I just never thought it'd be the royal family! (Laughs)

Amelia: I know which girl I'll marry, I'll marry Kara! (SB, Eastfield. Girls aged 7-8)

Tracy: Say if I was like, eighteen and me and Paige liked each other (laughter), I think some of our friends might be like, well that's a bit weird I'm not gonna/

Paige: /be friends/

Tracy: /be friends with you anymore but then I think some people would be like, oh well that's oka:y/

Paige: /but with the boys- boys take everything as sort've a joke

Tracy: Like so/

Paige: /so they would all laugh at it (SB, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

For boys, in comparison, the constant threat of homo-interpellation necessitated the mitigation of almost any defence of gay rights, and boys ran a far greater risk of ridicule or dismissal for voicing gay-supportive attitudes. For boys, then, dissenting attitudes were especially difficult to both articulate and maintain, with the excerpts below encapsulating the relative inextricability of homophobia and hetero-boyhood for Jacob, Tyler, Dan, Mike and Andy. The first excerpt is particularly striking given that Jacob himself is parented by two gay men and two lesbian women, a factor that perhaps necessitated an even more vehement deflection of homosexual association on his part:

CA: So what about a boy and a boy marrying?

Jacob: Well it's ok cos some people in our school, not any of us in here! (Laughter) are, (faux-dramatically) dun-dun-du::n/

Tyler: /homosexual! (Laughter)

[...]

CA: Mm hm? And what if, there was a boy in your class who fancied another boy?

Jacob: We'd go, ga-ay ga-ay! (All join in: ga-ay ga-ay!) (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

Dan: Eh ma cousin, we all think that he's gay because he's got like, a really high pitched voice and it's like, all (high pitched and soft) o::h la-de-da

Mike: That is stereotypical!

Dan: Mike guess what? Huh huh nobody likes yu! (Laughter)

Andy: Ga::y (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Given the particular vehemence with which many of the oldest boys across both schools regulated hetero-boyhood, it was particularly striking to find the most assured defences of non-heterosexuality coming largely from girls of the same age. The discussions between girls below, for example, stand in stark contrast to those of their male counterparts (see above) and show girls in these groups to be making sense of non-normativity in especially nuanced ways. Significantly, references are made in both excerpts to homophobia's particular relevance to boyhood ('the boys just always laugh'), and reveal not the exclusivity of homophobia to boys' peer groups, but rather the comparative *impossibility* of concomitant pro-gay attitudes for boys, for whom homophobia represented an almost uncompromising component in 'constructing a heterosexual masculine identity' (Eliasson et al, 2007: 559):

Tracy: Like, if you saw a gay couple walking down the street, some people might go, aw that's sweet! But that's still like, saying they're different? Cos y'wouldn't see, a straight couple walking down the street and be like ah that's cute!

Freya: Y'shouldn't treat them differently

[...]

CA: What do you think people would think if somebody in our class was gay?

Tracy: They would laugh

Freya: Yeah the boys would/

Ellen: /they would take it as a joke/

Tracy: /but that's horrible (DG, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

Me and Kay always walk around linking arms and people say like e:::w are you lesbians and we're just like... well, we're not? But if we were why does it matter? (Ava, Newhaven, age 9)

It was perhaps this comparative confidence that (some) girls felt in challenging homophobia that led boys to articulate gay supportive attitudes more often in mixed- versus single- sex discussions, wherein girls appeared to contribute to a strengthened 'group collective' (Renold, 2005) that enabled dominant scripts to be more liveably transgressed. As I have argued elsewhere (see Atkinson, 2013), I understand neither homophobic nor anti-homophobic positions to be more 'real' or 'authentic' than the other, but rather see children's fluctuating positions as reflective of the multiple discourses that circulate around gender, sexuality, equality, and intelligibility. For boys, then, it appeared primarily to be competing discourses around 'the rights of the individual' (see Davies, 1989: 30) versus the incorrigible 'wrongness' of homosexuality that lead to conceptualisations of homo-relationships that were both supportive and repudiative. Thus in the first excerpt below, Dan follows his assertion of individual rights ('it's your life') with a deflective homo-interpellation of Mike, whilst Andy makes clear the 'irrelevance' of a gay-themed story (positioned as useful only to 'people...who need it') to his own life. Equally, by tolerating homosexuality 'as long as they don't do it in front of me', Theo at once (reluctantly) acknowledges 'marginal' gay rights, and makes clear his (performed) disgust at concrete homosexuality:

Dan: I think it's, fine? Cos, it's up to you like- it's your life?

CA: Right?/

Dan: /like, Mike's gay and we're friends with him!?! (Laughter)

Mike: Why d'you think I'm gay!?!?

Andy: Because y'are

(Pause)

Mike: (Sarcastically) That's nice

[...]

CA: So what did you think about the story?

Andy: I think maybe it's good for- for some people. Who need it/

Dan: /yeah/

Andy: /I don't think I would ever need it (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

Theo: I would let them as long as they didn't kiss in front of me/

Stuart: /yeah

Theo: People think it's wrong, but, I think people should do what they want to do/

Stuart: /exactly/

Theo: /as long as they don't do it in front of me. (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Notwithstanding the coercive pressure of homophobia, there were some striking exceptions that revealed boys across both schools to be resisting hegemonic scripts in a range of complex ways. Most notable was Julian's friendship group at Newhaven (see p. 110), who consciously and collectively positioned themselves 'outside' dominant boyhood constructions. Within this group, Julian's sustained claims to non-heterosexuality ('my boyfriend is actually a boy called Max who's my imaginary boyfriend' (Julian, Newhaven, age 5)) were met exclusively with either neutral or positive responses by his friends, and were discussed in the same terms as hetero – crushes and –relations:

CA: So what would you think about a boy who wanted to have a boyfriend?

Julian: I've got a boyfriend! But he isn't here anymore.

Oliver: Who is he?

Julian: Da::vid/

Nick: /it's David.

Julian: He was really nice and, he would help me when I was sad.

Nick: Did you love him?

Julian: I didn't love him, but I was on the first stage of love. That means it's not true love/

Oliver: /(laughing) no/

Julian: /true love is when you marry somebody/

Oliver: /but it's still lovey lovey.

Julian: It's only love, the next one is lovey lovey, and the next one is completely love.

(DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Such enactments – and concomitant gay-supportive attitudes – appeared to be understood by this group as part of a wider rejection of normative boyhood, in relation to which homophobia, and the related repudiation of girlhood and 'effeminacy', was positioned as central. Below, for example, Jevaun is explicit in setting himself apart from 'a::ll of the other boys', for whom exclusive enjoyment of 'boy stuff' is perceived

to preclude the possibility of pro-gay attitudes ('[they] wouldn't think it's ok'). Here, the conflation of gender and sexuality is striking ('boys don't like girl stuff'), as is the perceived inextricability of normative boyhood and homophobia. Through distancing themselves from monoglossic boyhoods in their 'doings' of non-heterosexuality, Jevaun's group at once reject and cement notions of 'boy stuff', by positioning their own transgressive behaviours 'outside' intelligible male constructions ('*boys don't like girl stuff*' (my italics)):

CA: So what if there was a boy who wanted to marry another boy?

Julian: Really nice

Jevaun: I think, William, Oliver and Nick would think that's nice but everybody else wouldn't- a:ll of the other boys wouldn't think it's ok

CA: Yeah? Why do you think they wouldn't think it was ok?

Julian: Because boys don't like girl stuff

Jevaun: They only like, bo:ys, stuff

[...]

Julian: They only like, racing cars and Minecraft and things like that

Oliver: Yeah, and Lego Marvel

Jevaun: All boy stuff, really (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 5-6)

Another exception to boys' near-universal repudiations of homosexuality was Colin (aged 8) at Newhaven, who made facetious, but still sustained, claims to homosexuality on the grounds of his 'gay' relationship with his boy cat, Toulouse ('I'm gay! I'm married to a boy cat!' (Colin, Newhaven, age 8)). Whilst these claims worked partly to substantiate Colin's position in a wider class feud around cats versus dogs (within which Colin's friendship group were vehement cat fans), Colin's eagerness to position this relationship specifically as gay was striking, and set him apart from the majority of other boys across both schools, who worked hard to avoid 'abject' gay positioning:

CA: So what if there was a boy in your class who fancied another boy?

Sian: That would be Colin/

Colin: /yeah that would be me!

CA: Yeah?

Colin: Yeah I'm gay and I've already had a date with Toulouse!

Sian: Yeah he's had a date! And he's married! (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Whilst Colin's posited 'gayness' did not appear to extend to boy humans ('would you like to go on a date with a boy that wasn't a cat?'/ 'No I'd want to go on a date and then the boy turns into a cat!' (C/Colin, Newhaven)), his position was nonetheless striking, particularly considering the vehemence with which his friendship group repudiated 'love' and 'fancying' more generally. Given the perceived interrelationship between 'fancying' and 'girlhood', though, and the repudiation of effeminacy that characterised this group's discussions more broadly ('I hate being a girl!'/ 'all the girls are so stupid!' (Ella/Hua, Newhaven, ages 7-8)), it is possible that a same-sex (albeit cross-species) relationship represented for Colin a way to participate in dating discourse whilst simultaneously distancing himself from direct association with 'love' and effeminacy. Similarly to other (although crucially few, and younger) boys at Newhaven, Colin's claims perhaps reflected a conceptualisation of same-sex relationships as in some ways less threatening to masculinity-construction than association with girlhood ('I will just marry a boy because girls are gross! (William, Newhaven, age 5)). The non-human nature of his 'love interest', though, is significant, and it seems unlikely, given the near-universality of homo-repudiation across both schools – that a boy of this age would make such sustained claims to a gay relationship with another human.

What is perhaps most striking, though, is that both Julian and Colin – the only boys across both schools to make any sustained claims to gay relations/hips – were both pupils at Newhaven, wherein homosexuality was both visible and relatively openly discussed. Indeed, explicit references were made by both of these children to their Headteacher's gay relationship ('well Mr Graham is married to another Mr Graham!' (Julian, Newhaven, age 5)), which appeared at least in part to substantiate their own claims to non-heterosexuality (see Courtney, 2014):

CA: So what about a boy kissing a boy?

Colin: Yeah!

Sian: Mr Graham is gay!

Colin: Yeah, Mr Graham is gay and I am.

CA: And you are?

Colin: Yeah! I'm gay! I'm married to a boy cat! (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

iv. Institutional differences

Notwithstanding the constancy of homophobia at both Newhaven and Eastfield, there were nonetheless some fundamental differences between these schools with regard to the ways in which such behaviours were conceptualised and performed, each of which drew attention to the significance of *visibility* (stemming at Newhaven at least in part from the work of *No Outsiders*) to making non-heterosexuality legitimate, speakable, and real. I turn now, then, to a consideration of the three most profound differences between these schools with regard to 'doings' of homophobia: namely, perceptions of institutional approach; disclosures of non-heterosexuality; and 'conceivability', or otherwise, of gay identities.

a. Perceptions of institutional approach

We don't really talk about it cos they don't think it's right. (Sarah, Eastfield, age 8)

Arguably the most significant difference between conceptualisations of homophobia at Newhaven and Eastfield was children's understanding of their school's institutional approach to homosexuality, and the attendant ways in which they positioned their 'doings' of homophobia. At Newhaven – where gay parents and teachers were visible, and equalities work suffused school culture – children appeared to negotiate in/formal discourses of non-heterosexuality by aligning themselves broadly with 'pro-equalities' and 'pro-normativity' stances in the classroom and peer group respectively (see also Atkinson, 2013). For these children, peer group homophobia appeared to represent a transgression of the school's *moral* ethos, with situational approaches to gender/sexuality reflecting an understanding of Newhaven as a site wherein homophobia was *formally* unspeakable. Thus, during classroom conversations around non-heterosexuality, children at Newhaven largely expressed attitudes that aligned

with the school's official ethos on diversity, and stood in direct contradiction to normative (homophobic) peer group scripts:

On my request, Imogen reads *King and King* to the class and begins by asking children what they liked about it from memory. There is lots of enthusiasm from children around 'crown kitty' [the prince's cat] who everyone loves. During the story, the class listen intently, and whilst some repudiate the princes quietly (out of sight, to the person next to them) most speak enthusiastically about the story, telling Imogen that they liked it when the princes got married, and that the message is that 'it's ok to be different/it's ok to be gay'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 20/05/15. Class aged 7-8).

Some books have been set out on tables for children to read independently, and Lixie and Molly have chosen *King and King*. Before reading, Lixie flicks straight to the end to show me the page where the princes kiss, and tells me (laughing) "look two men kissing, gay!" After reading the book in full, they reach this page again and both grimace, commenting on how 'weird' and 'gross' this is. Molly tells me, 'that's weird, that – a man and a man getting married... I wouldn't really think a boy and a boy would get married'. She then repeatedly shows this picture to me, to the other children on the table, and then to Imogen. In response to Molly's disgust, Imogen says (tousling Molly's hair) 'you just don't like kissing do you'. Quietly, Molly says (out of Imogen's earshot) 'yeah but it's a man and a man?!'. (Fieldnotes, Newhaven: 03/03/15. Class aged 7-8)

At Newhaven, then, gay-supportive attitudes were understood clearly as reflective of the school's moral ethos (where Molly eventually expresses her disgust out of Imogen's earshot), with homophobia representing a counter-school script that permeated normative peer group culture. In justifying homophobia with the assertion, 'it's cos we're children so we just don't really get it yet, we don't really like it', for example, Matt (Newhaven, age 10) demonstrated an understanding of 'acceptance' and 'disapproval' as representing sanctioned and unsanctioned adult/child positions, respectively.

In stark contrast to this, it appeared that for children at Eastfield it was not homophobia, but *homosexuality*, that was unspeakable, with many children understanding the schools' institutional silence as indicative of formal school

disapproval ('we don't really talk about it cos they don't think it's right', above). For these children, formal school discourses around 'gay as swear word' ('there's a very devious word for it, we're not allowed to say it' (Russell, Eastfield, age 8)), alongside the relative invisibility of homosexuality in general, meant that peer group homophobia was understood as a transgression of Eastfield's *behavioural* ethos, akin to swearing ('y'not allowed to say it in school though... it's the golden rules... be polite' (Eli, Eastfield, age 5)). For children at Eastfield, then, the only available discourse around non-heterosexuality appeared to be one that positioned it as taboo ('we hear kids talk about it, like joking, but not, teachers' (Mike, Eastfield, age 10)) which lead to disbelieving reactions from children in response to teachers' readings of *King and King* ('I just couldn't actually believe Ms Simons read us that!' (Tracy, Eastfield, age 9)), and to Amelia (Eastfield, age 8) closing and covering the book when a teacher came into the room during our discussion. Related characterisations of *King and King* as 'really grown up' and 'inappropriate' were also exclusive to children at Eastfield, and reflected an understanding of homosexuality as incommensurable with 'age-appropriate' knowledges ('I just don't really think little girls, and little boys, should see two men kissing' (Sarah, Eastfield, age 8)). This perceived unspeakability is encapsulated clearly in the excerpts below, which position non-heterosexual knowledge as variously inappropriate, punishable, and corrupting, with Shane's final comment ('y'shouldn't really read it until... y'already know what like, real marriage is') indicating an understanding of homosexuality as definitively 'not real':

CA: Have you heard a story like this before?

Alison: N:::o/

Jamila: /(laughing) no!

Alison: Especially not a child's one! (Laughter)

Jamila: (Laughing) cos what if the first word they heard was like, ga::y!

CA: So do you hear- do you use the word gay at school?

Alison: N:oo y'can't use it at school (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: /so would you read this story in year one?

Theo: Neh/

Sarah: /that wouldn't really be, appropriate/

Theo: /going home, to our parents saying we learned about a king and a king, kissing!

Sarah: Our parents would probably just, not be happy

Theo: They would probably ground you for a little bit (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: So what sort of age d'you think this book would be for?

Shane: I don't think it should be for young kids cos then they would probably/

Jamila: /they (laughing) probably will, be, gay!

Liam: Yeah and copy it/

Shane: /yeah I just think y'shouldn't really read it until, y'older? When y'already, know what like, real marriage is. (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Given such taboo conceptualisations, children at Eastfield appeared to experience simple use of the word 'gay' as a significant novelty, at odds with their understanding of 'appropriate' language in school ('they're very gay! Gay, gay, gay!' (Tom, Eastfield, age 9)). Indeed, whilst homophobia evidently permeated peer group discussions across both schools, it was only at Eastfield that children viewed the word itself (and specifically, its use without reprimand) in novel terms, with the following excerpts exposing a collective understanding of 'gay' as formally unspeakable ('I don't wanna say it'/'I can't even believe you're saying that'):

CA: Yeah? Why do you think it was a surprise, then, that they got married?

Jamila: It's just odd, just/

Alison: /I don't wanna say it- (lowers voice) can't even describe it!

Jamila: Y'know (whispers) gay

Liam: Ga::y!

Jamila: (Laughing, quietly) imagine if someone shouts out, 'it's ga:y!' in front of the teacher that would be s:o funny (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: So can you remember what the story was about?

Harriet: Yeah two- two princes get gay (laughs) get gay.

Liz: (Laughing) I can't even believe you're saying that/

Harriet: /(laughing) get gay! Gay gay gay! (SB, Eastfield. Girls aged 9-10)

A logical extension of this understanding of gay as unspeakable were children's perceptions of the formal school as implicitly condoning anti-gay sentiment. As well as revealing further the centrality of homo-interpellation to peer group culture ('Tyler can't wait t'be gay!'), the excerpts below highlight a clear difference in children's understandings of institutional support across the two schools, wherein teachers are positioned as condoning ('get out of this school now') and condemning ('teachers would...look after them') homophobia at Eastfield and Newhaven, respectively:

Eli: Because- em, no teacher would let, lesbians or gay, in the school/
Karl: /if y'told Mr Stuart [Headteacher], he would'a banished y'from the school!
Eli: He would say GET OUT OF THIS SCHOOL NOW! (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

Mike: To be honest I don't think people who are gay/
Adam: /would say so/
Laurel: /they don't wanna be exiled
Mike: Or, kicked out or/
Laurel: /yeah or, kicked outta school (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 9-10)

CA: So what if there was someone gay in our class/
Sophie: /weird!/
Robert: /Tyler can't wait t'be gay!
Wyatt: Teachers would sort of/
Robert: /look after them/
Wyatt: /yeah like look after them and make sure that nobody's being horrible. (SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

Whilst Newhaven's equalities ethos did not preclude homophobia, then, its existence appeared nonetheless to make visible the school's position on anti-homophobia, and provide a language through which children could both name and transgress hetero/sexual norms (albeit still with difficulty). Finn's group below, for example, draw explicitly on the languages and resources of the school (specifically, the *No Outsiders* banners) to substantiate their defence of Finn's anti-normative boyhood, whilst Paula and Neil refer to the song from the school play to legitimate their positive stance on 'gay rights'. Thus, whilst homophobia remained prevalent at Newhaven, the existence

of a positive, school-sanctioned discourse on non-heterosexuality provided a second option for those who sought to work 'outside' dominant homophobic scripts:

- Finn: It celebrates differences and I'm different!
- Ava: Look we've got all these [banners] and there's a good one in there/
- Aisha: /saying like, sexua:lity/
- Ava: /it says, on it/
- Finn: /gay, lesbian/
- Ava: /it doesn't matter what- who you are, you are always/
- Aisha: /part of this school/
- Finn: /it's like, y'can be whoever you want to be (DG, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)
-
- Paula: It doesn't matter if y'love another girl/
- Ana: /it's up to you/
- Paula: /or boy/
- Neil: /it's in the song! (Singing) A tale of tw::o!
[...]
- Paula: (Singing) who you lo::ve is up to yo::u. A tale of tw::o! (SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 9-10)

By contrast, the lack of an equivalent positive discourse at Eastfield meant that for many children homosexuality was associated solely with negativity ('y'only hear it used as like, a bad thing' (Freya, Eastfield, age 10)), and alternative positions were thus significantly harder to access. This is articulated powerfully by Joe, below, who's reference to the 'violent, devious' use of the word 'gay' in *The Simpsons* – and perception of the school as a comparative moral arbiter ('if it's ok at school it's ok everywhere') – make clear the potential power (but here, failure) of the school to counter negative discourse and legitimise alternative ways of thinking. Such potential is exposed further by Tracy and Freya in the second extract, who argue eloquently for an in-school pedagogy around non-heterosexuality:

- CA: So why did you say that gay was a very devious word, Joe?
- Joe: Becau::se, when y'hear it on things like *The Simpsons* they make it feel, like a really really really bad word?

- CA: Oh yeah?
- Joe: When y'hear it at school then y'think, well it's- well it's ok cos if- if it's ok at school it's ok everywhere? But if like y'just hear it like in a violent and devious way...
- CA: How do they say it on *The Simpsons*?
- Joe: Well usually like, it means like very very very weird and like, not for children. (DG, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)
- Tracy: Um. Well after we read [*King and King*] I thought it would be suitable for about, seven or eight [year olds]? But then, I thought, actually, y'should really, tell, younger children about it? So then they could understand it better/
- Freya: /yeah, a bit like, a lesson like- not like (laughing) Maths and English, but like, they're gonna have to be told of it one day, and it's better to be, told it when we're young so we, can understand it, more.
- Tracy: Cos otherwise y'always just think it's a bad thing (DG, Eastfield. Girls ages 9-10)

b. Disclosures of non-heterosexuality

Differences in the perceived acceptability of homosexuality at Newhaven and Eastfield also informed the manner in which children disclosed information about their own non-heterosexual friends and family members. Not only did many more children at Newhaven make reference to gay relatives (likely due in part to the school's relatively high demographic of children with gay parents), but those that made such disclosures generally did so with apparent comfort, early in discussions, and often to substantiate a defence of 'gay rights'. Below, for example, Lara and Toby each make reference to their own gay family members in part to substantiate their defence of *King and King's* two princes:

- CA: What did people think about the two kings/
- Lara: /I think it's fine/
- Lynn: /ga::y!
- Lara: Doesn't matter
- Lynn: The:::se, are gay bo:::ys.
- Lara: My brother is gay
- Molly: Oh yeah with Kieran!

Lara: Yep (SB, Newhaven. Girls aged 7-8)

CA: Has everybody read this book?

Ian: Yeah and it's so gross!

Toby: It's not gross

Ian: It i::s

Dawei: Because they're kissing and kissing's gross because they're smooching!/
Toby: /no it's no::t

Sophia: I know why it's not! Because it's true lo::ve!

Alberto: And Toby's mum/

Toby: /and my mum- my mum is marrying someone called Kim and it's, tru::e love!

(SB, Newhaven. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Equivalent disclosures from children at Eastfield, however, operated in markedly different ways: coming at later points in the group's discussion and taking the form of a more guarded or embarrassed 'confession' ('I have a very embarrassing secret that my mum- before she married the dad I have now she was, a lesbian!' (Amy, Eastfield, age 7)). It was also exclusively at Eastfield that children spoke in disapproving terms about gay family members ('my grandad's in love with a man which is actually very gross! (Robyn, Eastfield, age 6); 'I've got a cousin...who's getting married to another girl, and I'm not gonna go cos it's too weird' (Lara, Eastfield, age 8)). The capacity for openness and comfort around varied family structures was therefore significantly delimited at Eastfield, where the relative invisibility of homosexuality contributed to its particularly profound Othering. In the excerpt below for example, Theo first tests the water for his 'confession' by revealing that he has a secret about his brother that he is unwilling to share, before going on later to disclose, guardedly, that 'one of [his] family members are gay'. Significantly, it is only after I reveal my own mum's lesbian relationship – perhaps providing a necessary alternative discourse – that Theo eventually 'confesses', somewhat defensively, to his brother's sexuality ('so what'). Here, as with Amy, above, having a gay family member is experienced as something near unspeakable, and it is only through mitigation and embarrassment that his 'confession' is eventually made:

CA: So do people ever talk about being gay at school?

Theo: I'm not gonna tell anyone my secrets thank you! (Laughter) I have a very important secret about my brother and I don't wanna explain it
 [...]

Theo: Stuart you do realise that one, of my family members are gay

Stuart: Ooh who!

Theo: (Fiercely) I'm not tellin' yu who!

CA: Why d'you not wanna say Theo

Theo: I just don't/
 ...

CA: Yeah? My mum's gay

Theo: So big whoop de do

CA: So there y'go/

Theo: /so my brother's gay, so what. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

It is significant that in the first two excerpts, Lara and Toby's disclosures are either met with or preceded by familiarity ('oh yeah with Kieran'/'Toby's mum'), whilst in the second, Amy and Theo appear to be 'confessing' to this information for the first time, eliciting surprised reactions from their peers ('what!'/ 'ooh who!'). Such divergent reactions point again to the relative 'speakability' of non-heterosexuality at Newhaven and Eastfield, with Eastfield's institutional 'silence' appearing to have contributed to the construction of a space wherein the relations/hips of certain family members must be kept secret.

Children who drew on their own experiences of non-heterosexuality to substantiate gay-supportive attitudes, however, did still fluctuate in their positions at other points, revealing again homophobia's contingent and interactional nature in practice. For example, whilst Toby used his mum's gay relationship to defend *King and King's* princes in a mixed-sex story-group (above), he was in comparison vehemently homophobic towards a hypothetical gay classmate during a single-sex discussion group. Equally, Jacob – the child of four gay parents – was defensive of gay rights in a mixed-sex conversation about *King and King* but repudiative towards the notion of a gay classmate in a discussion group of all boys. Further to demonstrating again the significance of a mixed-sex 'group collective' in enabling dominant scripts to be more feasibly transgressed, these boys' fluctuating positions with regard to the *nature* of

imagined gay scenarios highlighted the lesser and greater threat posed to hetero-masculinity by 'abstract' gay princes and 'relatable/proximal' (but still hypothetical) gay classmates, respectively.

This contingency was revealed particularly acutely by Theo (above), whose relative support of his brother's sexuality did not preclude his vehement disapproval of same-sex marriage ('I'm just gonna say no to that, that's creepy') and of my own mum's lesbian relationship. In the hope of establishing a 'group collective' following Theo's disclosure, I decided to elaborate on my own non-heterosexual family structure (see below). However, this was met – somewhat surprisingly! – with fierce disapproval from Theo, for whom 'two mums' represented a greater disruption to (hetero-familial) intelligibility than did a gay brother:

CA: Well my mum and dad were married, for a long time, and then my mum fell in love with another woman and now they're married.

Theo: E::r I wanna stay away from you right now!

CA: Why?

Theo: That's just, weird.

Sarah: Y'just said it's fine Theo/

Marissa: /you've just said there's nothing wrong with it!

Theo: But it's a mum!

CA: Right?

Theo: It's not right/

Sarah: /it's just

Theo: Having two mums isn't right (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Further, Theo's support of his brother's sexuality did not appear to extend to the (perhaps more concrete) notion of two men marrying, which he continued to conceptualise in terms of unintelligibility ('I'm just gonna say no to that'/'two men can't marry' (Theo, Eastfield)). Revealed here was the fundamental conditionality of 'gay acceptability', where gay brothers, gay mums, and same-sex weddings each represented a different sort of disruption to the hetero-order. In this instance, in particular, the 'individual rights' of Theo's brother were separate and distinct from the incorrigible 'wrongness' of hetero-familial and hetero-marital disruption.

Homosexuality's comparative *conceivability* at Newhaven, though, clearly did not preclude the continuation of homophobia, and regular use of gay-as-insult had to be particularly complexly navigated given children's awareness of the gay relationships of their friends' parents and relatives. Particularly striking was Jacob's friendship group (aged 9-10), who were aware and relatively supportive of Jacob's four gay parents but still used homophobic language regularly in informal interaction. What annoyed this group, though, was Jacob's apparently hypocritical attitude towards homophobic language, where in spite of his own use of gay-as-insult, he was often deeply upset at being interpellated as 'gay' himself:

Wyatt: Right, Jacob, if somebody calls you, gay, or something, then you go s::o mad/

Robert: /but then he, calls people gay as well/

Wyatt: /and we don't say it seriously though just as a joke!

Jacob: Yeah but what if your parents were gay you wouldn't like it either! (SB, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

What became clear over the course of this discussion was the profoundly coercive pressure of homophobia, where for Jacob (as for myself at school) use of gay-as-insult was at once necessitated by informal culture and painfully experienced. Thus, in spite of the distinction drawn by Wyatt and Robert between its 'joking' and 'serious' usage, Jacob makes clear the meaninglessness of this distinction for those whom the word injuriously affects ('but what if your parents were gay you wouldn't like it either'). Thus, whilst for Wyatt and Robert it was possible for the word to be nothing more than a joke – given that for them actual gay association was (as far as I knew) relatively abstract – gay-as-insult was far more profoundly experienced by Jacob, interpellating him more injuriously than it did others ('some people say Jacob's gay because his mum is' (Sophie, Newhaven, age 9)). In distinguishing between use of the word 'as a joke' and 'seriously', then, Wyatt and Robert – similarly to Matt in the previous section – draw a distinction between 'gay as abject' and 'gay as legitimate, marginalised identity'. Thus, it seemed almost to be their stated 'acceptance' of the latter that rendered homophobic language acceptable, with equalities discourse drawn on as *carte blanche* for 'jokingly' homophobic behaviour ('I would be fine if it was me'/'it's not a big deal' (Wyatt/Robert, Newhaven, ages 9-10)).

c. Conceivability of non-heterosexuality

Notwithstanding children's continued homophobia, homosexuality was significantly more conceivable for children at Newhaven, for whom their Headteacher's gay relationship – alongside many pupils' gay parents, and stories like *King and King* – provided means by which to understand and articulate non-heterosexualities. Indeed, in comparison to children at Eastfield, for whom simple use of the word 'gay' represented a laughable novelty, language used by children at Newhaven to talk about non-heterosexuality was comparatively straightforward, rendered 'speakable' by its concrete existence in (and out of) school ('well Toby's mum's gay?' (Julia, aged 8, Newhaven)). The extracts below, for example, represent just two of many more conversations at Newhaven wherein concrete experiences were drawn on to 'actualise' (Sanders, 2018) non-heterosexuality, and reflect the relative un/reality of homosexuality for children at Eastfield and Newhaven, respectively:

CA: So what if there was a man who was married to another man?

Mandy: That's fine! Because Mr Graham is married to a bo::y/

Mei: /yeah yeah! Mr Graham is married to Mr Graham!/
Mandy: /he said that to me!/
Mei: /he is he is. Cos I've been to lunch before and, there's two Mr Grahams (DG, Newhaven. Girls aged 5-6)

Dawei: If um, a boy, got like a boy, as a boyfriend, that's called gay? Like Mr Graham he's gay

Alberto: What is gay?

Dawei: Gay means like, same- boy girl- no. Boy boy, girl girl.

Toby: Same gender.

Alberto: A::h yeah like, *King and King* (DG, Newhaven. Boys aged 7-8)

With the exception of some of the youngest children at Newhaven, conceptualisations of homosexuality as specifically *inconceivable* were exclusive to children at Eastfield, where the school's silence on (homo)sexualities rendered gay parents and teachers in particular a near impossibility. The first extract below, for example, reflects the inconceivability of 'gay teachers' for many children at Eastfield, for whom 'gay' and 'teacher' represented incommensurable categories of identity ('I wouldn't see how she

would be a teacher', see also Youdell, 2006). Equally, the second extract reveals clearly the unintelligibility of an imagined gay classmate, with 'same-sex' desire first invisibilised by a discourse of male friendship ('that just means, best friend in the world'), and then made imaginable via insertion into a ('trans') heterosexual frame ('he might be female?'):

CA: So what if maybe, your teacher, who was a girl, was married to another girl?

Stuart: U:::m/

Theo: /that would just be, incredibly weird

Stuart: I dunno- I- I wouldn't see how she would be a teacher. (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: What if, there was a boy in your who wanted a boyfriend?

Aamir: Well that just means, your best friend in the world.

Brad: He might be, female. Cos some people need to be changed? Like, my sister said, that she read in the newspaper that, someone had to be changed, because they had an illness or something.

Jaaved: Yeah some people, don't like being a girl? So they, so- it's really gross- they, have an operation, and, they, pull the boobs in, to make them like a boy. (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Further, whilst for children at Newhaven the notion of a gay parent was relatively imaginable, children's comparative inability to conceive of 'two mums' at Eastfield lead in a number of cases to outright refusal ('what?! That's false!' (Aadita, Eastfield, age 5)), and/or the 're-casting' of (my) gay parents into more conceivable family roles ('[Catherine] has one mum and one sister', 'which one's the twin?!', below):

Aamir: Catherine's got em, two- she's got- right, her mum- she found, another woman, and what happened is, she has one mum, and one sister so y'have, y'have more/

CA: /well she's not my sister, it's like I've kind've got two mums

Brad: What!

Jaaved: Like a mum and a aunty (DG, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Ray: Well if, if my mum had a twin, then it'd be hard t'go to your actual mum if you were with y'other mum/

CA: /but what if your mum was married to another mum/

Ray: /well if you were with y'mum's twin, like, which one's the twin!? Which one's my mu:::m!? (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 7-8)

Indeed, it appeared to be the disruption caused by homosexuality to *hetero-familial* intelligibility that most profoundly delimited understandings at Eastfield, where a relative silence around non-heterosexual family structures rendered gay family members particularly 'impossible' (Youdell, 2006). Indeed, whilst homophobia characterised discussions across both schools, it was significant that references to *familial* intelligibility were made exclusively at Eastfield. The extracts below represent just two of many more discussions of this kind, where first, Aaron and Aqib position the hetero-family ('who's gonna be the mam?!') and normative gender roles ('who will drive the car') as key to intelligible romantic relationships. Equally, Tanish's suggestion that 'the [boy] who looked most like a girl would have a baby' reflects the structuring power of hetero-gender and -sexuality, which for Tanish acts here as the norm against which Other relationships are able to be made intelligible:

Aaron: /a girl marrying a girl?

Aqib: Who'll be the dad?

Aaron: Yeah who's gonna be the dad if they have a children? And they'll have two babies

Aqib: And who will drive the car if- if there's no dad?!

[...]

CA: What about a boy marrying a boy?

(Gasps)

Zuraib: N:::o!

Aaron: Who's gonna- who's gonna- who's gonna be the mam?! (SB, Eastfield. Boys aged 5-6)

Tanish: Ladies and ladies can marry each other so boys and boys can marry/

Ling: /so, so you don't get a baby!

Tanish: Yeah y'do! Because, if you have, if you married another girl and you were a girl you'd have two babies. If you were a boy and you married a boy, the one

who looked most- the one who looked most more like a girl would have a baby.

(SB, Eastfield. Boys and girls aged 5-6)

References to 'having two babies' were made across numerous discussion groups at Eastfield, and reflected, again, the conceptual monopoly that (normative) heterosexuality held over children's understandings of romantic relationships. Below, for example, Fariah's conceptualisation of a lesbian relationship as 'even more weird' on the grounds that two women would 'get four babies' reflects not just the dominance of nuclear family models, but also the perceived inextricability of 'woman' and 'reproduction', with romantic relationships frequently understood in fundamentally (hetero-)reproductive (and thus normative) terms:

CA: What if there was a, boy in your class, and he wanted t'go out with another boy?

Fariah: Blu::gh!

Ray: That's... that's weird

Fariah: A::nd when a girl marries a girl, that's even more weird!

CA: Why's that even more weird?

Fariah: Becau::se, you would get four babies!

Billy: At once (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Even more striking, though, was Fariah's subsequent suggestion (below) that the presence of two mums would lead her to question her *own* gender identity, an assertion that, whilst facetious, nonetheless highlighted the profound disruption caused by 'gay parents' to broader conceptualisations of intelligibility. Again, it was significant that comments such as these were made exclusively by children at Eastfield, for whom the notion of non-heterosexuality appeared to far more acutely trouble understandings of the (hetero-)social order:

CA: So what if there was someone in our class who had, two mums or two dads/

Fariah: /they'd feel weird, like, am I a boy, or a girl.

CA: Why would they think that?

Fariah: Becau::se they've got two mums! (Laughs) so they'll think/

Billy: /like mu::m and mu::m!

Fariah: Mum and mu::m! Wait which one's my mum?! Which one's my mum?!

Wha::t! (SB, Eastfield. Girls and boys aged 7-8)

Notwithstanding their often repudiative attitudes towards homosexuality, children at Newhaven were nonetheless able to position non-heterosexualities as commensurable with notions of family, and conversations about gay parents/teachers/princes were not marked by conceptual struggle here (with the exception of some of the youngest children), as they were at Eastfield. Indeed, whilst the discussions below somewhat belie the homophobia expressed by these same children at other moments, they illustrate nonetheless these children's comparative ability to draw on (albeit normative) romantic scripts to conceptualise non-heterosexualities. Unlike for Fariah, Tanish, and Aqib's groups above, the notion of non-heterosexual family structures was for most children at Newhaven wholly conceivable (if often repudiated), and reflected again the impact of school ethos on the intelligibility of 'Other' relationships and identities:

Clare: Em, I think, because if they're gay, being gay/

Mark: /it means they're, they're kissi::ng they live togethe::r/

Clare: /and they have kids

Mark: Yeah they have a ba::by, and then, em. You em kiss together! (SB, Newhaven.

Girls and boys aged 7-8)

CA: Were you surprised at all, by the story?

Wyatt: N::o, not really cos of the title. But if I didn't know the title (pause) well it still wouldn't be that much of a surprise/

Jack: /na::h/

Wyatt: /I wouldn't be like... what! He's a guy!? And he's a guy?!

CA: Yeah? So is that just something you see quite often?

Jack: Em, yea::h/

Wyatt: /yeah Jacob's mum's gay

CA: Mm hm?

Wyatt: And em, I dunno. I'm just. (Bored tone) not really bothered by being gay

Robert: Yeah Mr Graham is gay (SB, Newhaven. Boys aged 9-10)

v. Conclusions: Sexual cultures and conceivabilities

This chapter has explored some of the various ways in which discourses of sexuality suffused in/formal cultures at Newhaven and Eastfield, and has identified children's negotiations across these sites as having been characterised by both similarity and difference. With regards to cultures of heterosexuality, I began by identifying the pervasiveness of hetero-discourse across both schools, children's relationships to which differed primarily according to gender, age, and status. However, whilst levels and forms of participation varied, the ubiquity of hetero-culture was such that absolute avoidance appeared near-impossible, with all children compelled to position themselves *somewhere* within the informal school's hetero-relational frame (for example, as 'anti-romance'), not least due to heterosexuality's interrelation with understandings of gender. Indeed, hetero-discourse represented for many children not only a central aspect of informal school culture, but also a conceptual framework for understanding and embodying gendered 'selfhood' (see also Renold, 2005). However, whilst boys were relatively able to draw on alternative discourses (for example, sexualisation or notions of 'age-appropriateness') in order to reject hetero-romance, the perceived inextricability of heterosexuality and femininity was such that girls appeared compelled to reject girlhood altogether in order to align themselves with anti-romance positions. Further, whilst children's own relationships to hetero-culture were broadly similar across the two schools, the incorporation of 'equalities work' into formal school practice at Newhaven did appear to have led to a less normatively-infused learning culture, where hetero-gendered and -sexualised norms were less evident (although not absent) in teachers' classroom practice.

Following this, I moved to a consideration of the ways in which children at Newhaven and Eastfield made sense of non-heterosexualities, and argued that the significant variation across these sites stemmed from the schools' differing approaches towards (gender/sexualities) equalities pedagogy. Thus, whilst homophobia was still prevalent at Newhaven, formal discourse around sexualities contributed to the construction of a school culture wherein non-heterosexualities were, at least formally, *acceptable* (if marginalised), *speakingable*, and *intelligible*. Conversely, at Eastfield, it appeared at least partly to be as a result of institutional silence that homosexualities were understood as *unacceptable*, *unspeakable*, and *unintelligible*, where for many children invisibility was

understood as equalling disapproval ('they don't talk about it because they don't think it's right'). Thus, notwithstanding continued homophobia in peer group spaces, Newhaven's comparative openness around 'diverse' identities (through e.g. teacher and parent diversity, visible *No Outsiders* resources, school projects and assemblies) appeared nonetheless to have provided children with an available language to 'actualise' non-heterosexualities, and a positive alternative to 'normative' (homophobic) conceptualisations.

The implications of these findings for understandings of equalities work are significant, and reveal proactive sexualities pedagogy as essential to countering the deleterious effects of institutional 'invisibility'. Indeed, whilst many teachers and practitioners might view relative silence as at worst reflecting a 'neutral' position towards non-heterosexualities, my findings here demonstrate that the effects of inaction are significantly more damaging than this, with institutional silence at Eastfield leading many children to understand their school and its teachers as sanctioning homophobia.

8. Teacher Interviews: Conceptualising Gender, Sexuality, and Equalities

I [often] related back to some experiences I'd had with my sister when she was younger and her experience of primary school and I just decided I'm never going to use the words "boys" and "girls" unless I actually have to. (Imogen, ages 7-8 teacher, Newhaven)

/well y'know what I'm a bit like with me shoes (laughs) and matching clothes, so that's always a big conversation with the girls, .hh em, but no I've got brothers, and nephews, and I think, I'm fine, at just, chatting to lads as if they're lads. (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

Contrary to my expectation of a relatively definite distinction in attitudes between teachers at Newhaven and Eastfield, I found that conceptualisations of gender and sexuality varied almost equally within as between schools, informed as much by individual disposition as by involvement or otherwise in *No Outsiders*. Above, for example, it is at least in part as a result of her sister's experience of primary schooling that Imogen (*No Outsiders* participant) positions the troubling of gender categories at the centre of her practice, whilst Julie (*No Outsiders* participant) conversely, draws on essentialist understandings to justify her (gendered) relationships with girl/boy pupils (discussed further below). Thus, whilst teachers' attitudes towards *equalities work* were informed significantly by their relationship to *No Outsiders* (discussed in Section II), general conceptualisations of gendered and sexual workings varied markedly from person to person, seemingly influenced as much by background, politics, and experience as by participation in 'critical' work in school.

The current chapter, then, is divided into two parts. I consider first the variety of ways in which teachers at both schools made sense of the workings of gender and sexuality in general, before moving to an exploration of their perceptions of and approaches towards 'equalities practice' in particular.

I. Conceptualising gender and sexuality

i. Conceptualising gender

Whilst particular conceptualisations varied markedly across interviews, the notion of gender as at least to some extent informing children's social worlds was consistent across both schools, reflecting perhaps a more general shift in the popular imagination around the relationship between gender and childhood³³. Whilst this led to considered reflections on the nature of gender's workings, though, teachers rarely challenged the norms that underwrote gendered understandings, largely maintaining fixed notions of boy- and girl-hood even whilst criticising gender normativity. Further to this, it appeared most often to be the most visible, monoglossic productions that teachers positioned at the centre of their observations, with most interviewees responding to my opening question ('how do you see gender operating in school?'/ 'do you see the school/classroom as being a gendered space?') by citing (and simultaneously reaffirming) normative gender as structuring almost all girl/boy behaviours:

I don't know if it's just the type of, personalities that we've got but the boys are a lot louder and a lot more confident [...] whereas the girls are kind of, just- you know, they're a lot more, placid and they're very, polite and quiet. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

/you notice the sort of, the groups don't you. So you notice the, the testosterone filled, male, football, bla- you know that sort of group is, very obvious on the yard. Em, the sort of, the girls and the sort, of (lowers voice) bitchy playing and all that sort of stuff. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Through observations such as these, teachers worked often to both cite and cement essentialist understandings, with each of these excerpts constructing a dichotomous image of what was in reality a far more varied picture of boy- and girl-hood 'doings'.

³³ See e.g. the recent UK Let Toys be Toys and Let Clothes be Clothes campaigns (<http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/>; <https://letclothesbeclothes.uk/>) and popular documentaries e.g. Louis Theroux's 'Transgender Kids' (<http://bbc.in/1PaFCFX>) and Channel 4's 'Secret Life of...' series (<http://bit.ly/2n8uEts>)

Indeed, there were a number of loud and confident girls in the class to which Chloe refers (see e.g. Alison, Jamila, Fariah in Chapters 6 and 7) who are subsumed here within a homogenising discourse that positions *all* girls as ‘placid...polite and quiet’. Equally, whilst Andrew recognises his observations as referring only to particularly visible ‘groups’ of children, his instinct towards boys and football and girls and ‘bitchiness’ nonetheless reinscribes a problematic (and sexist) dualism that was prevalent across interviews at both schools (‘You generally get more tittle tattle at the end of a play time from a girl. Y’get- how can I- what’s a better word than bitchiness?’ (Diana, ages 5-6 teacher, Eastfield)). Indeed, of twelve total interviewees, one third (two each at Newhaven and Eastfield) responded to broad questions about the workings of gender with reference to boys’ and girls’ ‘straightforward’ versus ‘vindictive’ friendships respectively, and in so doing reinscribed longstanding, now somewhat hegemonic ‘truths’ about ‘the association of meanness and girlhood’ (Bethune and Gonick, 2017: 390; see also Pratt-Adams and George, 2005; Ringrose and Renold, 2010):

/when boys are difficult you usually have a few boys, [who] probably have fisticuffs, fall out for a day and then they’re friends again. Whilst I find, girls harder to manage because girls can be quite nasty, and can be quite vindictive with each other. (Lauren, ages 9-10 teacher, Newhaven)

Girls are a nightmare! [...] Girls are particularly mean. In terms of how they deal with those things, it’s that obvious, age-old thing, that boys will just smack each other and girls can be quite mean. (Eddie, Equalities Champion, Newhaven)

Whilst likely reflecting patterns of learned behaviour across some girl/boy friendship groups (see e.g. Hey, 1997; Walkerdine, 1990; Morris-Roberts, 2004; Ringrose, 2008; Read, 2011), characterisations such as these worked nonetheless to homogenise diverse groups of ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ along essential lines of difference, simplifying boys’ own relational interactions (see Eriksen and Lyng, 2016) and drawing on only the most visible ‘doings’ of girl- and boy-hood as bases for understanding gendered behaviour as a whole. Indeed, each of the excerpts above refers not to ‘some boys/girls’ but to ‘(the) boys/girls’, and in so doing positions *all* children on one or other side of a fixed (and fictional) behavioural binary.

Broad conceptualisations such as these manifested further through teachers' interactions with children, which worked often to strengthen dualistic constructions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. In response to my asking whether they considered their relationships with children to be informed by gender, for example, many teachers positioned what they perceived as inherent male/female dispositions as bases for gendered interactions. Below, for example, Andrew identifies (all) girls' and boys' apparently oppositional desire for tactility as 'influencing' his interactions with children, which he recognises as being 'nicer' and 'cuddlier' with girl- as opposed to boy- pupils. Further, his interpellation of female and male pupils as 'girls' and 'lads' suggests a paternal versus fraternal relationship respectively, which in turn underscores the 'fragile-female/resilient-male' dichotomy implicit in his approach:

I'm probably much nicer to the girls, I would have thought (laughs). Em, I'm quite a tactile Headteacher so I'll give them a cuddle and, and those sorts of things... and when they get a bit older the boys don't particularly like that any more! (Laughs) So yeah, I suppose, I am influenced by that, and, I'll probably talk to them differently- you know I've never- I've not really thought about it. But I guess if you saw me on the yard interacting with a bunch of lads and interacting with a bunch of girls it would probably be, a bit different particularly, as they got older. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Equally, in the extract below Chloe (ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield) begins by justifying her greater strictness towards boys on the grounds of their universally difficult behaviour, before going on to identify 'other', quieter boys (see Renold, 2004) to whom this characterisation doesn't apply. Even after identifying these others, though, Chloe still maintains an impression of *all* boys as relatively badly behaved by suggesting that these others might only appear quiet in relation to their especially boisterous (male) peers. In this construction, then, no boys are given the chance to be positioned outside a 'loud/boisterous' framework, and Chloe's uncertainty regarding her strictness towards quieter 'others' ('I might not, be as strict with those, ones, I don't know') suggests a likely homogenous approach wherein all boys are disciplined for the 'loudness' of a few:

Chloe: When you watch me it might come across that I'm, a bit stricter with the boys but I think actually that's because they're a lot louder and, you know, they

often shout out and, kind of, wiggle around on the carpet and things whereas the girls in my class... they try harder to please me...

CA: And are there boys in the class who aren't as rowdy and outspoken or/

Chloe: /yeah there are but sometimes I don't know if that's just because they're overshadowed kind of by the ones who are a lot more boisterous... I dunno possibly I'm not- I might not, be as strict with those, ones, I don't know.

Whilst a number of teachers acknowledged the problems inherent in such interpellations ('you know if a boy or a girl falls over [...] I'd like to think I don't react differently but I bet I do, oh god that's awful isn't it' (Diana, ages 5-6 teacher, Eastfield)), others were more dismissive about their effects, and justified differential behaviours along fundamentally essentialising lines. In the first extract below, for example, Nora's (Newhaven, non-participant in *No Outsiders*) characterisation of the collective use of 'girls' and 'boys' as both insignificant ('that's just mo::re, chatting'), and productive in fostering 'healthy competition', both justifies and extols classroom practices that position girl- and boy-hood as fixed, oppositional categories. Such an insistence stands in stark contrast to Imogen (Newhaven, *No Outsiders* participant), who is profoundly critical about the everyday interpellation of 'boys' and 'girls', and describes her own attempts to disrupt static conceptualisations:

I think um, in any school, automatically teachers often say girls, bo:ys, u:m, bla bla but I think that's just, mo::re... .hh chatting and having healthy like competition I don't think it's to address, things as such if you know what I mean. (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)

You see I don't really see [my classroom] as being a gendered space... it used to be quite a conscious thing where I would deliberately try not to say, "Oh girls do this and boys do that" but now I don't even think about it... now I actually would really beat myself up over that, I even try not to say, "Oh well done girls!"... and as a class we'll talk about- you know, what is a boy thing, what is a girl thing, can we even say that because there isn't such a thing. (Imogen, ages 7-8 teacher, Newhaven)

This variation in positions within, as well as between, schools was revealed further by Julie (Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven) who despite a strong commitment to equalities

work following her involvement in *No Outsiders* ('it was ground-breaking... I remember thinking we've moved, today, we've taken a step, and actually, there's no going back now') drew still on universalising conceptualisations in discussions around in-school gendered workings. In the extract below for example (cited in this chapter's opening), Julie describes a specific rapport with female students that is at once based on and reifies an essentialist link between girlhood and fashion. Following this, she draws on notions of (rough, jovial) boyhood ('I'm fine at just, chatting to lads *as if they're lads*' (my emphasis)) to substantiate her claim to equal affinity with all students and, in turn, construct a picture of universal male and female natures. For Julie, then, non-gendered interaction is characterised here as the ability to find affinity with two distinct sets of (male/female) students, as opposed to deconstructing essentialist notions of gender itself:

/well y'know what I'm a bit like with me shoes (laughs) and matching clothes, so that's always a big conversation with the girls, .hh em, but no I've got brothers, and nephews, and I think, I'm fine, at just, chatting to lads as if they're lads, cos in fact... I probably have always, liked, to hang out with the rucker buggers and, that kind've, naughty, group, so I think they, probably feel- also feel quite comfortable with me.
(Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

Despite her enthusiasm for *No Outsiders*, then, the power of dichotomous understandings was such that Julie's conceptualisations remained structured along essentialist lines. As well as reflecting the pervasiveness of the gender binary, I understand this as relating also to *No Outsiders*' explicit foregrounding of *sexualities* equalities, which whilst cognisant of sexuality's interrelation with gender, nonetheless positioned LG (and to a lesser extent B) identities at the forefront of its work (see DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). Indeed, *No Outsiders*' interrogations of 'gender' in particular occurred largely in relation to the project books (which featured a range of gender non-conforming protagonists³⁴) and its (later) work on trans identities, with gender-related workshops facilitated in collaboration with trans youth group, *Gendered Intelligence* (2018). With regard to the latter – and despite its broadly

³⁴ Unfortunately, though, these were predominantly male, and whilst likely reflective of an imbalance in the available literature, nonetheless precluded an equal interrogation/troubling of 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender identities

deconstructive framing (see DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a) – many teachers’ interpretations of this work appeared still to reify certain essentialisms, where ‘gender non-conformity’ was understood as an individual issue affecting particular (possibly trans) students (‘after that I just felt strongly that, y’know I wouldn’t want anyone to feel the way that Jay [workshop convener and trans man] had felt at school’ (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)). Equally – and arguably as a result of their predominant focus on *singular* gender- and sexuality- ‘transgressors’³⁵ (see inter alia *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein, 2005); *Oliver Button is a Sissy* (dePaola, 1979); *William’s Doll* (Zolotow, 1972)) – teachers largely interpreted the ‘message’ of *No Outsiders*’ books as being one of ‘accepting difference’, a position that whilst well-intentioned nonetheless cements heterosexuality and the gender binary as the normative ‘centre’ against which such ‘difference’ is measured. In the excerpt below, for example, Imogen explains her critical approach towards gender (discussed above) as informed primarily by a concern for ‘non-conforming’ children, where unisex toilets and non-gendered language are understood as legitimising the counter-normativities of individual students, rather than representing part of a broader process of gender deconstruction:

You don’t need to say ‘girls line up and boys do this’ [...] I would go as far as to say I think we should have unisex toilets in primary school [...] Because I just think there’s going to be that kid and I remember the first class I ever taught, there was a boy and he was so effeminate and [...] I could see already the struggles that he was having, and I think it’s those sorts of things that would’ve made a difference for him. (Imogen, ages 7-8 class teacher, Newhaven)

Whilst attuned in many ways to gender’s significance in delimiting (certain) student subjectivities, then, *No Outsiders* teachers nonetheless continued in many ways to reify normative understandings by both individualising counter-normativity, and conceptualising gender-critical pedagogy as relevant primarily to those ‘outside’ the gender binary.

Such individualised conceptualisations were a feature of interviews across both schools, with many teachers simultaneously challenging binary understandings and

³⁵ Reflective of a trend in children’s LGBT-themed literature generally

shoring up essentialisms. Whilst Georgina (ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield), for example, spoke passionately about a need for critical work around gender in school ('I wish there was more time for them to take part in things... that [challenge] those stereotypes'), her characterisations of and interactions with girl/boy pupils nonetheless worked often to reinscribe normativities. In the extract below, Georgina characterises the 'tomboy' as a transgressive positionality that gains girls 'respect' from boys and garners 'friendly competition'. Whilst seemingly celebrating girls' 'tough[ness] and resilien[ce]', this characterisation works equally to denigrate girlhood, and valorise (honorary) masculinity as a respected position that enables girls to be considered worthy 'competitors' in the gender hierarchy. Revealed in this extract is not only the positioning of boyhood as more desirable (a construction that makes boys' enjoyment of 'being boys' unsurprising, see below), but also Georgina's own role in cementing boys' lauded position through everyday language ('I'll be like, boys, would you like to help me with this? Boys, would you do that?'):

I've got more, girls in this year that would consider themselves to be tougher and more resilient and stronger... I would say the boys like to be more identified as a group than the girls do though. The girls are happier to be somewhere on the spectrum, call themselves tomboys or not y'know whereas boys, I think in particular, like the mentality of being boys and liking the same things. [And how are those girls received you know- the 'tomboys'] /I think it's well received isn't it? They're respected for it and I think they're almost seen as, kind of, friendly competition for the boys... I think that's a good thing, that they want to be as active and interested in those things as- as boys are.

...

The boys like Dan and Andy are particularly boys' boys... And they like to be called boys. So if it's a group of boys, I'll be like, 'boys, would you like to help me with this? Boys, would you do that?' (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

Whilst normative conceptualisations were a feature of teacher interviews at both schools, it was exclusively teachers at Eastfield who spoke during interviews about noticing such gendered workings for the first time ('you know I've never- I've not really thought about it' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)), with five of six total interviewees

making reference to the shift in thinking that resulted from their involvement in the current research:

/god even that pirate book we read, the boy was the main character, the hero. A lot of them, you reinforce stereotypical things don't you really... I don't think we think about it... now you've said it- you know just to have somebody saying something kind of makes you look at things, in a new light. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Whilst teachers at Newhaven were largely more familiar with critical thinking on gender and schooling, though, positions on the nature and implications of gender's workings still varied significantly, with differences appearing most clearly informed by participation or otherwise in *No Outsiders*. In contrast to Imogen (*No Outsiders* participant) for example, who saw the troubling of gender categories as a central aspect of her classroom practice, Nora and Lauren (non-participants, below) each insisted on the relative innocence and 'genderlessness' of childhood play:

/no I think, I actually think they just play, at this age, that's what I've noticed um, you know they might play slightly different games but, um, I actually even think a bit older as well... what I have seen is, you know if they're going off to play tag, or whatever, they're all just playing tag it doesn't matter if you're a girl, boy or what. (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)

A:h, I don't really notice [gender]! At all. I think because they're so, young and particularly my class now are really young... I suppose you've got children like Sophie, who, act up and I think that's more to take on the boys and stand up to them... But apart from that, o:h I don't really think about it! (Lauren, ages 9-10 teacher, Newhaven)

The similarity between Nora and Lauren's conceptualisations is striking here given the different ages of their year groups, and Lauren's characterisation of her class as 'so young' stands in contrast to the maturities evinced by these same children in the context of informal research discussions. Despite their positioning within a school that works in part to recognise and challenge gendered workings, then, the strength of the 'childhood innocence' discourse was such that all children were positioned by these

teachers (significantly, non-participants in *No Outsiders*) as relatively 'unknowing', genderless beings. The situational nature of children's doings is also profoundly revealed here, where children's performances of 'innocent child' positionalities in the classroom (versus 'knowing peer' in the friendship group) have provided a basis for Nora and Lauren's impressions of them as relatively untouched by gendered 'knowledges'.

Perhaps most striking, though, were the confluences of gender and sexuality that permeated some teacher interviews, in particular during discussions of children's 'anti-normative' gendered behaviours. Whilst a conceptual link between gender and sexuality revealed itself across a number of interviews at both schools ('I guess Finn has, I don't know, a homosexual sort of trait perhaps?' (Lauren, ages 9-10 teacher, Newhaven)), there were two teachers in particular – Julie (Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven) and Andrew (Headteacher, Eastfield) – who drew strikingly sustained links between children's gender performances and perceived sexual orientations. In so doing, these teachers worked to cement longstanding confluences of, in particular, 'effeminacy' and (male) homosexuality, and revealed gendered understandings to be positioned – even for those involved in 'critical' work at Newhaven – within rigidly heteronormative frameworks. This gender-sexuality confluence is encapsulated succinctly by Andrew below, whose characterisations of 'a female approach' and 'a gay attitude' are interchangeable, both defined in terms of perceived 'effeminacy' and time spent with girls. Andrew's singling out of non-normative boys in particular here is also telling, and reveals – as have numerous others (e.g. Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Connell, 1995; Martino, 2000a, 2000b; Powers Albenesi, 2017) – the particular rigidity of normative masculinity constructions (indeed, Andrew did not speculate about girls' sexual orientation in his discussion of so-called 'tomboys'):

There have been children, where, you think actually that boy is much more comfortable, in a female setting [Mm]. In a- in a sort of female approach to, life and all those sorts of things .hhh now, whether that person is gay or not, is, completely, sort of- off the wall but... we've certainly had boys- tends to be boys that I'm thinking of- certainly had boys who have taken on... quite a gay attitude to- to their approach so they've, their voices change, slightly? One boy, who was with us last year, very much as he got, older, became, more, more gay in his approach... he was certainly

questioning, whether he, preferred being, in a more feminine, situation than a masculine situation. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Equally, Julie's speculation about the sexual orientation of two 'effeminate' boy pupils in the extracts below definitively equates gender performance and sexuality ('you know, it was so obvious!'), and highlights again the particular visibility of male gender transgression. Despite speaking passionately about the need for work that challenges gender and sexuality norms, Julie nonetheless cites the same characteristics to support her speculations (mixed-sex friendships, dressing up) that children themselves used to police normativity. Notwithstanding an evident concern for the wellbeing of non-heterosexual and otherwise 'non-normative' students, then, Julie's conflation of gender and sexuality works not only to cement rigid conceptualisations, but also to delimit the potential of sexualities equalities work by relating it only to 'visible' and 'recognisable' gender-based 'queerness' (see Airton, 2009):

Jonathan is someone who's always loved, dressing up, in princess clothes, and, in lots of ways he's this, (in low voice) bi::g butch lad isn't he, but actually... .hh also, he loves t'be with the girls. And, Jill [class teacher] and I certainly of late have sort've said, y'know... especially because, physically, he is a tough lad he's, y'know, quite gruff and all the rest've it, .hhh I hope that he would feel confident that if you know- if he is, gay? ...that he'd feel confident, t'feel, actually that's alright? (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

A couple of years ago we did a- an alternative, sort of nativity which had, Spanish dancers in... and Thomas, (smiling) was desperate to be a Spanish dancer. He had this frilly shirt o:n (laughing) [...] And he did used to come and say sometimes to us that, the kids called him gay, and obviously, we had to challenge them for it, but actually, there's a bit of me that wants to say to them, "why don't you just say, and you're telling me what?" (laughs) because, you know, it was so obvious! (ibid)

ii. Conceptualising sexuality

a. Children and sexuality

Whilst few teachers were as explicit or sustained in their speculations as Julie and Andrew, gender-sexuality connotations did nonetheless permeate a number of interviews, and represented just one of various ways in which teachers interpreted the workings of sexuality in childhood. Further, speculations around 'future' homosexualities were not always neutral, but at times underwritten by somewhat pathologising discourses that cemented heterosexuality's 'normative' position. Andrew's description below, for example, of a child whom he had assumed to be gay as 'now married with children... and absolutely fine' betrays a (likely unconscious) problematisation of non-heterosexuality on his part. This, combined with his language ('[he] became the minciest boy I've ever taught!') and surprise at 'non-stereotypical' homosexuality reinscribes discourses around the homogenous 'other-ness' of non-heterosexualities, whilst Louise's equation of gender transgression with physical disability is striking in its pathologising of non-normativity:

Em, but I don't know enough about, where that ['effeminate' behaviour] leads, do you know what I mean? Em, Gary – years ago this little boy called Gary – became the minciest boy that I've ever taught! You know and is now married with children you know and absolutely fine and so .hh- y'know if you asked me have you ever taught a child who you thought was gonna be gay it would be Gary [...] equally a- you know, really strong, rugby player, boy that I used to teach, em, is now, openly gay... and you know you wouldn't have, at this age in primary age, been able to say ooh yes, you know, that boy's gonna be gay and, you know that boy's, sexuality's different to that boy's, sexuality you know. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

CA: Mm hm. And how do [gender 'transgressive' children] tend to be received, is it usually/

Louise: /accepted. Absolutely accepted yeah. Just how they are I think it's like if you've got a kid with downs syndrome or, or with autism or anything else, children are very accepting. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

It was also likely as a result of this perceived 'other-ness' that non-heterosexualities received such heightened visibility (see Patai, 1992; DePalma and Atkinson, 2006a; Allan et al, 2009), marked in a manner clearly distinct from their normative heterosexual counterparts. In addition to the attention given by teachers across both schools to male 'effeminacy', Louise's narrative below (which responds to my asking if she noticed sexuality operating in any way in school) reveals further the visibility and invisibility of normative and 'transgressive' sexualities, respectively. For Louise, it was only hyper-sexuality in girls and hyper-effeminacy in boys that warranted definition as 'sexual', whilst 'talk[ing] about getting married and things' remained untroubled as a relatively unknowing aspect of normative childhood ('I don't think they really understand it'):

We had a girl a couple of years ago and the way she dressed, the make up, the way she acted, held herself, her body language very very aware of her own sexuality, we've had a few girls like that, through school. Em, equally, I've had, you know quite, camp, boys that I've taught where, I've thought, they will be gay, em, from a young age.

...

I suppose yeah they do- they talk about getting married and things but I think that's just, they don't really mean anything by it do they- I don't think they really understand it. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

In comparison to speculations around supposedly 'homosexual' doings, heterosexuality remained unnoticed by many teachers, granted invisible status on account of its everyday, acceptable normativity. Although the existence of hetero-relationship cultures in school was acknowledged, such acknowledgements both related near-exclusively to older children, and were generally dismissed as non-romantic. Below, for example, Louise and Nora recognise the existence of apparently pseudo-romantic language and interaction between children, but dismiss this as both infrequent and unknowing ('they will say things but I don't think they really mean [anything]'), with both excerpts framed by 'common-sense' discourses of childhood (sexual) innocence. Further, these teachers' insistence on the sexual innocence (and ignorance) of children in school stands again in stark contrast to children's own accounts, and corroborates findings from my pilot study (see Atkinson, 2013) that

highlighted the fundamentally situated nature of 'sexual' and romantic childhood productions:

I've heard it in year six before when we went on a residential, em, and there was a girl and a boy, they were obviously going out together, and everyone was talking about them going out and they were holding hands em- but generally, kids... don't really talk about relationships and things, they tend to do that as adults. Um, they don't, they sometimes talk a bit further up the school about boyfriends and girlfriends... not a lot though. Not a lot. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

Um, I would say at fi:ve... I mean, they might use the word, boyfriend but actually, they don't, they don't, really- I mean if I said to Hugh "Hugh have you got a girlfriend?" he would probably say to me "it's Megan in 1B" [Mm hm]. Cos he just means, she's his closest friend... who's a girl [Mm hm]. So, they will say things but I don't think they really mean- I mean they are only fi::ve! (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)³⁶

This relative invisibility (and perceived insignificance) of hetero-workings in school was revealed further through the differential ways in which teachers characterised hetero- and homo-sexualities, which were often divested of and suffused with sexual significance, respectively. During a discussion around Newhaven's summer production of *King and King*, for example, Chloe (Eastfield) speculated about the imaginability of Eastfield producing a similar show, before concluding: 'I don't know if we would choose to do that, kind of marrying, storyline... we normally just go for musicals like *Bugsy Malone*'. Implicit in this statement is a characterisation of *King and King* as fundamentally romantic/sexual in a way that *Bugsy Malone* is not ('we normally just go for musicals' (my italics)), in spite of the latter involving an explicitly romantic sub-plot between a male and female character. In this instance, then, and others like it (consider *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *Rapunzel*, the *Nativity*) it is hetero-romance's *usual*-ness that grants it invisibility, whilst the homo-romance of *King and King* is made hyper-visible as a result of its transgression.

³⁶ Significantly, Hugh himself described this relationship in explicitly romantic terms: 'It means I'm gonna kiss her!' (Hugh, age 6, Newhaven)

b. Teachers and sexuality

Perhaps the clearest way in which such differential conceptualisations revealed themselves, though, was through discussions of teachers' own relationships. As has been revealed elsewhere (see e.g. Wallis and VanEvery, 2000; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a) popular characterisations of primary schools as asexual spaces fail to acknowledge the multitude of ways in which heterosexuality suffuses school culture, particularly via assumptions, or indeed explicit sharing, around the hetero-marital relationships of its teachers. It therefore came as little surprise to find teachers at both schools embedded in practices that affirmed heterosexuality as a ubiquitous but invisible aspect of primary schooling. For example, whilst many interviewees were largely undecided on the extent to which gay relationships should be discussed with children, *all* heterosexual interviewees revealed their relationships as being public knowledge in school ('I'll often say to my children, 'I was talking last night to my husband about this or that' (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)). For many teachers, details about their own (heterosexual) lives were an implicit feature of classroom practice, not only structuring relationships with children but also informing children's understandings and play:

When I got married, the children were really interested- I taught in nursery at the time and they were really interested in the fact that I got married and they got really into the whole wedding thing, at nursery, and we had a teacher in reception got married a few years back and, they loved that and they kind of took it into their role play and things as well. (Louise, Deputy Head, Eastfield)

Particularly striking, though, was the apparent invisibility of these enactments, which were generally unrecognised by teachers as representing productions of sexuality or romance. In the extract below, for example, Andrew depicts the primary school as a space wherein teachers' personal lives are generally unshared, a claim made to support what he perceives as gay teachers' understandable reluctance to 'bring [their] home life, into school'. Revealed in this extract though is not only Andrew's invisibilising of his own very visible (hetero-marital) relationship with another teacher at Eastfield, but also a lack of institutional support for, and awareness of, the specifics of non-heterosexual teachers' experience ('I don't know I've not, asked'):

You know I don't know... my feeling is, knowing both of them, my feeling is that that's, their, private life and they wouldn't, want- exactly the same as a heterosexual, person, they wouldn't want to go, and say, I'm- I'm a gay couple and, it's great, um... because, just like, you know, any teacher wouldn't wanna bring that, home life, into school. Em, but I don't know. I don't know I've not, asked. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Equally, below, Nora claims to question the relevance of *King and King* to young children on the grounds of its marital, rather than gay, storyline, before going on to acknowledge her daughter's uncontroversial awareness of hetero-marital relationships. Again, hetero-marriage maintains an unquestioned and easy visibility, whilst homosexual relationships are positioned in terms of 'older', irrelevant or inappropriate knowledges (see also Surtees, 2005; Robinson and Jones Diaz, 2006; Payne and Smith, 2017). Nora's insistence on children's inability to understand non-heterosexuality is also significant here, not only contradicting the knowledges evinced by children in peer group spaces, but also positioning 'lack of knowledge' in terms of an inherent inability to understand, rather than as evidence for the necessity of an alternative discourse:

It just didn't mean anythi- honestly it really didn't, and actually, half of them didn't know what it was about anyway they just liked the dancing bits, d'you know what I mean? So, it just went over their heads... and in actual fact, I think, u:m, again if parents, have maybe not spoken- because to be honest at five I don't think I'd have spoken to my daughter about any... form of marriage of any direction [Mm hm]. She knew daddy and I were married when she was little but- d'you know what I mean I don't know that parents do I think it's- it's when they're older. (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)

Significantly, it was for many teachers at Newhaven as a result of their participation in equalities work that heteronormative logics such as these were made visible, with Julie's narrative below pointing to the role played by *No Outsiders* in heightening her awareness of in-school inequalities. In this excerpt, Julie acknowledges the taken-for-granted silencing of gay identities that preceded Newhaven's involvement in *No*

Outsiders, and identifies a session with the project's diversity trainer as having instigated a recognition of the injustices particular to being a gay teacher:

I remember [Diversity Trainer] coming in, for a session... and I suppose that was the first time I ever really, questioned, the fact that we needed to change the way, we talked about things cos it was all, y'know (lowers voice) "do we- do we mention if someone's gay", and there had been a feeling among the staff that, y'just shouldn't talk about it and I sort of realised, well actually, I don't think that's fair then because if- if you as a woman are allowed to talk about your, husband, and you as a man are allowed to talk about your wife then... why should someone like George be excluded from talking about- [his relationship?]

 (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

For Julie, then, it was at least in part as a result of her participation in *No Outsiders* – as well as through conversations with her gay colleague and friend – that the heteronormative structure of the school and its implications for the lived experiences of teachers was made visible ('as George talked to me about things, it made me see, o::h my god, this is just not right, you know' (ibid)). At Eastfield, in comparison, there appeared to be little sense of the specifics of gay teachers' (or parents'/children's) experience, with many interviewees characterising the school in terms of a somewhat abstract or theoretical ethos of acceptance ('I think we're a school where, everybody's welcome, you know and all those sorts of things but, no it's not something we've sort of looked at directly' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)). In response to my asking whether they felt gay teachers could be open about their relationships in school, Eastfield interviewees most often drew on conflicting discourses of 'privacy' and 'risk', which at once equated hetero- and homo-sexual teacher experience, and (contradictorily) highlighted the difficulties specific to open homosexuality ('my feeling is that that's their private life and they wouldn't want to [share] it'/'George (Newhaven) is in a position of, greater authority so I think it's maybe easier for him to [be open about his sexuality]' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)). The specific challenges faced by non-heterosexual colleagues were thus largely subsumed at Eastfield within discourses of 'sameness', which worked to both diminish sexual inequities, and divest straight teachers of any responsibility for tackling them. In the extract below, for example, responsibility is placed on the hypothetical gay teacher to decide how 'out' to be, rather than on the school to facilitate or support this 'outing',

with the supposedly universal notion of 'choice' invisibilising the easy, ubiquitous 'out-ness' of heterosexual staff ('actually I mentioned him today'):

I don't think they are [out]... I mean, it's a personal choice. I don't know, wh::y, but as far as I know, I don't think the children know... It's up to him, y'know. I mean, I'm not explicit about the fact that I have a boyfriend [Mm-hm]. So I guess... I mean, actually, I mentioned him today but, it doesn't come up very often, so it may be just that it hasn't come up. (Cheryl, ages 9-10 teacher/School Champions trainee, Eastfield)

A number of teachers at Eastfield also cited the 'labelling' of people as an undesirable outcome of equalities work, and positioned 'seeing people as people' (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield) as preferable to highlighting differences through a focus on sexualities. Whilst well intentioned, such arguments somewhat paralleled those around racial 'colour blindness' (see Carr, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2018) which, stemming from a place of (heterosexual/racial) privilege, diminish the profoundly more difficult experiences of those that live outside normative frameworks of 'acceptability'.

Further, given the lack of opportunities given to gay teachers or parents at Eastfield to vocalise the particularities of their experience ('I don't know I've not, asked' (Andrew, above)), such assertions of 'sameness' largely reflected assumed rather than established understandings, and thus prioritised dominant, unfounded (heterosexual) narratives over marginal, lived ones. This is encapsulated in the excerpt below, where Louise's claims to 'sexuality-blindness' ('I don't really notice these things anyway') effectively justify Eastfield's silence on non-heterosexualities, and divest her, and the school, of any responsibility for providing support for a gay teacher (Paul). Despite acknowledging that Paul had taken 'a few years' to come out to other staff members, Louise still positions his 'out-ness' with pupils as his decision, informed by privacy and 'choice' rather than by any institutional barriers. Further, her question: 'did it really matter whether I knew or didn't know?' reflects, again, a privileged position wherein for Louise 'knowing or not knowing' are equally weighted. For Paul, conversely, the issue of 'who knew', and the professional/personal implications of this, likely did 'matter', and might indeed have been made easier by an explicit school ethos of equality:

Paul got married this summer, and he didn't tell- not to my knowledge did he tell the children I don't think that he did. He told the staff he was gay, em, after working here for a few years. I don't really notice these things anyway I'm just- not bothered- doesn't matter... but no, we haven't told the children. And I've got some friends who are parents, and I was careful not to tell them, because I think, that's somebody's, decision, whether they want people to know or not.

[...]

There is a risk, yeah, that you're making, divisions, and highlighting people as being things, rather than just being, people, and does it really matter who they are, like... I was really close friends with Paul and didn't know for a couple of years, and did it really matter whether I knew or didn't know? Not really. Em, it didn't change anything, really. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Further to this, in discussions around the possibility of future equalities work, teachers often placed a significant pressure on (hypothetical) gay teachers and parents to be the facilitators of learning around non-heterosexuality. Indeed, following concerns around 'labelling' and 'drawing attention to' homosexualities ('I think the nervousness is more around, making it more obvious' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)), many teachers at Eastfield positioned a more 'organic' form of learning as preferable to formal equalities pedagogy. In each of the extracts below, for example, the responsibility is placed on individuals (two dads, a gay teacher) to 'teach' children about non-heterosexuality, not only compounding the already vulnerable (and, in Eastfield's case, institutionally unsupported) position occupied by gay teachers (see Rofes, 2000; Curran et al, 2009; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c) and parents (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Henley Averett, 2016; Goldberg et al, 2017), but also relieving the school and its (straight) teachers of any responsibility for tackling inequalities. Notwithstanding good intentions, such approaches individualised issues around inequality by failing to address heteronormativity more broadly, and – as evidenced throughout the previous chapters – overstated children's 'naturally accepting' nature ('if a child just goes round to their friend's house and there's two dads... they won't question that'). Further, given both the perceived lack of sexual diversity at Eastfield and the fundamentally happenstance nature of this imagined approach, the scope of such proposed learning was necessarily limited, by its reliance on infrequent, 'organic' interactions between a few parents, teachers, and children:

There's a nervousness about, saying, "ok some people are gay"... does that feed, the anti-gay, families, does that, create more aggression, or bring more problems, than, if a child just goes round to their friend's house and there's two dads. Because, they'll accept that, they won't question that, particularly, and the parents will get to know the two dads and it'll help them to go, ok that's fine my child now, is friends with this child so I've got to make an effort, to be friends with these parents. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

It makes me feel a bit sad [that Paul wasn't 'out' with the children] because, they might have struggled for ten minutes, but then it would have been absolutely fine and the kids would have been, really accepting and taken it on board and actually a lot of them would have really benefitted a lot because they would have thought, "oh, if that teacher is then that must make it really cool and fine and I really like him. It doesn't change what I think about him". (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

In contrast to this relative lack of awareness of gay teachers' experience, discussions at Newhaven revealed clearly the difficulties experienced by non-heterosexual teachers, particularly when positioned as 'representative' of sexualities equalities work as a whole. George and Imogen's narratives below, for example, make clear the particularly exposing, and at times risky, nature of work that centres around one's own identity, and highlight the necessity of whole-school participation – as well as the significance of *No Outsiders* – in challenging inequities in teacher experience:

[Another *No Outsiders* teacher] was a very positive role model, in terms of what she did in her school. But sometimes I thought... she had a slightly advantageous position because she wasn't gay, so you know I was always very aware that I didn't want this to be me talking about myself and making people do things to support me. So when other people took over the work that was great. (George, Headteacher, Newhaven)

I think George... felt a little bit as a gay Headteacher that he didn't want it just to be about him, which it's not and I'd never look at it that way, but I think he maybe had a little bit of insecurity about- are people just going to look at this and think, "Oh well yeah it's because George is gay"? And that's why it was so important that, y'know- that everyone was involved. (Imogen, ages 7-8 teacher, Newhaven)

II. Conceptualising Equalities Work

i. Perceived need

Notwithstanding the essentialist understandings maintained by a number of *No Outsiders* teachers, a significant impact of the project appeared nonetheless to be its influence on conceptualisations of *equalities work*, with all participants positioning anti-heterosexism and/or anti-homophobia education as a vital aspect of primary schooling ('hearing peoples' stories just made me think... actually we've got no choice but to do this' (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)). This conviction is encapsulated by Imogen, below, whose incorporation of *King and King* into lectures on English planning, and positioning of everyday language as significant and interpellative, reveal an approach to teaching that is framed fundamentally by a desire to challenge heteronormativity:

I do a talk at the university about English planning, but I just always add in a few other things and I always talk about [making the video of] *King and King*... because it was just such an empowering thing to do and just so important, and I think everybody should see it. So I mention [*No Outsiders*] then and I talk about, y'know, the issues around "Girls this, boys that" and "Girls do this and boys do that"- you know- the impact of that language. (Imogen, ages 7-8 teacher, Newhaven)

In contrast, it was largely teachers at Eastfield – alongside those at Newhaven who hadn't been involved in *No Outsiders* – who questioned the need for sexualities education, with doubts based most often around notions of children as already accepting, and sexuality as irrelevant to primary schooling (see Payne and Smith, 2017). In each of the extracts below, for example, children are positioned as somewhat naturally accepting of the world around them, and concerns are raised around whether 'making [sexual diversity] something that we teach' might strengthen rather than challenge divisions. In each of these narratives, though, the extent or otherwise of children's 'acceptance' is based not on any substantiated interrogation, but rather on assumptions informed by interviewees' own perspectives ('*I don't think the kids'd be that bothered really*/'the kids... *probably* think... that's just the way that works' (my italics)). As a result, the active role played by children in regulating normativity is distinctly under-estimated, and the lived experiences of individual, and potentially

marginalised, pupils (e.g. Sapphi, extract two) are assumed, rather than heard. Further, assertions around the supposed preferability of wider social learning (TV, gay parents) over formal sexualities education again divest the school of responsibility for addressing inequalities, and rely on happenstance and contingent moments to educate *all* children on diversity:

The thing is, with TV and everything now, there are so many people that the kids know, that are- whatever, they are- that it's almost, like, the norm. And I don't think- I don't think the kids'd be that bothered, really... And there is a risk, that if you then teach it, you're making, divisions, and highlighting people as being things, rather than just being, people. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

So Sapphi... she just seems to be totally accepted the kids go round, play with Sapphi and, there's two mums there and, you know... they get it. And I suppose it's that classic of, have you seen it have you grown up with it, so... I'm sure the kids in Sapphi's class, all probably think yeah that's- that's just, the way that works. And I suppose... you then worry, a little bit about, making it something that we teach, and things because actually, they just get it. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Notions of children as 'too young' also permeated discussions around the 'need' for equalities work, with teachers across both schools (but significantly, none of those involved in *No Outsiders*) drawing on discourses of childhood innocence to position sexuality, in particular, as irrelevant to children's lives. In the following extract, for example, children are positioned as universally unaffected by sexualities, with their apparent lack of questions understood as evidence of a lack of interest and relevance, rather than familiarity or understanding. However, just as a child who has never seen an elephant is unlikely to ask why it has a trunk (Jackson, 1982: 57), a child who has been shielded from any knowledge of sex/ualities is unlikely to know not only what questions to ask, but also what questions are allowed (see also Robinson, 2012):

The only thing I would say, is I don't know that they need that- they're not- .hh you know- they're quite little still [Mm hm]. They're only fi::ve. And, you know, I think it's lovely, that, you know, they're knowing that, people are friends but- you know they

don't- to m:e- at that age, they wouldn't be asking about things like that because they just don't know. (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)

Such assertions not only contradicted the variety of knowledges evinced by children during informal discussions, but also constructed childhood as a universal experience wherein sexuality is, for everyone, abstract rather than lived. For me, though, at five – and for countless others, equally unacknowledged – sexuality was profoundly lived, and being a child of gay parents structured my experience of primary school in ways that continue in the above narrative to be dismissed. Arguments that drew a supposed link between age and relevance, then ('it's not something that really comes up in a primary school' (Lauren, ages 9-10 teacher, Newhaven)) served to both homogenise, and implicitly heterosexualise, the lives of all children, and further silence those children, parents, and teachers who have already long been unheard.

Arguments around age and relevance were informed not only by such assumptions of homogeneity, but also by interviewees' fears around childhood and 'dangerous knowledges' (see Epstein and Sears, 1999; Allan et al, 2009; Robinson, 2012). This is perhaps most clearly revealed in the extract below, wherein Louise's perception of 'age appropriateness' regarding LGBT terminology appears to be informed almost wholly by her own discomfort, rather than by any evidence of such knowledges having been experienced (by her son) as inappropriate or damaging. Similarly to Nora, Louise places the onus on children themselves to 'ask questions' – rather than on educators to facilitate this asking – and draws a seemingly arbitrary dividing line between 'too young' (year six) and 'not too young' (year seven) that appears to stem more from social constructions of schooling (where year six marks the end of primary school) than from the lived experiences of children. Further, Louise's equation of LGBT terminology with 'the facts of life' works to position gendered identities ('transgender and transvestites') and non-heterosexual relationships ('gay and lesbian and bisexual') as inherently sexual, contrary to the supposedly neutral and asexual categories of hetero –gender and –sexuality. Implicit in Louise's narrative is not only an Othering of 'non-normative' subjectivities, but also a positioning of sexualities education as relevant only to 'some children', of which her son is presumed not to be one (see also Airton, 2009):

Louise: In year six last year, my son came back and he was full of transgender and transvestites and gay and lesbian and bisexual, and I was a bit like, oh my god, you're eleven, I don't know if I'm ready for you to know all that... it made me feel uncomfortable... He hadn't asked questions. And it's- it's almost like a natural thing with children, if they ask about the facts of life, you tell them as much as they need to know. And you know when you've told them enough because they just stop. I didn't feel there was a need for him to know all of that.

CA: Do you think there is an age at which that would have felt more appropriate?

Louise: Yeah I think in year seven or year eight, I just think year six is too early. They're- I dunno, cos if you've got a child that's uncomfortable with their own sexuality, maybe that is more appropriate- that might be comforting to some children... I just thought it was a bit early. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Significantly, it was for many teachers as a result of having their attention drawn to in-school inequalities – through either *No Outsiders* or the current research – that such attitudes towards 'need' were altered. Indeed, all interviewees at Eastfield made reference to a change in perception resulting from the interview itself or from their experience reading *King and King*, whilst those at Newhaven cited involvement in *No Outsiders* as having shifted previously held convictions around childhood, gender, and sexuality. For Chloe, below, it was reading *King and King* to her class that effected a recognition of previously unseen intolerances in school, whilst for George, being introduced to the notion of 'heteronormativity' shifted previously held feelings towards his own open homosexuality:

Yeah I was really surprised. I don't know I thought, that they probably would have been, a bit, more open minded I don't know why I just, thought that those stereotypes weren't, there anymore I don't know. It just shows- doesn't it- that we need to be reading books like that. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

What I did like was the "heteronormativity" kind of argument that if you only present one kind of thing, you might not be being homophobic but you're just presenting one way of being and that idea that, if you had a gay partner, "that's not appropriate to talk about your relationship at school". But then other teachers would say, "Oh, my

husband was helping me with this last night” and so that really shifted some of my thinking about how by being silent you were adding to that heteronormativity.
(George, Headteacher, Newhaven)

ii. ‘Bullying’

Significantly, doubts around the supposed need for sexualities education were particularly dominant when such work was framed in terms of ‘bullying’, and given the perceived lack of ‘severe’ homophobic incidents in school, many teachers at Eastfield dismissed sexualities work as either unnecessary, or relevant only ‘as and when’ individual issues arose. In the extracts below, the need for equalities education is understood as contingent on the identification of visible ‘cases’, a view which not only invisibilises undetected bullying (see e.g. Aqib, pp. 136-8) but also silences the more insidious, daily workings of heteronormativity. As a result of bullying frameworks, then, a number of teachers positioned equalities work as separate to, rather than inextricable from, their daily practice, and as an individual rather than societal issue, to be dealt with if it ‘come[s] up’:

CA: Are you aware of anything that’s gone on until now around sexualities or gender equality?

Louise: Uh, it’s anti-bullying week’s we’ve done. And yeah the sexuality stuff could come into that.

...

CA: And do you think that the school would benefit from more work around/

Louise: /I think it would always be good to have something in place as and when. Yeah just because it’s not an issue now doesn’t mean to say that it won’t come up.

(Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

I don’t think that there’s a- a se-vere need. I think it’s always good, to know it, um... but I think incidences at Eastfield are very, very ra:re, of, of that form of bullying. Although we do hear ‘you’re gay’ being thrown around, I haven’t been told or know of many severe cases so far. Um, but you know, you never know. Could happen. (Cheryl, ages 9-10 teacher/*School Champions* trainee, Eastfield)

Significantly, bullying frameworks informed many Eastfield teachers’ imaginings of future sexualities pedagogy, with three of five interviewees conceiving of equalities

education within a definitive ‘bullying’ framework. This appeared to be informed at least in part by the school’s recent introduction into Stonewall’s ‘School Champions’ programme – training for which one teacher (Cheryl, above) had attended – whose explicit aim is to ‘[provide] bespoke support and guidance to local authorities to tackle homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (HBT) in local schools’ (Stonewall, 2017b). Equalities education was therefore conceived by many teachers at Eastfield in terms of relatively individualised ‘tackling’, an approach that reinscribes discourses of the ‘subaltern LGBTQ subject’ (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015: 150) and stands in contrast to *No Outsiders* teachers’ conceptualisations of such work as ‘celebrating [as opposed to tolerating or accepting] diversity’ (George, Headteacher, Newhaven). Imaginings of sexualities pedagogies at Eastfield were largely constrained, then, by deficit frameworks (Quinlivan, 2012; Formby, 2015; Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015) that not only enabled a dismissal of ‘need’ (‘you could hear people going oh well, we don’t really have any issues with that in school’ (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)) but also delimited the scope of imaginable equalities education:

Well we’ve sent someone on the, Stonewall homophobic, training- uh well, no it’s everything isn’t it it’s transphobic homophobic all the- the whole lot, em... and, she’s come back really enthused, about that... and so it’s just about, well how do we build that into the curriculum in a sensitive way? How do we address that- that, ‘phobia’.
(Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

CA: And are you aware of Eastfield doing anything around sexualities at the moment?

Diana: No- no. Uh well we’ve done some stuff on policies- on discipline policy. That’s where we’ve sort’ve looked at it- but we could maybe do more with- with anti-bullying weeks and so on. (Diana, ages 5-6 teacher, Eastfield)

Inseparable from such individualised bullying discourses were teachers’ interpretations of homophobic language, and in particular, derogatory use of the word ‘gay’. For most teachers at Eastfield, uses of gay as insult were interpreted largely as either unknowing (‘I don’t think they know what they’re saying if I’m being honest’ (Diana, ages 5-6 teacher, Eastfield)), or individualised (‘well we would deal with a child’s use of that word the same, as we would deal with someone telling someone to fuck off’ (Andrew,

Headteacher, Eastfield)). Such interpretations, though, both underestimated children's often conscious, and pointed use of 'gay as insult', and positioned homophobic language as an individualised behavioural issue, rather than a broader systemic one. This is encapsulated by Andrew's narrative, below, which contrary to children's own assertions, positions use of 'gay as insult' as wholly unknowing; a universally applicable term of abuse rather than one informed by (hetero)gendered normativities ('gay's like, a boy, acting all girly' (Matt, Newhaven, age 10)). Further, whilst 'gay as insult' is indeed often experienced as injurious regardless of sexual identification, Andrew's positioning of recipients as identically affected (and, somewhat implicitly, heterosexual: 'they're not upset because they think they're gay') nonetheless silences the particular experiences of those children who *are* directly and profoundly affected by homophobia (see e.g. Jacob, p. 236):

The only thing we really deal with is, abusive language you know, and it's been a child who just, knows that it's aggressive, to say you're gay, and the other child has got upset. But they're not upset, because they think they're gay (laughs) they're just upset because it was an a- it was an aggressive [Mm hm], verbal attack sort of thing.
(Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Following this, Andrew goes on to imagine an instance wherein a child might respond to 'gay as insult' by affirming their non-heterosexuality. Whilst well-intentioned in its attempt to actualise discussion of homosexualities, such a proposition nonetheless conflates gender and sexuality by suggesting a response to homophobia that positions the recipient as inevitably 'gay', assuming successful 'identification' on the part of the perpetrator and ignoring the force of gender normativity as 'its own axis of normalisation' (Airton, 2009: 131). Not only does this suggestion thus misconstrue the nature of homophobic name-calling – which arguably works more often to regulate gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity than to identify sexual orientation (see Pascoe, 2005; Airton, 2009) – but it also places the onus on the imagined child, rather than the school, to combat homophobia:

We've never had to deal with that, as a, direct accusation of somebody's sexuality, 'you're gay' y'know and that's like, ok well how do we deal with that. It's easier when they're older, because you can say yeah, you know and that child can affirm that, and

say yeah I'm gay and we can have that conversation... it would be much easier, to deal with it if that child, could then... say yeah, yeah I'm gay. And we can say you know we can have a conversation about that if you want, but, eh, you don't need to use that as a- as anything derogatory. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

iii. Risks, barriers

Further to doubts around perceived 'need', teachers also cited a number of obstacles as delimiting opportunities for 'equalities' work in the future, each of which reflected either normative conceptualisations of childhood and sexuality, or shared understandings around the constraints of primary education. Significantly, though, it was the same obstacles that Eastfield interviewees identified as *current* barriers to equalities work that were positioned by *No Outsiders* teachers as *past* fears, which no longer prevented the doing of critical pedagogies ('at the time it felt, y'know incredibly new and- and quite scary but now we wouldn't ever say, "Oh we're not doing this work", y'know because it's just what we do' (George, Headteacher, Newhaven)). Through such rememberings, Newhaven interviewees drew attention to the profound significance of *doing*, and highlighted the necessity and value of 'taking a step' (below) in order to shift conceptions of what is 'speakable' in school:

At the time, it did feel, very ground breaking... I remember just thinking god- .hhh there was such a lot vested in that whole, thing we were doing [...] and I remember thinking, like we've moved, today, we've taken a step. And actually, there's no going back now. (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

I conclude this chapter, then, with an exploration of the key obstacles teachers identified in relation to the doing of equalities education, before exploring a number of factors that were identified as having the potential to make such 'doings' possible.

a. Sexualities work as new frontier

The gay bit was only one bit of it I suppose- in some ways it was the most controversial bit because lots of the other stuff had already been covered. (George, Headteacher, Newhaven)

Consistent across interviews at both schools was a recognition of sexualities work as still novel to the field of education, particularly in primary schools. Whilst learning around racism, disabilities and SEN³⁷, and to some extent gender, were cited as staple features of teacher training, 'sexualities' were understood by many as representing a relatively 'new frontier' in schools, not ascribed the same critical importance as other areas of anti-discrimination education ('the equalities stuff I did, was mostly on disabilities, and a lot of teaching about ethnicity' (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)):

When I started teaching in '86, it was all about, accepting other cultures [...] at that time it was all about, making other cultures feel welcome and, comfortable and all those sorts of things. Em, and I suppose for us, we're at the start of that, wi- with gay couples [Mm] and- and eh, and relationships and all those sorts of things. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

In contrast to the 'new' and relatively contentious status ascribed to sexualities education, other areas of equalities work were discussed by teachers in uncontroversial terms, and characterised by many at Eastfield as a central aspect of their school's ethos. In the extracts below, for example, Andrew and Georgina cite the school's relatively high demographic of minority ethnic pupils as reason for a greater focus on ethnic diversity, which, whilst understandable, works to divest Eastfield of responsibility for tackling other areas of inequality. Indeed, such an approach not only makes various assumptions about pupils' and parents' gendered and sexual backgrounds ('there's less evidence of it'), but also positions sexualities education as relevant only to 'sexual minority' students, as opposed to necessary for tackling the broader workings of heteronormativity:

[Newhaven is] a school that really focuses on, that area of, diversity [sexualities] whereas, we have a much greater percentage of Asian families, you know and so, a lot of our focus is on EAL³⁸ mums, coming in and doing learning with us and those sorts of things. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

³⁷ Special Educational Needs

³⁸ English as an Additional Language

I think the school, to give it its due, we are very accepting in terms of background and make up of parents and we have, in terms of society and class we have all sorts from one end to the other. And the same with religion and ethnic backgrounds so I think it would be the same with sexuality. I just think there's less evidence of it so, we do just do less on that. (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

Equally, and somewhat surprisingly, 'gender equalities' work was positioned by a number of interviewees across both schools as a relatively 'obvious' aspect of primary education, with Louise (Eastfield) and Nora (Newhaven), below – both of whom expressed doubts around children's need for sexualities learning – characterising the challenging of gender norms as an inevitable aspect of classroom practice. Not only is this striking in its differential positioning of gender and sexuality, but it also stands at odds with many of my own observations, which saw teachers reinscribing rather than disrupting gender norms. I understand these assertions, then, as not only consolidating sexuality's position as comparatively incompatible with childhood, but also reflecting many teachers' alignment with broadly 'anti-sexist' paradigms, which largely cement rather than trouble gender binaries (see Airton, 2009):

The whole gender thing I suppose, you've got to actively, do something about it, and I suppose subconsciously I always have, from when I first started teaching y'know making sure the girls feel equal and all that but- but it hasn't been something that I've been, trained to do. I think that's something that you've just got inside you that you've always done. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

It does absolutely filter in, but it'd be more things we do about religion and we do about, um, if you're a boy or a girl, you know if you're feeling you're treated in different ways, but I think that would be in lots of schools. [...] But, um, perhaps not so much with se- I think that's when they're older they start asking questions... probably not at our- not at our age. (Nora, ages 5-6 teacher, Newhaven)

In contrast, discussions with Newhaven interviewees (particularly those involved in *No Outsiders*) highlighted the significance of equalities work in shifting notions of 'newness', with teachers reflecting on its 'doing' as having enabled a shift towards new paradigms and possibilities. Below, for example, Julie characterises her colleague's

'coming out' in school as 'old hat' today, but 'ground breaking' in the context of the project's early stages, whilst Lauren makes clear the significance of Newhaven's ethos (particularly given her arrival post-*No Outsiders*) in making sexualities speakable:

[George] was able to talk to the kids about, y'know, this is how it made me feel, and, y'know, I think- I think that was a really, at the time brave thing to do? I don't think anything of that now in a sense it's kinda like a bit old hat (laughs) but at the time, it just- it did feel, very ground breaking. (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

I probably just would, have avoided, talking about those things in other schools. Whilst now- if it came up I'd be happy to talk about it. Here is definitely the most open about sexuality [mm hm] of all the schools that I've been in. (Lauren, ages 9-10 teacher, Newhaven)

b. Dangerous knowledges

She was like, oh well I don't really want Billy to know those sorts of things. (Andrew, Headteacher Eastfield)

Related to such notions of 'newness' were teachers' conceptualisations of sexualities work as inherently 'risky', entailing within it the teaching of 'sensitive' issues that necessarily require particular tact and care ('we'd have to be very careful, about how we approach the teaching of it' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)). Indeed, references to 'carefulness' were made in three of five total interviews at Eastfield, and reflected a positioning of sexualities as far distinct from other more 'appropriate' forms of knowing. In the quote above, Andrew cites a parental complaint – made in response to Chloe's reading of *King and King* – that reflects an understanding of non-heterosexual knowledges as inherently inappropriate. The parent's reference to 'those sorts of things' works here to conflate gay princes with a host of other unspecified anti-normativities, and in so doing positions non-heterosexualities as firmly (but vaguely) Other, and unsuited to discussion with children.

Considering the prevalence of such discourses, it followed that many teachers conceived of sexualities work in terms of 'risk', and conflated equalities learning with

sex education. In the extracts below, for example, Georgina makes clear the necessarily bounded nature of imagined equalities work, whilst Louise – referring again to her son’s learning around LGBT terminology – draws on discourses of risk and ‘care’ in her positioning of non-hetero-knowledges as both sexual, and adult:

I think we’d have to play it really safe, we couldn’t just say to teachers, ‘please go away and teach your class about, I don’t know, sexuality or sexuality in the news or-’ I think we’d have to be- we’d have to be careful. It’d have to kind of have its boundaries.
(Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

You’ve got to be careful with the terminology I think at this age em, because, ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘sexuality’- you wouldn’t even use the word sex- really... I don’t think it’s an appropriate age to use that word. And to explain sexuality you have to explain- I just don’t know that there’s a need- for, for that. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Again, though, for a number of teachers at Newhaven it was as a result of their participation in *No Outsiders* that perceptions of ‘risk’ were altered (‘I was scared when I was making the film [*King and King*] and a little boy was playing the prince... but they just loved it, and that actually turned in to one of the most positive things for me about the whole project’ (Imogen, ages 7-8 teacher, Newhaven)). Below, for example, Julie identifies her involvement in *No Outsiders* as having enabled a rethinking of the perceived link between age and ‘appropriate’ knowledges, and highlights succinctly the differential experiences of children entering primary school:

[*No Outsiders*] certainly made me, reflect much more on that whole thing about, well, you know... can you tell them about it? Cos, they’re only little- .hhh well what are we gonna do because actually so-and-so’s just walked into nursery and she’s got two mams and two dads. Shall we hide one of each away until she’s in Key Stage Two?
(Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

c. ‘Acceptance’ versus ‘promotion’

There’s an acceptance and a positively promoting it isn’t there. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Particularly striking, though, was the frequency with which fears around the 'promotion' of homosexuality emerged during interviews at Eastfield, with four of five interviewees making reference to the perceived dangers inherent in the teaching of sexual diversity ('we'd have to be able to say to parents, 'look, it's fine, we're discussing it through a story and we're talking about the world as a whole and not telling your child how to be or how to behave' (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)). In their positioning of sexualities equalities work (but not work around 'race', religion, dis/ability, or gender) as somehow inherently promotional, such concerns not only highlighted non-heterosexuality's 'surplus visibility' (Patai, 1992), but also echoed the 'promotion' rhetoric of Section 28 (repealed thirteen years prior).

In each of the extracts below, concerns about 'promotion' are expressed both implicitly and explicitly, where first, Andrew purports to equate gay and straight teacher experience, whilst at the same time characterising homosexual openness as somehow inevitably less neutral ('I'm a gay couple *and it's great*' (my italics)):

So they wouldn't want to go, and say, I'm- I'm a gay couple and it's great, um, because, just like, you know, any, teacher wouldn't wanna bring that, home life, into school.
(Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

More explicitly, Louise (below) not only characterises the discussion of same sex parenting as 'promotional', but also questions the acceptability of its positioning by teachers as 'normal'. In so doing, she both attributes an agenda to teaching around diversity and solidifies homosexuality's position 'outside' normative/acceptable margins. Moreover, in her distinction between 'acceptance' and 'positive promotion', Louise draws clear boundaries around imagined equalities work, and aligns herself with what Taylor (2007: 218) has described as 'the new form of homophobia', wherein homosexuality can be 'tolerated (but not endorsed)...and only if [it] is not defined in terms of family':

I don't know because... if you were promoting two men being together and having a baby, or two women together having a baby, as being, (sighs) normal? I don't know what to call it- would parents like that? I know a lot of them might not like that... I suppose some of it is asking the children what they think... Yeah I don't know how

parents will take it. I think some of them will be uptight. If you were positively promoting it. There's an acceptance and a positively promoting it isn't there. (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Finally, while reflecting on her response to the parental complaint that followed her reading of *King and King*, Chloe (below) draws a distinction between teacher- and child-led discussion, with the former characterised (albeit jokingly) in terms of active promotion ('it wasn't... you know... do you want to be gay'). This same distinction was made during Andrew's discussion of the same incident, with 'teaching' and 'research' positioned as relatively risky and safe, respectively ('the accusation was that Chloe was leading that discussion, and I said well that just wouldn't happen... it was based in research. I think, it would've been different if we'd been, teaching it' (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)). Whilst defending the legitimacy of my research, then, Chloe and Andrew equally characterise *teaching* around sexual diversity as somehow inappropriate, and rely again on children (largely denied sufficient knowledge on sexualities) to define the limits of sexualities education:

I just said if you've got any concerns go and speak to Mr Stuart which she did and I think he sort of just explained, that, all the conversations that you had were led by the children? And, it wasn't... you know, did you know that you can be gay. Do you want to be gay when you're- (laughing) it wasn't, it wasn't anything like that he sort of just said, Miss Connell read the book, and then the children led the conversation afterwards. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

d. Confidence, training

I think a lot of teachers feel like, ooh I don't really know how to approach that.
(Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Another of the most prevalent concerns for teachers at Eastfield related to a lack of confidence around teaching diversity, with many citing limited knowledge and training as a significant obstacle to the doing of equalities pedagogy. For many, this concern related again to the perceived sensitivity of sexualities, and a nervousness around 'saying the wrong thing' with regard to Other identities and relationships ('I think

teachers are a little bit wary that if they go down that road, they might have awkward questions or difficult questions that they don't feel comfortable answering' (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)). Such concerns highlighted both the perceived 'difference' of non-heterosexual identities, and the profound need (and indeed desire) for teacher training around the delivery of equalities pedagogy. This relative inability to imagine the doing of sexualities work is encapsulated by Chloe, below, who cites her limited exposure to such work as contributing to a lack of confidence in its (imagined) delivery:

In terms of actually, you know if it was same sex families I don't know where- how- what, we could do or even- I know there's sort of things in classrooms like reading books where there is, a story about two girls or two boys and things like that. But I think, as a school I don't know... how, how do you? [...] It'd probably help actually if I'd been, to a school that does, something like that- I don't know- I can't imagine it.
(Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

Despite this desire for clearer training, though, a number of teachers cited lack of time as a further obstacle, and identified the time-bound nature of contemporary primary schooling as a significant barrier to the pursuit of non-'core' educational pedagogies ('Sometimes you just do not get the time. And I find that really sad. You run a really tight ship [...] and I don't know how you combat that in this system' (Diana, ages 5-6 teacher, Eastfield)). Such assertions corroborated the arguments of many others who have identified the damaging effects of an increasingly rigid UK education system (see Atkinson, 2003; 2004; Satterthwaite et al, 2004; Rosen, 2018), and highlighted the importance of carving out spaces in the current curricula for effective social, cultural and emotional learning:

We don't really do that enough. Often there just isn't enough time- we're so strapped for time. Which means that our children probably leave Eastfield feeling like there is only really one way of being, like they're boxed in. (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

e. *'Race', religion, culture*

A final obstacle identified by teachers at both schools was that of culturally- or religiously- based objections to sexualities work. This was a particularly prominent concern at Eastfield, where a high demographic of minority ethnic and Muslim students was identified as a potential barrier to education on diversity ('I suppose my biggest concern would be, the racial diversity, and the way the different races will approach, those sorts of, sexual issues (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)). Whilst reflecting some identifiable (but nonetheless complex) patterns in the relationship between, in particular, religion and sexualities education (see for example Allen, 2007; Rasmussen, 2010; Nixon and East, 2010, Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015), such concerns worked still to over-homogenise cultural 'difference', and highlighted the need for effective training that addresses the (real and imagined) challenges of religious or 'cultural' backlash.

Notwithstanding a continued concern around the 'squaring' of (homo-)sexualities and religion ('I still think, for parents who have, a religious belief, y'know, how do we square, that. That's still really difficult' (Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)), interviews with Newhaven teachers revealed some of the ways in which potential antagonisms had been successfully managed during their own 'doings' of equalities education. Below, for example, George (Headteacher, Newhaven) identifies broader discourses of 'marginalisation' as having altered one family's feelings towards *No Outsiders*, whilst Julie positions sexualities alongside dis/ability and religion in her construction of an equalities ethos that interrogates multiple social inequities:

One of our Muslim families was going to pull their children out because of *No Outsiders* and they were the ones that ended up doing the Bangladeshi cooking during *No Outsiders* week because we said, "It's about all the people who might feel a bit marginalised at times" and- and I suppose that kind of changed things for them.
(George, Headteacher, Newhaven)

It was about challenging, views and beliefs that- that actually made people feel, as if they were somehow on the margins, of society, you know, you have to fit into this, mould as to who you are, and what a human being is, and therefore, if you're deaf, you're not quite it and if you're, .hh Jewish, you're not quite it, and if you're this- so it

was about, y'know recognising sexuality as just another part of that- of that spectrum.
(Julie, Deputy Headteacher, Newhaven)

iv. Making equalities work possible

Certainly without doing all of that work that we did and building on it, there's no way we'd be doing what we're doing now. (George, Headteacher, Newhaven)

Notwithstanding these perceived obstacles, a consistent feature of interviews across both schools was the identification of institutional support and teacher training as key to making sexualities work imaginable, with *No Outsiders* interviewees in particular highlighting 'community support' as having enabled a shift away from perceptions of sexualities pedagogy as 'impossible' ('it was quite uniting... that there was this network of people who were all working together, on something that might previously have felt quite, contentious' (George, Headteacher, Newhaven)). Moreover, for teachers at Eastfield – many of whom struggled to conceive of a 'do-able' equalities pedagogy – institutional support was identified as a pre-requisite to imagined work in future, necessary to the pursuit of what currently seemed like 'risky' and 'sensitive' pedagogies:

I think it would be nice to have, a bit more training on how actually, to teach around that because it gets- once you start talking about it you start panicking, as if you're not using the right language or you're not using the right terms sort of, to describe things. It's quite intimidating and I think, there has to be training and- and there has to be support, y'know. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

Equally, there was a consensus among a number of teachers that both the imaginability and effectiveness of sexualities work would depend on the nature of its incorporation, with an embedded, whole-school approach identified as key to making such work conceivable. Whilst Georgina, below, for example, cites school-wide commitment as key to both 'having an impact' and alleviating pressure for individual teachers, Chloe's criticality towards work that isn't successfully '[built] into the curriculum' reveals both 'structure', and institutional sanction, as key to actualising sexualities pedagogy:

If as a school we decided to make this more of a priority- y'know, if I do it, it's all very well but I only teach a third of one year group so it's actually like, are we having an impact as a school? And also there's quite a lot of pressure, then, as an individual. It feels like I need to have somebody telling me, 'this is what we're doing'. It's got to come from higher up. (Georgina, ages 9-10 teacher, Eastfield)

I think it needs to be done. I think there are too many children going off to secondary school that think, you know, being gay is an insult. And that's got to be tackled somewhere and I don't really know how else you'd get round that other than by teaching it in schools [...] but I'm not sure the school can really, do an awful lot unless they build it into the curriculum. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

Whilst many teachers at Eastfield were relatively wedded to 'bullying' frameworks – and few cited everyday school practices as in need of troubling – there were nonetheless a few who were able to conceive of a more positive, curricular approach to equalities education that filtered into various areas of children's learning ('we'd probably have some kind of discussion, or circle time, about what they felt was normal and go down the explanation route and explain to them why they shouldn't put people in boxes and stereotype them' (Georgina, ages 9-10 class teacher, Eastfield)):

I think drama's a great way to explore things as well. Really good I think we could definitely use that. Em, you know give them scenarios and then they decide and explore things, I think that's great. Even hot seating and things like that cos you can tell through the questions they ask and everything. And sometimes they feel safer don't they when they're pretending? (Louise, Deputy Headteacher, Eastfield)

Literature's always the easiest way in. Because [...] if a book can say it, then the children are much more willing to talk about the characters in the book because it, just- it removes them one space. So that they can then have a, a safe conversation and it can become... you'll find- whatever difficult, conversation you want to have, if you can find a text that does that. And opens up the conversation, it can, go forever. (Andrew, Headteacher, Eastfield)

Through identifications of drama, literature, and circle times as offering potential for sexualities learning, teachers who had expressed doubts around the need, nature and

implications of sexualities work revealed themselves in these moments as nonetheless able to conceive of potentially positive and incorporative future sexualities work. Through such imaginings, these teachers revealed current fears around 'risky' or 'inappropriate' learning as having the potential to be overcome, and made clear, again, the necessity of *doing* in making change imaginable:

I think as soon as it's been done once then that's when it becomes easier. And it doesn't seem so scary anymore. (Chloe, ages 7-8 teacher, Eastfield)

v. Conclusions: Gendered and sexual conceivabilities

In the opening to this chapter, I identified teachers' attitudes towards 'gender' and 'sexuality' as differing notably within as well as between schools. Indeed, whilst Imogen and Julie (Newhaven, *No Outsiders* participants) shared a conviction of the necessity of *equalities work* to primary education, their attitudes towards gender and sexual workings *in general* differed markedly, with Julie maintaining significantly more essentialist understandings ('I'm fine at just, chatting to lads *as if they're lads*' (my italics)). Further, whilst some teachers (e.g. Imogen) held a more critical approach, interviewees across both schools nonetheless maintained a broad understanding of heterosexuality and the gender binary as the normative benchmarks against which (even 'legitimate/celebrated') 'otherness' was measured. Further, gender-sexuality connotations were striking across both schools, and revealed a profound need for future work that de-couples these distinct axes of identity.

Notwithstanding these similarities, participants in *No Outsiders* expressed markedly different views to non-participants when it came to issues around school culture and *equalities work*. Indeed, all *No Outsiders* teachers positioned equalities education as key to primary school practice, and recognised concerns around hyper-visibility (e.g. of gay teachers) and 'explicit' homosexuality (e.g. *King and King*) as reflective of wider processes of heteronormativity. Non-participants (particularly at Eastfield), in comparison, expressed concerns around equalities pedagogy primarily in relation to perceived 'need'; related 'prevalence' (of 'bullying'); and institutional and personal 'risk'. Nonetheless, these teachers did still identify a range of factors as having the potential to make such work possible, with *No Outsiders* teachers' accounts making

clear the profound significance of 'doing' to rendering new (professional/political) conceivabilities:

I don't think any of us can 'go back' now. (*No Outsiders* teacher-researcher, cited in Nixon and East, 2010: 158).

9. Conclusions, and Implications for Research and Praxis

I approached this project with the intention of gaining insight into the influence, or otherwise, of formal equalities efforts on primary school children's understandings and 'doings' of gender and sexuality. Whilst my findings revealed doings of gender to be broadly similar at Newhaven and Eastfield, the differences in children's constructions of (non-hetero)sexuality – and specifically, of homophobia and its acceptability – were profound, and have significant implications for understandings of gender and sexualities equalities work and its 'relevance' (see also Payne and Smith, 2017).

In this final chapter, I consider the key outcomes of this project by revisiting each of its research questions in turn, which together respond to the following key query: *How are children 'doing' gender and sexuality in the primary school, and what difference does/might a critical gender and sexualities pedagogy make?* Following this, I identify some of the project's limitations, its contributions to knowledge, and its implications for future research and praxis (see Stanley, 2001; Cullen, 2009).

I. Research questions revisited

I. How do children (co-)construct, negotiate and regulate gender and sexuality within both formal (classroom, assembly) and informal (playground, peer group) sites?

i. Gender

In the opening chapters of my analysis, I identified gender – as performed by discursively constructed girl/boy bodies (see Francis, 2010) – as manifesting similarly at Newhaven and Eastfield, with the gender binary structuring understandings and interactions across both schools. Particularly striking was the regularity with which lines of difference were drawn, as well as the apparent arbitrariness of these distinctions, with children's constructions working to position 'girls' and 'boys' as almost two separate species (see Jackson, 1999). Thus, even in moments where gender norms were disrupted, the perceived inseparability of 'femininity' and

'masculinity' from girl/boy bodies remained consistently untroubled, with 'girl stuff' and 'boy stuff' maintained as clearly and oppositionally distinct.

Further, such dualistic understandings were revealed as unequally weighted across both schools, with boyhood positioned largely as both 'default' and 'better', and girlhood representing a marked (and frequently repudiated) category. As such, boyhoods were constructed not only in relation to a range of 'masculine' signifiers, but also in opposition to 'abject' girlhood, with 'strength', 'bravery' and 'naughtiness', in particular, representing the antitheses of weak, cowardly, and well-behaved 'femininity'. For girls, in comparison, it was 'looks/beauty' that most centrally defined feminine constructions, with access to other, 'more exciting' (Paige, p. 162) practices enabled via appropriations of 'tomboy' (that is, honorary male) status.

Notwithstanding the rigidity of these constructions, there were multiple ways in which children resisted such normativities, and key to my discussion throughout has been an exploration of the ways in which dualistic understandings were maintained in the face of near-constant contradiction. Indeed, it is impossible for any gender performance to be truly monoglossic (see Francis, 2010), and all children's doings were revealed as variously underwritten by heteroglossic subversion. Largely, though, it was through an ongoing process of 'submersion, refusal, and disguise' (Francis, 2012: 7) that such contradictory constructions were made invisible, and whilst Laurel, Aqib, Tanish and Finn each displayed consistently heteroglossic boyhoods, their positioning 'outside' normative masculinities ensured that monoglossia remained untroubled. For Obasi, in contrast, it was through the accentuation of particular 'totemic motifs' (Francis, 2010) that his otherwise profoundly subversive gender productions were invisibilised, with the majority of children (and teachers) reading Obasi's 'front stage' (Goffman, 1969) production of boyhood as firmly normative.

For girls, transgressions of normative femininity worked largely to maintain the perceived primacy of boyhood (e.g. via 'tomboy' positionalities) whilst 'repudiations' reified normative constructions by positioning masculinity in opposition to 'pretty' 'demure' or 'well-behaved' girlhood ('they are smelly and girls would never be smelly' (Steph, p. 177)). Nonetheless, girls' complaints regarding boys' exclusionary practices,

particularly in older year groups, revealed children as (albeit contingently) critical of such inequalities, and offered a space from which critical pedagogies might be carried out in future.

I understand this lack of significant difference with regard to gendered doings at Newhaven and Eastfield as primarily reflective of the force of the gender binary, which continues to represent one of the most pervasive organisational and discursive structures in Western society. Further to this, though, I consider *No Outsiders'* primary focus on *sexualities* equalities to have rendered a more troubling interrogation of gender somewhat secondary to work around LG (and to a lesser extent, B) identities, with teachers' narratives in the previous chapter revealing gendered understandings as informed still by essentialist notions of (individual) 'difference'. Indeed, even the most critical of teachers' approaches were revealed as underwritten by binary understandings, with (albeit accepted/celebrated) non-conformity positioned 'outside' normative (or 'normal') constructions. I thus see Newhaven and Eastfield's approaches to gender as falling along broadly similar lines, with both schools incorporating liberal equalities/acceptance paradigms into their practice whilst doing little to trouble the fixity of the gender binary. Such paradigms can be seen as reflective of a more general trend towards what Airton (2009: 13) describes as 'recuperative gender binary-based equalities projects in education', which reveal the continued need for work that moves beyond 'anti-sexism' and towards a more profound troubling of gendered (and sexual) 'fixities' (see Airton, 2009). Notwithstanding these limitations, though, Newhaven's ethos of 'diversity' did still provide an available language – as well as opportunities for counter-normative constructions (e.g. Finn's role as Queen in the school play, see p. 116) – with which children were able to realise and affirm (certain) non-normativities ('It celebrates difference and I'm different!' (Finn, Newhaven, age 10)).

ii. Sexuality

The third chapter of my analysis revealed productions of heterosexuality as equally similar at Newhaven and Eastfield, with children at both schools engaged daily in cultures of hetero-romance that both structured girl/boy interactions, and informed understandings of gendered selfhoods ('tell me about being a girl'/'well I've got about:t, ten boyfriends!' (C/Poppy, p. 184)). Further, whilst some discussions revealed

understandings of 'looks/beauty' to be at least partly 'racialised', it was significant that hetero-networks appeared generally to cut across 'ethnic' (and other demographic) differences, with Black, South Asian, Chinese, 'Mixed-Race' and White (as well as working/middle class) children acting as equal participants in hetero-culture (cf. Reay, 2001; Connolly 2002; 2008). Indeed, doings of heterosexuality differed most markedly along axes of age, gender, and status, with hetero-relations/hips constituted as relatively fluid and abstract in the earliest years, and becoming increasingly concrete and 'monogamous' as children grew older. As a result, it was largely 'high status' children who were able to make claims to 'real life' boy- and girl-friends in older year groups, whilst others claimed participation via hetero-romantic games, gossip, and mediation. Further, whilst boys were able to position themselves as uninterested in hetero-culture whilst still maintaining (albeit lower status) 'masculinity' (see also Renold, 2005), heterosexuality's centrality to constructions of girlhood made it near-impossible for girls to simultaneously reject hetero-discourse and be positioned as (normatively) 'feminine'. These findings reveal the necessity of future work that troubles the specifically gendered fixities that continue to inform (hetero) romantic relations/hips, with boys' misogynist evaluations of girls' bodies, and continued characterisations of girls in terms of (sexualised) desire and contamination, representing key areas for critical interrogation.

Significantly, it was with regard to productions and negotiations of *non-heterosexuality* that difference was most clearly identifiable, and whilst homophobia permeated peer group culture at Eastfield and Newhaven, my findings revealed understandings of homophobia's *acceptability* to differ profoundly across these sites. I return to this key finding in more depth in response to my penultimate research question (III, below).

II. To what extent, and how, do teachers interact with, conceptualise, and/or trouble children's in-school productions of gender and sexuality?

i. Gender

In the previous chapter, I revealed teachers' attitudes towards 'gender' – and its workings in childhood – as differing almost as much within as between schools, with personal convictions and politics appearing to influence understandings as much as

involvement or otherwise in *No Outsiders* (see e.g. Imogen vs. Julie, both *No Outsiders* participants at Newhaven). For the majority of teachers, though, gender was characterised in broadly dualistic terms, which in turn informed the nature of their (often homogenised) relationships with ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ children. Thus, challenges to gender inequality rarely troubled notions of ‘fixity’, with even the most critical approaches (e.g. Imogen) underwritten by discourses that continued to position the gender binary as the benchmark against which ‘difference’ was measured. Again, I see this as reflective of both the force of the gender binary, and the nature of *No Outsiders’* work on gender in particular, which arguably reinscribed certain essentialisms through a focus on individual ‘transgressors’. This finding highlights a need for further critical work with teachers that moves away from a focus on singular non-normativities (the ‘exceptional’ nature of which largely shores up binary understandings) and towards a more profound troubling of ‘gender’, wherein *all* productions are recognised as variously, contingently, and discursively produced.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the existence of a formal equalities ethos at Newhaven did appear to have effected a greater cognisance amongst teachers around the effects of gender-normative practice. Thus, it was exclusively teachers at Eastfield who spoke during interviews about recognising gendered workings for the first time, and normatively gendered classroom and curricular practices were indeed more prevalent here than at Newhaven.

ii. Sexualities

Equally, the final chapter of my analysis exposed gender-sexuality confluences as permeating teacher interviews across both schools, with Julie (Newhaven) and Andrew (Eastfield) revealing these as characteristic of both participants, and non-participants, of *No Outsiders*. Indeed, Julie’s (*No Outsiders* participant) speculations around the sexual orientation of particular (‘effeminate’ male) students encapsulated the continued essentialisms that underwrite many contemporary approaches to ‘equalities’ work, with gender normativities reified via the equation of dancing/dressing up/mixed-sex friendships with ‘effeminacy/homosexuality’, and sexualities pedagogy individualised as relevant only to (identifiably) ‘queer’ students (see Airton, 2009).

Notwithstanding the force of these connotations, it was nonetheless largely *No Outsiders* teachers who challenged perceptions of hyper-visibility with regard to childhood and sexuality, with only non-participants characterising *King and King* as inherently sexual/romantic, or viewing their own heterosexualities as 'invisible'. However, whilst discourses of 'childhood innocence' were challenged by *No Outsiders* teachers (particularly in relation to notions of relevance and 'age-appropriateness'), teachers across both schools continued to dismiss young hetero-relations/hips as broadly innocent, platonic, and unknowing.

III. How do children's productions compare in schools that do vs. do not incorporate gender and sexualities work into their curriculum?

Whilst I have highlighted children's gender productions as having been broadly similar at Newhaven and Eastfield, a central finding from this research reveals understandings of sexuality – and in particular, of non-heterosexuality and its 'acceptability' – as differing markedly across these sites. Thus, whilst continuing to permeate (particularly boys') peer group cultures at Newhaven, homophobia was understood, significantly, as contradicting Newhaven's *moral* ethos, which accepted and celebrated 'diversity'. In contrast, children at Eastfield interpreted their school's silence on (homo)sexuality as reflecting disapproval, with homophobia understood as a *behavioural* rather than moral transgression. Simply put, whilst at Newhaven it was *homophobia* that was (formally) unspeakable, at Eastfield, it was *homosexuality*.

Conceptualisations differed primarily across these sites in relation to perceptions of legitimacy, speakability, and conceivability, with these findings having significant implications for both academic and public understandings of 'equalities education'. First, perceptions of homosexuality as formally condemned and punishable by expulsion were exclusive to children at Eastfield, and revealed the profoundly damaging implications of silence, which was interpreted by these children as equal to school-sanctioned homophobia. For children at Eastfield, the only available discourse on homosexuality was a negative one, which positioned gay relationships and identities as 'devious...very very very weird and...not for children' (Joe, p. 232)). Thus, teachers', parents' and public perceptions of sexualities work as irrelevant or unnecessary (see Payne and Smith, 2017) are revealed here to profoundly

underestimate the damaging effects of silence on perceptions of 'Other' (non-heterosexual) relationships and identities.

Second, constructions of homosexuality as 'unspeakable' at Eastfield ('y' not allowed to say it in school', Eli p. 228) led to children positioning LGB friends and family members as a source of secrecy and embarrassment, with many 'confessions' appearing to occur for the first time in discussion group conversations. Comparatively – and notwithstanding their articulations of homophobia at other moments – children at Newhaven spoke with apparent ease about non-heterosexual friends and family members, and these relationships were always already known to their peers. Thus, a further effect of institutional silence at Eastfield appeared to have been the rendering of certain family relationships as a source of shame, with children's 'confessions' revealing both the problems inherent in teachers' assumptions around (heterosexual) family backgrounds ('there's less evidence of it so, we do just do less on that' (Georgina, p. 273)), and the related need for teachers to create spaces wherein all family relationships can be legitimised and heard.

Finally, the relative unintelligibility of gay parents and teachers for children at Eastfield revealed constructions of homosexuality as 'Other' to have precluded understandings of gay identities as commensurable with both 'school' and 'family' ('I wouldn't see how she would be a teacher' (Stuart, p. 238)). Indeed, even recognitions of homosexuality as a legitimate (if 'wounded' (Youdell, 2004)) identity were found to be profoundly contingent, with gay princes, peers, parents, teachers and siblings each posing different forms of disruption to the intelligible social order. Such contingencies reveal the necessity of equalities projects that not only address abstract homosexualities (e.g. *King and King*), but also render these commensurable with children's understandings of 'family', 'peers', and 'school'. Indeed, the comparative conceivability of gay teachers and family members at Newhaven revealed the significance of 'visibility' (see Sanders, 2018) in rendering 'relatable' homosexualities imaginable and real. However, the continued repudiation of imagined gay classmates (particularly by boys) exposed a need for further work that both actualises *young* LGB identities (see animated short film *In a Heartbeat* (2017) as an example) and addresses, specifically, homosexuality's perceived threat to 'masculinity'.

Together, these findings reveal *No Outsiders* to have contributed markedly to the construction of a school space wherein homosexuality is able to be positioned, significantly, as legitimate, speakable, and real. Indeed, the fact that claims to gay male relations/hips were made exclusively by children at Newhaven (see pp. 223-6) is of particular significance, and highlights the enabling potential of 'visible' (albeit unitary) non-heterosexual identities in school (see Courtney, 2014). Nonetheless, the enduring prevalence of homophobia to informal school culture exposes the need for future work that addresses homosexuality's incommensurability with both 'masculinity' and peer group interaction. Deconstructive pedagogies around gender, in particular, alongside resources that actualise concrete (as well as abstract/fictional) LGB identities may go some way to achieving this.

IV. How have gender and sexualities pedagogies been employed (or not), and what epistemological, political and methodological convictions/assumptions have underpinned these?

Teacher interviews revealed participation in *No Outsiders* to have profoundly informed approaches towards teaching, with all *No Outsiders* teachers positioning gender and sexualities equalities work (albeit broadly conceived) as an essential aspect of school practice. Significantly, it was in relation to notions of conceivability, age-appropriateness and relevance that *No Outsiders* and non-*No Outsiders* teachers most differed in their approaches, with the former citing participation in the project as having shifted many previously held convictions around, in particular, 'sexuality' and 'childhood'. Conversely, at Eastfield, fears around 'age-appropriateness', 'relevance', and 'promotion' permeated many teacher interviews. Significantly, though, *No Outsiders* teachers' references to these same fears as having been overcome by participation in the project revealed the profound impact of 'doing' (that is, 'taking a step', see Julie, p. 249) to rendering *new* conceivabilities, and Eastfield teachers' relative openness towards the possibility of a future equalities pedagogy revealed this 'step' (if not equalities work itself) as being somewhat imaginable. Indeed, these teachers identified a range of factors as having the potential to render such a step 'possible', and future work would benefit from incorporating these factors into formal teacher training.

Notwithstanding these differences, it was significant that even the most critical of teachers' approaches were underwritten by discourses that continued to position heteronormativity as the benchmark against which 'Other' individual (albeit legitimate, celebrated) 'differences' were measured: a tendency that I have argued as being somewhat bolstered by the use of 'LGBT-themed' books that focus on *singular* gender/sexuality 'transgressors'. Indeed, teachers' conflations of gender and sexuality in speculations around the sexual orientations of individual students (and readings of gender non-normative protagonists as necessarily gay or 'protogay' (see DePalma, 2016)) revealed a continued understanding of 'normative gender' and 'heterosexuality' as inevitably linked, and highlighted a need for future work that both dismantles this conflation, and recognises 'equalities work' as relevant to *all* students (see Airton, 2009). Resources that move beyond a focus on singular non-conforming protagonists may go some way towards shifting such constructions. For example, what if *King and King's* prince was presented with a range of princesses *and princes* throughout the story? Might this represent a more 'troubling' (Butler, 1990) scenario, which disrupts the broader heteronormative structure of romantic practice rather than focusing on the prince's individual (albeit celebrated) 'transgression'? And what if Oliver Button (dePaola, 1979) or the Sissy Duckling (Fierstein and Cole, 2005) were just one of a range of (male and female) gender non-conforming protagonists in their tales? Might this go beyond an individualised acceptance (or indeed, celebration) of their anti-normativity and towards a recognition of the wider social processes that define and regulate such perceptions of 'difference'? Citing one of the lesser-used resources from the *No Outsiders* project (*Are You a Boy or a Girl*, Pendleton Jiménez, 2000), Renee DePalma (2016: 839) notes:

By refusing to assign Alex [the protagonist] any coherent and recognizable sexual minority identity, the story turns the gaze outward, to the social processes that construct gender according to the ways in which children perform boy or girl... This technique contrasts with... *The Sissy Duckling* (Fierstein & Cole, 2002) [in which] there is little discussion among the characters of the social processes that render him a sissy.

I would argue that the development of resources that '[turn] the gaze outward' is key to future developments in gender and sexualities pedagogy. Further, and

notwithstanding the school's centrality to the everyday lives of children, I recognise the home, media, and wider society as contributing equally profoundly to children's (and teachers') constructions and regulations of heteronormativity. Thus, it is critical that such in-school interventions are supported by wider deconstructive work, which addresses, for example, children's books, toys, and television as sites wherein norms must be equally troubled (see YouTube series, *Queer Kid Stuff* (2018) as an example).

II. Limitations

Notwithstanding the value of in-depth ethnography (and indeed, the partiality of all data and claims to 'truth' (Atkinson, 2003)), it is important to note that as a small-scale ethnographic study this project can be read only as a partial insight into two particular, situated school cultures, and my findings are not generalisable beyond these sites. Newhaven also represents just one of at least fifteen different incarnations of *No Outsiders'* work (see DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a), and future research would benefit from an exploration of the ways in which this has been applied and understood in other schools across the UK. Indeed, a comparative exploration of other equalities initiatives (e.g. cross-culturally) alongside *No Outsiders* might provide particularly valuable insight into the broader workings of gender and sexualities pedagogy, and the particular 'effects' of different pedagogic approaches.

Moreover, whilst it is significant that discourses of gender and sexuality appeared to cut across other demographic 'differences' at both schools, the relative lack of diversity in my research sample – particularly at Newhaven – precluded a more nuanced insight into the relationship between, in particular, gender, sexuality, 'ethnicity', and 'class'. Thus, whilst the seemingly equal participation of 'non-White' children in cultures of gender and sexuality should be understood as reflecting at least some change in the position of 'minority ethnic' children in UK schools (at least in relation to dominant hetero-cultures, cf. Connolly, 2003; 2008), future work would undoubtedly benefit from a more diverse exploration of gender and sexuality's interrelation with other axes of identity.

Arguably the most significant limitation of this research, though, is the lack of attention given to trans identities. Though *No Outsiders* did include work around trans in collaboration with *Gendered Intelligence* (2018) – and specifically, its director, Jay Stewart – this is acknowledged by the project team as having been somewhat secondary to pedagogies that focused on LG (and to a lesser extent, B) identities and relationships (see DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). As a result, trans issues were largely (although not wholly, see pp. 249-250) invisible throughout my fieldwork, and there was no identifiable incorporation of trans pedagogy into classroom practice during my time at Newhaven. Further, my decision to remove ‘other’ members of the *No Outsiders* project team from my interview sample, whilst an important one, resulted in the unintended exclusion of Jay as an interviewee, who might indeed have given much-needed voice to the particularities of trans equalities work. Thus, whilst this thesis provides insight into some of the continued workings of *No Outsiders* at Newhaven, further research would benefit greatly from exploring how trans pedagogies in particular have been incorporated into other *No Outsiders* – and non-*No Outsiders* – schools.

III. Contributions

Notwithstanding these limitations, this thesis makes a notable contribution to the field of gender and sexualities education, and its findings have significant implications for future research and praxis.

First, the application of poststructural/queer and symbolic interactionist approaches to Francis’ concepts of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia represents a novel theoretical framework, which I consider to account for both the discursive and material workings of gender (and sexuality) in interaction, and the (contingent) operation of individual agency. Indeed, whilst poststructural/queer thinking lends itself well to analyses of gender and sexuality’s *monoglossic* workings – where dominant discourses are constructed and reified within powerful regimes of truth – an interactionist perspective strengthens understandings of gender and sexuality’s *everyday* workings, as well as of subjects’ agentic (interpersonal, intrapsychic)

(re)negotiations of dominant scripts. Indeed, I discussed in my analysis a number of ethnographic moments wherein an understanding of *interaction* was key, with children's local, reflexive (co-)constructions revealing the primacy of this to both defining and producing masculine/feminine gendered identities. By maintaining a recognition of gender and sexuality's macro (monoglossic) workings, however, this framework is able to recognise the continued power of dominant discourses to override or 'subsume' (Francis, 2010) micro-level, and/or heteroglossic accounts.

Second, whilst now critical of my positional approach in the field, my use of the least adult role nonetheless enabled a significant depth of insight into continued issues of power in childhood research. In elucidating the various ways in which assumptions about power continue to inform and infuse this field, and revealing various norms around 'childhood' as having remained untroubled even in queer or norm-critical circles (see e.g. swearing, pp. 78-80), I advance Gallagher's (2008) critique of power theorisations by providing a range of empirical examples of power's continued mis/construction. This in turn has significant implications for current debates around method/ology in childhood research, and pushes for a more thorough consideration of, in particular: the shifting relations of power between researcher and researched; the similarities *and* differences between adult-researcher and child-participant; the problems inherent in researcher-defined positionalities; and the nature and limits (or otherwise) of 'participation'.

Finally, this thesis represents one of the first comparative analyses of gender and sexualities equalities work in general, and the first of *No Outsiders'* work in particular. As such, it sheds new light on both the particular ways in which children negotiate formal gender and sexualities pedagogies, and the differences in these negotiations across *No Outsiders* and non-*No Outsiders* schools. Specifically, it is the first work to demonstrate empirically the damaging effects of silence on *children's own* understandings and doings of gender and sexuality (cf. discussions of silence as it relates to policy and curricular materials (Sauntson, 2013; Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015) and teacher practice (Rofes, 2000; Robinson, 2002; DePalma and Atkinson, 2006a; Phillips and Larson, 2012)).

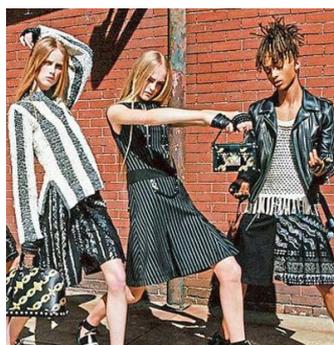
i. Constructions at Newhaven

Corroborating findings from my pilot study, this thesis has highlighted the primarily situational nature of homophobia at Newhaven, where children produced broadly 'pro-equality' and 'pro-normativity' subject positions in formal and informal sites, respectively (see Atkinson, 2013). Further to this, children's 'doings' of homophobia were revealed as profoundly interactional, with attitudes shifting throughout discussion groups in response to the stated positions of friends and peers. In particular, girls' greater ability to express gay-supportive attitudes (due to the lesser threat posed by homosexuality to legible productions of 'girlhood') contributed to the construction of mixed-sex discussion groups as sites wherein dominant (homophobic) scripts could be more liveably transgressed. Whilst it is important to avoid positioning girls as 'educators' or 'advocates' for equalities work, this finding might nonetheless be harnessed in future work that recognises the power of (certain) peer group interactions (in contrast to more didactic teacher-pupil models) to produce and legitimise new commensurabilities. Indeed, the continued centrality of gender/sexuality regulation to counter-school (that is, anti-adult/authority) cultures suggests that young, deconstructive, gay-supportive voices might offer greater potential in rendering homophobia and gender policing '*uncool*'.

Further, defences made of homophobic language at Newhaven (see p. 236) revealed children to be negotiating formal discourses in particularly complex ways, with the school's 'equalities ethos' operating for some as *carte blanche* for 'jokingly' homophobic behaviour. Such constructions parallel broader societal discourses around so-called 'post-feminism' (see e.g. McRobbie, 2009) – whereby advances in 'equality' are drawn on to legitimise 'joking' or 'ironic' sexism – and reveal the need for work that enables a greater understanding of oppressive language and its particular damaging effects.

Finally, notwithstanding the significantly greater conceivability of homosexualities at Newhaven, both children and teachers revealed understandings of equality to be underwritten still by discourses of 'difference', where for many children, non-heterosexuality was understood as intelligible/legitimate but still marginal/wounded Other. Indeed, the distinction drawn by some children at Newhaven between 'gay' as

marginal identity and 'gay' as abject other reveals the profound contingency of gay-supportive attitudes, where gender non-normativity was still understood as deserving of regulation (and, significantly, indicative of non-heterosexuality). Such constructions reveal the need for critical work with children that decouples both gender and sexuality, and gender-based homophobia and masculinity. Recognition and discussion of various gender non-conforming young people (e.g. straight male actor, Jaden Smith, below) represents just one way in which such conflation might begin to be troubled.



Figures 20-21. Jaden Smith

ii. Constructions across Newhaven and Eastfield

Further to shedding new light on the relationship between 'equalities' education and gender/sexuality at Newhaven, my findings revealed significant differences across Newhaven and Eastfield with regard to the relative 'conceivability' (and speakability, legitimacy) of non-heterosexualities. Indeed, children's interpretations of institutional silence as equalling school sanctioned homophobia have significant implications for public understandings of (gender and) sexualities pedagogy, and have the potential to inform government policy around future *statutory* gender and sexualities education.

Further to this, teachers' differing perceptions of equalities work – informed profoundly by involvement or otherwise in *No Outsiders* – reveal a critical need for developments in teacher training that combat fears and misconceptions about gender and sexualities in general, and equalities education in particular. Indeed, Eastfield teachers' wariness around managing responsibility for 'risky' pedagogies highlights the need for *whole-school approaches* towards equalities, which both support teachers in their practice and situate gender and sexualities education as an important and valued area of the curriculum. Equally, the continued essentialisms underwriting *No Outsiders'* teachers practice highlight the necessity of future work that more

profoundly deconstructs gender-sexuality connotations and individualised understandings of 'Otherness'. Indeed, there is a need for a greater number of resources that move beyond a focus on singular (and indeed, primarily gay male) protagonists, and towards a greater diversity of LGBT, queer and non-unitary identities (see Epstein, 2013), with such approaches having the potential to both trouble understandings of non-conformity as 'difference', and draw attention to the wider social processes of heteronormativity. In light of these findings, I would argue that current teacher training around gender and sexualities education should have three central concerns, namely: rejecting the enduring 'discourse problematic' (Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015) around non-normativity; de-coupling gender-sexuality to interrogate these as two separate axes of normalisation (see Airton, 2009); and positioning equalities education as relevant to *all* (that is, not only identifiably 'Other') children and young people.

Notwithstanding the distance that there is still to go with regard to the in-school troubling of gender and sexual fixities, Newhaven teachers' reflections on past fears and misconceptions reveal the profound impact of *training* on shifting understandings, and of *doing* to making 'unimaginable' work 'imaginable' and 'real'. Whilst tentative, the ability of Eastfield teachers to imagine the future incorporation of gender and sexualities pedagogy into their school's curriculum makes me hopeful in this regard, as do children's own (albeit fleeting) imaginings of a future, freer gender-sexuality order:

Well after we read [*King and King*] I thought it would be suitable for about, seven or eight year olds? But then, I thought, actually, y'should really, tell, younger children about it? So then they could understand it better...cos otherwise y'always just think it's a bad thing. (Tracy, Eastfield, age 9)

Why- why d'you have t'be married to a man and a woman, why is that traditional why can't it just be, whatever y'like that should be true? (Aisha, Newhaven, age 10)

Appendices

Appendix A: No Outsiders book list

ABC: A Family Alphabet Book by Bobbie Combs

And Tango Makes Three by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson

Are you a Boy or a Girl? AppenDCO teachelteaT(DVD Story Board Version) by Karleen Pendleton Jiménez

Asha's Mums by Rosamund Elwin, Michele Paulse and Dawn Lee

The Daddy Machine by Johnny Valentine and Lynette Schmidt

Daddy's Roommate by Michael Willhoite

The Harvey Milk Story by Kari Krakow and David Gardner

Heather Has Two Mommies by Leslea Newman and Diana Souza

Inventing Elliot by Graham Gardner

If I Had 100 Mummies by Vanda Carta

King and King by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland

King and King and Family by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland

Molly's Family by Nancy Garden and Sharon Wooding

Mummy Never Told Me by Babette Cole

Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tomie de Paola

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dad by Johnny Valentine and Melody Sarecky

Priscilla and the Pink Planet by Nathaniel Hobbie and Jocelyn Hobbie

Something Else by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell

Spacegirl Pukes by Katy Watson and Vanda Carter

The Family Book by Todd Parr

The Princesses Have a Ball by Teresa Bateman and Lynne Cravath

The Sissy Duckling by Harvey Fierstein and Henry Cole

Totally Joe by James Howe

Two Weeks with the Queen by Morris Gleitzman

We Do: A Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Marriage by Gavin Newsom and Amy Rennert

While You Were Sleeping by John Butler

William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow and William Pene du Bois

Appendix B: Email to George Graham, Newhaven

Hi [George],

Hope you're well and looking forward to the holidays! I have exciting news and also a favour to ask, so I will get right on with it... The exciting news is that I'm going to be starting a PhD in October, following on from my Masters research and from *No Outsiders*, exploring gender and sexualities equality/diversity in primary education. The research will be a comparative study of two schools - one that does and one that doesn't incorporate gender and sexualities work into their formal curriculum - and an exploration of the effects of this work on children's in-school 'doings' of gender and sexuality. Having had a fantastic time at [Newhaven] last summer and finding it to be a real frontrunner for this stuff, my favour is of course: would it be possible to come and carry out part of this research at [Newhaven] next year? This would be beginning around January/February 2015 and hopefully lasting a full school year, with around 2-3 days spent in school per week. Of course, as with the Masters research, the school would be completely anonymised, with all kids' and teachers' names changed and data closely protected. I hope, also, that the research would be enjoyable for all involved - I think both kids and teachers really liked being part of it last time.

Let me know your thoughts and really hope to see you again next year! Thank you in advance, and hope you're both well,

Catherine :)

Appendix C: Email to Andrew Stuart, Eastfield

Dear Mr [Stuart],

Hi, my name is Catherine Atkinson and I'm a PhD student at the University of York researching issues around childhood and gender. I'm particularly interested in the significance of gender to children's interactions in school, and am going to be carrying out some related research at [Newhaven] Primary beginning around January/February 2015. The reason for my getting in touch is that I'm hoping also to carry out this research at a second school in [city] with a similar pupil demographic, and wondered if this might be possible at your school?

For this research, I would hope to spend 2 or 3 days a week at your school over a period of around 10 months, simply observing and chatting with children in the classroom and playground. I would also hope to carry out some informal 'discussion groups' and 'storybook sessions' with children so as to listen to their views and understandings around ideas of gender, and conduct some informal interviews with teachers on the same topic. All of the data collected would be completely confidential and closely protected, and any audio recordings (e.g. from discussion groups) would be deleted after transcription. The name of the school, children and teachers would also be anonymised in the write-up of the research. I carried out a similar study in two primary schools in [city] last year, and found that as well as being informative for me, it was also really enjoyable for those taking part, with children in particular relishing the opportunity to chat to me about their ideas.

As well as having conducted research of this sort before, I have also worked full time as a teaching assistant, child-carer and nanny in Edinburgh and York (CV attached), so have a number of years' experience working with children and young people. I also have an enhanced DBS check in place.

I really hope you'll be interested in this research and would love the opportunity to work with you and the children at your school. If you have any questions, please do contact me on this email address or on my mobile at [###]. Also, feel free to contact [Newhaven's] headteacher [George Graham] on [###] and/or my PhD supervisor Stevi Jackson on [###] for further references.

Many thanks in advance and very much hope to speak to you soon,

-- Catherine

Appendix D: Demographics by Friendship Group

| Newhaven | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| | # | Name | 'Sex' | 'Ethnicity' | 'Class' |
| Year 1 | 1 | Jess | F | White-British | WC (Working) |
| | 2 | Steph | F | White-British | MC (Middle) |
| | 3 | Alice | F | White-British | MC |
| | 4 | Mandy | F | White-British | MC |
| | 5 | Mei | F | Chinese | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 6 | Laya | F | White-British | WC |
| | 7 | Josie | F | White-British | MC |
| | 8 | Ellie | F | White-British | WC |
| | 9 | Lucy | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 10 | Poppy | F | White-British | WC |
| | 11 | Aafa | F | Mixed White-Asian | WC |
| | 12 | Lily | F | White-British | MC |
| | 13 | Rachel | F | White-British | WC |
| | 14 | Dawn | F | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 15 | John | M | White-British | WC |
| | 16 | Alfie | M | White-British | WC |
| | 17 | Komi | M | Black-African | MC |
| | 18 | Daris | M | White-British | MC |
| | 19 | Finley | M | White-British | MC |
| | 20 | Riley | M | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 21 | Nick | M | White-British | WC |
| | 22 | Oliver | M | White-British | WC |
| | 23 | Julian | M | White-British | MC |
| | 24 | Jevaun | M | Mixed White-Black Caribbean | WC |
| | 25 | William | M | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 26 | Patrick | M | White-British | WC |
| | 27 | Hugh | M | White-British | WC |
| | 28 | Jay | M | White-British | WC |
| | 29 | Obasi | M | Black-African | WC |
| | | | | | |
| Year 3 | 1 | Lixie | F | White-British | MC |
| | 2 | Lara | F | White-British | MC |
| | 3 | Clare | F | White-British | WC |
| | 4 | Natalie | F | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 5 | Molly | F | White-British | WC |

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----|---------|---|-----------------------------|----|
| | 6 | Lottie | F | White-British | MC |
| | 7 | Lynne | F | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 8 | Lindsay | F | White-British | WC |
| | 9 | Abbie | F | White-British | WC |
| | 10 | Lorna | F | White-British | WC |
| | 11 | Hayley | F | White-British | WC |
| | 12 | Sophia | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 13 | Scott | M | White-British | MC |
| | 14 | Mark | M | White-British | WC |
| | 15 | Jonny | M | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 16 | Alberto | M | White-Other | WC |
| | 17 | Ian | M | White-British | MC |
| | 18 | Toby | M | White-British | MC |
| | 19 | Dawei | M | Mixed White-Asian | MC |
| | 20 | Noah | M | White-British | WC |
| | 21 | Julia | F | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 22 | Colin | M | White-British | MC |
| | 23 | Gareth | M | White-British | WC |
| | 24 | Hua | M | Chinese | WC |
| | 25 | Ella | F | White-Other | WC |
| | 26 | Sian | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| Year 5 | 1 | Paula | F | White-British | WC |
| | 2 | Ana | F | White-British | WC |
| | 3 | Ivy | F | White-British | WC |
| | 4 | Neil | M | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 5 | Ryan | M | White-British | MC |
| | 6 | Agwe | M | Mixed White-Black Caribbean | WC |
| | 7 | Jack | M | White-British | WC |
| | 8 | Rob | M | White-British | MC |
| | 9 | Chris | M | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 10 | Jacob | M | White-British | MC |
| | 11 | Tyler | M | White-British | WC |
| | 12 | Robert | M | White-British | WC |
| | 13 | Matt | M | White-British | WC |
| | 14 | Wyatt | M | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 15 | Finn | M | White-British | MC |
| | 16 | Kay | F | White-British | MC |
| | 17 | Ava | F | White-British | MC |
| | 18 | Aisha | F | Mixed White-Asian | MC |
| | 19 | Lacy | F | White-British | WC |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|--------|---|---------------|----|
| | 20 | Sophie | F | White-British | WC |
| | 21 | Eoife | F | White-Other | WC |
| | 22 | Nicola | F | White-British | WC |
| | 23 | Luke | M | White-British | WC |
| | 24 | Ross | M | White-British | WC |

| Eastfield | | | | | |
|---------------|----|---------|-------|-------------------|---------|
| | | Name | 'Sex' | 'Ethnicity' | 'Class' |
| Year 1 | 1 | Mason | M | White-British | MC |
| | 2 | Anthony | M | White-British | MC |
| | 3 | Pete | M | White-British | MC |
| | 4 | Caleb | M | White-British | MC |
| | 5 | Ania | F | White-British | WC |
| | 6 | Robyn | F | White-British | WC |
| | 7 | Purdil | M | Indian | MC |
| | 8 | Tanish | M | Mixed White-Asian | MC |
| | 9 | Ling | F | Chinese | WC |
| | 10 | Aadita | F | Mixed White-Asian | MC |
| | 11 | Jenny | F | White-British | MC |
| | 12 | Yacoub | M | Asian-Other | WC |
| | 13 | Owen | M | White-British | MC |
| | 14 | Zimran | M | Mixed White-Asian | WC |
| | 15 | Varsha | F | Mixed White-Asian | MC |
| | 16 | Zoe | F | White-British | MC |
| | 17 | Rose | F | White-British | WC |
| | 18 | Bella | F | White-British | WC |
| | 19 | David | M | White-British | MC |
| | 20 | Labeeq | M | Indian | MC |
| | 21 | Aqib | M | Bangladeshi | MC |
| | 22 | Taahid | M | Bangladeshi | WC |
| | 23 | Zuraib | M | Pakistani | MC |
| | 24 | Aaron | M | White-British | MC |
| | 25 | Ewan | M | White-British | WC |
| | 26 | Zach | M | White-British | MC |
| | 27 | Eli | M | White-British | WC |
| | 28 | Jonah | M | White-British | MC |

| | | | | | |
|---------------|----|---------|---|---------------|----|
| Year 3 | 1 | Jaaved | M | Bangladeshi | MC |
| | 2 | Brad | M | White-British | WC |
| | 3 | Raajih | M | Pakistani | WC |
| | 4 | Aamir | M | Pakistani | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 5 | Ray | M | White-British | MC |
| | 6 | Joe | M | White-British | MC |
| | 7 | Russell | M | White-British | MC |
| | 8 | Shane | M | White-British | MC |
| | 9 | Renee | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 10 | Alison | F | White-British | MC |
| | 11 | Jamila | F | Black-African | MC |
| | 12 | Stuart | M | White-British | WC |
| | 13 | Martin | M | White-British | MC |
| | 14 | Theo | M | White-British | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 15 | Fariah | F | Pakistani | MC |
| | 16 | Fatima | F | Indian | WC |
| | 17 | Amy | F | White-British | MC |
| | 18 | Kara | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 19 | Mel | F | White-British | MC |
| | 20 | Jane | F | White-British | MC |
| | 21 | Marissa | F | White-British | MC |
| | 22 | Amelia | F | White-British | WC |
| | 23 | Sarah | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 24 | Anne | F | White-British | MC |
| | 25 | Alec | M | White-British | MC |
| | 26 | Billy | M | White-British | WC |
| | 27 | Farid | M | Asian-Other | WC |
| | | | | | |
| Year 5 | 1 | Harriet | F | White-British | MC |
| | 2 | Liz | F | White-British | MC |
| | 3 | Asiyah | F | Bangladeshi | MC |
| | 4 | Sabra | F | Pakistani | WC |
| | | | | | |
| | 5 | Eric | M | White-British | MC |
| | 6 | Tom | M | White-British | MC |
| | 7 | Jamie | M | White-British | WC |
| | 8 | Kamal | M | Pakistani | MC |
| | 9 | Laurel | M | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 10 | April | F | White-British | WC |
| | 11 | Ruth | F | White-British | MC |
| | 12 | Rosie | F | White-British | MC |
| | 13 | Kelly | F | White-British | WC |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|-------|---|---------------|----|
| | 14 | Imani | F | Black-African | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 15 | Mona | F | White-British | WC |
| | 16 | Ellen | F | White-British | WC |
| | 17 | Freya | F | White-British | MC |
| | 18 | Paige | F | White-British | MC |
| | 19 | Tracy | F | White-British | MC |
| | | | | | |
| | 20 | Andy | M | White-British | WC |
| | 21 | Mike | M | White-British | MC |
| | 22 | Adam | M | White-British | WC |
| | 23 | Dan | M | White-British | MC |
| | 24 | Jason | M | White-British | MC |

Appendix E: Ethics Committee approval

ELMPS submission -Catherine Atkinson

Inbox x



Celia Kitzinger <celia.kitzinger@york.ac.uk>

27/11/2014 ☆



to me, Stevi, Debbie ▾

Dear Catherine

The ELMPS Ethics Committee has now had the opportunity to consider your submission and we are able to **APPROVE SUBJECT TO ONE ADDITION AND ONE AMENDMENT**. Please consult with your supervisor and confirm to me that you are able to make these two changes.

1. We would like you to undertake to inform a relevant adult (e.g. teacher or parent) if a child becomes upset so that someone in the child's life is able to take responsibility for dealing with this. It is not required that you divulge any of the child's confidences - simply that you report the upset.
2. One reviewer is concerned about your letter to parents. I have pasted in the feedback received below and ask that you undertake to amend your letter accordingly.

As soon as you confirm that you are able and willing to make these changes you may start your research.

I hope it goes well!

Best wishes

Celia

Reviewer 2 Feedback

My only concern is about how the 'opt out' system of consent for parents has been framed in the letter in Appendix 1. I agree in general with the approach that has been taken to consent in what is a complex research project and can see why the 'opt out' system for children's parents is a sensible one. However, although the letter to parents in Appendix 1 explains how they can contact the researcher, it does not actually state explicitly that parents have the right to opt out of the research on their child's behalf. As a consequence the letter presents the research as non-optional (although I am sure this is not the intention of the applicant). An explicit statement on the right to opt out should be included in the parent letter

...



Catherine Atkinson <catherine.atkinson@york.ac.uk>

27/11/2014 ☆



to celia.kitzinger, Stevi, Debbie ▾

Dear Celia,

Many thanks for this - I'm happy and able to make both of these changes. The letter to parents should indeed have said explicitly that they can opt out on behalf of their child, and this was just a mistake on my part, so many apologies. Informing an adult about a child becoming upset is also absolutely fine.

Thanks again and all best,

Catherine

Hi! My name is Catherine Atkinson and I'm a PhD student at the University of York researching issues around childhood and gender. For my research, I will be spending two to three days a week at [Newhaven] between February and December this year, looking at how children understand and experience gender and the effects of in-school equalities work. Most of my time will be spent in the classroom and playground, talking to and interacting with children across a range of year groups. I'll also be carrying out some informal focus groups that explore what it means to be a 'girl' or 'boy', and reading stories with groups of children that deal broadly with ideas around gender and relationships.

All of the data collected during this research will be completely confidential and audio recordings from focus groups and storybook sessions will be deleted after they've been transcribed. The name of the school and all children's names will be anonymised in the transcription and write-up of the project.

As well as having conducted research of this sort before, I have also worked full time as a teaching assistant, child-carer and nanny in Edinburgh and York, so have a number of years' experience working with children and young people. I hope that my time at [Newhaven] will be fun for the children involved - I carried out a similar study in two primary schools in [City] last year and found that children really enjoyed being part of the project and sharing their ideas.

I look forward to meeting some of you during my time at [Newhaven]!

-- Catherine

Children and gender in school

Researcher: Catherine Atkinson, University of York

What is the research about?

The research is about children and gender. 'Gender' is the word we use to talk about 'girl things' and 'boy things'. For example, some people think that pink is for girls and blue is for boys. This is because of ideas about gender, but is not necessarily true. Not everyone agrees about what gender is. Some people think that gender is natural, and that all girls like 'girl things' (e.g. dresses) and all boys like 'boy things' (e.g. football). Other people think that gender is made up, and that all 'things' (e.g. dresses, football) are for everyone. I am interested in how children understand gender in school.

What will you be doing?

I will be coming to [Newhaven/Eastfield] for 1-2 days a week for this school year. I will be spending time with you and other children during lessons. I would also like to spend time with you and other children during playtime, but this is for you to decide. I will be writing in a notepad about things that I find interesting when we spend time together. Also, I will be talking to children about gender in groups (these are called discussion groups) and reading stories with children in groups (these are called story groups). You can ask me any questions about the research and ask to read through this sheet again at any time.

What will I be asked to do?

If you want, you can be involved in a discussion group or story group. This is totally your choice. You do not have to be involved. If you do take part, then your voice will be recorded so I can listen again to what you said. If you come to a discussion group or story group but then decide you don't want to be there, you can ask to leave whenever you like.

Do I have to take part?

No. If you don't want to take part in any discussion groups or story groups, then that's fine. You don't have to do anything that you don't want to do.

What is the research for?

The research is for my university studies. When I've finished the research I will write about it. I might also use the research in the future.

What will happen to the information?

Everything that you tell me is confidential. This means that I won't tell it to anyone else, not even your teachers or parents, **unless** I am worried that you are not safe. When I write about the research, your names will all be changed. I am the only person who will listen to the recordings from focus groups and story sessions - no one else. I will listen to the recordings and write down what is said, and then I will delete them. If you want to see the written version of the recording then I will read it through with you. If you don't want me to use the recording after all, then I won't, but you must tell me this as soon as possible. When I have finished writing about the research, I will send you all some information about what I have found.

What happens next?

If you want to be involved in the research, please read or listen to the questions on the consent form. I will record you telling me that you are happy to take part. Remember you can change your mind about being involved in the research whenever you want.

**** Questions? ****

Children and gender in school

Researcher: Catherine Atkinson, University of York

These questions are about whether you want to be involved in the research. Please read/listen to and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask.

Has the research been explained to you?

Yes No

Did you understand the explanation?

Yes No

Have you been able to ask questions?

Yes No

Do you understand that your conversations with me will be confidential? Yes No

Do you understand that you can leave the research whenever you want?

Yes No

Do you understand that the information you give me might be used in future research?

Yes No

Do you understand that you don't have to be in focus groups or story sessions if you don't want to?

Yes No

Is it ok for me to spend time in your classroom?

Yes No

Children 'doing gender' in the primary school

Researcher: Catherine Atkinson, University of York

- Information sheet -

The research project is interested in how children understand and experience gender in the primary school, and the attitudes of teachers and educationalists towards work around gender equality. The research is for my PhD thesis and will be written up for this purpose. Data may also be used for future research and publications.

I will be coming to [Newhaven/Eastfield] for 1-2 days per week between February and October this year. I will be spending this time talking to and interacting with children in the classroom and playground ('participant observation'). I will maintain a 'least adult' role during this time and hope to interact with children as a friend rather than a 'grown up'. For this reason I will not be able to help out (e.g. in the classroom) in an 'adult' manner when children are present but will be happy to offer help during break and lunchtimes or after school.

Further, I will be carrying out a series of discussion groups with children: informal sessions where children will be encouraged to talk about what it means to be a 'girl' or 'boy' and how this is experienced. I am also interested in the ways in which children read and respond to children's stories that deal with issues around gender, and will be conducting a series of storybook sessions in which I will read these stories with groups of children and listen to their ideas. Focus groups and storybook-sessions will be carried out at times most convenient to teachers and children.

Finally, I am interested in teachers' understandings of the workings of gender in school and their attitudes towards critical work around gender equality. I hope to conduct some informal interviews with teachers during my time at [Newhaven/Eastfield]. These will be carried out at times most convenient to the interviewee. Participation in focus groups, storybook sessions and interviews will be entirely voluntary and consent to participate can be withdrawn at any time.

All of the data collected during this research will be confidential and closely protected, and audio recordings from focus groups, storybook-sessions and interviews will be deleted after they've been transcribed. All participants will be given the opportunity to read through and respond to transcripts - and if necessary, withdraw their data - up until one month after the conduct of the interview/focus group/storybook session. The name of the school, teachers and children will be completely anonymised in the write-up of the research, and a summary of the research findings will be sent to all participants.

Please feel free to ask any questions immediately and/or throughout the research process, either in person or at catherine.atkinson@york.ac.uk

Children 'doing gender' in the primary school

Researcher: Catherine Atkinson, University of York

- Consent form -

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in the study. Please read and answer every question. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

Have you read and understood the information sheet about the study?

Yes No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the study?

Yes No

Do you understand that the information you provide will be held in confidence by the researcher?

Yes No

Do you understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason?

Yes No

Do you understand that the information you provide may be used in future research?

Yes No

Do you agree to take part in the study?

Yes No

If yes, do you agree to your interviews being recorded?

Yes No

All data is held by the researcher in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Your name (in BLOCK letters): _____

Your signature: _____

Date: _____

Original copy to be retained by the researcher. Copy to be scanned and sent to participant by email.

Reiterate focus of research, answer questions, establish consent.

Key question:

- Can you tell me about being a girl/boy?

Follow up questions/prompts:

- What's good about it/what's your favourite thing?
- What's not good about it/what's your least favourite thing?
- What does it mean when people talk about 'boy things' and 'girl things'? What things do you like?
- Do you think girls and boys are quite similar? Why? Why not?
- What do you think it'd be like to be a girl/boy? What would be good about it? What wouldn't be good about it?
- What if there was a boy in our class with really long hair/who liked to play with dolls? What would you think about that? What might other people think?
- What if there was a girl in our class with really short hair/who liked to play football? What would you think about that? What might other people think?
- Do you play with girls and boys at school? Why/why not? How do you choose who to play with?
- [Following children's own introduction of 'fancying' or 'girlfriends and boyfriends']
What if there was a boy in our class who fancied/wanted to go out with another boy? What if there was a girl in our class who fancied/wanted to go out with another girl?

Appendix L: Story group questions/prompts

Reiterate focus of research, answer questions, establish consent. Position book in the middle of the table to be referred to throughout conversation.

Key question:

- Can you tell me what you thought about the story?

Follow up questions/prompts:

- What did you think it was going to be about? Were you surprised/not surprised?
- What did you like/not like about it? What was your favourite part? What was your least favourite part?
- Would you read it again? Why? Why not?
- Did you have a favourite character? Who? Why?
- If you were a character in the story, who would you like to be? Why?
- Is it a story that your parents would read to you? Why? Why not?
- Does anyone know two men who are married, like the king and the king?
- Do you think the story had a message? If so, what?
- What age do you think this story should be for? Why?

Professional involvement in *No Outsiders*

- Tell me about how Newhaven got involved with *No Outsiders* – how did that relationship start? How did you feel initially about becoming involved?
- What were some of the most exciting/rewarding parts of the project for you? Anything that went particularly well/felt like a great success or milestone?
- What were some of the biggest challenges of the project for you? Anything that didn't go as planned/work that came up against obstacles or complications?
- Did you ever have to make compromises in your approach to equalities work in response to e.g. parents', teachers' or public reactions?
- In what ways has Newhaven's curriculum and classroom practice been informed by its involvement in *No Outsiders*? What were some of the biggest changes that happened for you/the school as a result of being involved?
- Was there anything that you introduced to the project personally, or that you felt particularly strongly should be a part of the project's work?
- And what about other teachers at Newhaven – how did they respond to involvement in *No Outsiders*? How was it negotiating their involvement?
- How did you deal with some of the more negative media attention surrounding the project?
- I know that you're continuing to be involved in equalities work now through Stonewall's *School Champions* programme and in other ways – do you notice any similarities/differences between the approaches of different equalities programmes, e.g. between Stonewall and *No Outsiders*?
- Do you continue to come up against any struggles when introducing/implementing this work?

Personal involvement in *No Outsiders*

- I know from reading about the project that almost everybody involved had a different idea of how the work should be done, and in particular there was this interesting tension between 'gay role model' and queerer/'deconstructive' approaches to challenging heteronormativity/homophobia. What was your approach to how the work 'should' be done? Would you put yourself somewhere on that spectrum?
- What was your experience of that tension? Was there anything that you didn't feel comfortable with in terms of some of the approaches of the project?
- Did your own approach to equalities work change at all throughout the course of the project? E.g. did you set out with any firmly held beliefs that shifted as a result of the work?
- I know from reading your own stuff in the project books that for you and other gay teachers there were moments where your own identity was kind of 'on the line' because of the nature of the work you were doing. In what ways did your own identity come in to that work, and how did you manage that? Did it feel dangerous investing yourself personally in the project in that way?
- Were there moments where being involved in the project felt professionally 'risky'?
- **For you, what was main goal of *No Outsiders*? What was it all 'about'?**

Gender and sexuality

- Do you notice children's behaviours as being particularly gendered in school?
- Do you notice a difference in girls'/boys' behaviour on the playground e.g. the sorts of games they play, the space that they use, the children they play with?
- Does gender play a role in children's interactions with you? Do you notice yourself acting differently with girls/boys e.g. in talking with them, congratulating them, reprimanding them?
- Do you notice any children across the school who seem to be understanding/performing gender in interesting ways, e.g. not conforming to gender norms? How do children/teachers respond to this?
- Do you notice sexuality playing a part in children's behaviours? E.g. language, jokes, relationships? Does it differ according to gender/age? Are you aware of any relationships between children at primary school?
- Does the school have any specific policies on gender/sexualities equality?
- How do you deal with/encourage other teachers to deal with e.g. use of 'gay' as insult?

Gender and sexualities equalities work

- Is there currently any work around gender and sexualities equality that goes on at Eastfield? (E.g. alongside discussions of 'race', ethnicity etc.?) What form does this take?
- If not, do you think the school would benefit from incorporating this into the curriculum? What might this look like? What opportunities do you think there are for exploring this?
- I know the school has recently become involved in Stonewall's *School Champions* programme – what made you decide to take part in this? How did other teachers respond to the idea of it?
- I know there was a parental complaint about reading *King and King*. Can I ask how you felt about that, and how you responded? Were you surprised by the complaint? How would you feel about using more books like *King and King* in school?
- What do you think stops primary teachers from addressing gender/sexualities equality in schools and classrooms? What do you think would make it easier?
- Are you aware of any lesbian or gay parents of children at Eastfield? Do you think the school is welcoming towards all families? Do you think it could be more so? In what ways?
- Do you have openly LGBT teachers on staff? Do you think the school is welcoming/supportive of LGBT teachers? Do you think those teachers would be comfortable being open about their sexuality with children and parents?

Appendix O: Interview schedule, Newhaven teachers not involved in *No Outsiders*
(Nora, Lauren)

Gender and sexuality

- Do you notice children's behaviours as being particularly gendered in the classroom?
- Do you notice a difference in girls' and boys' behaviour on the playground e.g. the sorts of games they play, the space that they use, the children they play with?
- Are there any children in your class in particular who seem to be understanding/performing gender in interesting ways? E.g. not conforming to gender norms?
- Does gender play a role in children's interactions with each other? In what ways?
- What about in their interactions with you? Do girls/boys act differently with you? Do you notice yourself acting differently with girls/boys e.g. in talking with them, congratulating them, reprimanding them?
- Do you notice children engaging with or exploring sexuality in any ways? Does it differ according to gender/age? Are you aware of any romances/relationships between children at this age?
- Are there any children in particular who seem to be understanding/performing sexuality in interesting ways?

***No Outsiders*/equalities work**

- Do you notice work around gender and sexualities equality as being particularly prominent at Newhaven? Is it incorporated into the curriculum? How does it compare to other schools you've worked at?
- Obviously I know you read *King and King* with your class when I was there – have you used books like that before? Does the work being done around gender and sexuality at Newhaven filter into your own classroom practice? E.g. books with gay characters, projects about different families?
- Does it feel risky at all to read books like *King and King* with your class? Did you have any reservations?
- Do you think it's important that schools do work around gender and sexualities? In what ways do you think that work should be done?
- Is there anything that you wouldn't feel comfortable talking about with your class? Anything you'd have reservations about in terms of carrying out gender or sexualities equalities work?

Appendix P: Interview schedule, Newhaven teachers Involved in *No Outsiders*

(Imogen, Julie)

Gender and sexuality

- Do you notice children's behaviours as being particularly gendered in the classroom?
- Do you notice a difference in girls' and boys' behaviour on the playground e.g. the sorts of games they play, the space that they use, the children they play with?
- Are there any children in your class in particular who seem to be understanding/doing gender in interesting ways? E.g. not conforming to gender norms?
- Does gender play a role in children's interactions with each other? In what ways?
- What about in their interactions with you? Do girls/boys act differently with you? Do you notice yourself acting differently with girls/boys e.g. in talking with them, congratulating them, reprimanding them?
- Do you notice children engaging with or exploring sexuality in any ways? Does it differ according to gender/age? Are you aware of any romances/relationships between children at this age?

No Outsiders

- Tell me about your involvement in *No Outsiders* – how did you first learn about the school becoming involved, and how did you feel about it? What was your impression of the project initially?
- What were some of the most exciting/rewarding parts of the project for you? Anything that went particularly well/felt like a great success or milestone?
- What were some of the biggest challenges of the project for you? Anything that didn't go as planned/work that came up against obstacles or complications?
- Was there anything that you introduced to the project personally, or that you felt particularly strongly should be a part of the project's work?
- Did you ever have to make compromises in your approach to the work in response to e.g. parents', teachers' or public reactions?
- In what ways has Newhaven's curriculum and classroom practice been informed by its involvement in *No Outsiders*? In what ways does the work continue?
- I know from reading about the project that almost everybody involved had a different idea of how the work should be done, and in particular there was this interesting tension between 'gay role model' and queerer/'deconstructive' approaches to challenging heteronormativity/ homophobia. What was your approach to how the work 'should' be done? Would you put yourself somewhere on that spectrum?
- Were there moments where being involved in the project felt professionally 'risky'?
- [Imogen] I know you did some work in particular around *King and King* – can you tell me a bit about that? What was it about that book in particular that inspired you? How did the children respond to it? Were the year 1 responses different from responses you've had in year 3 or older?
- **For you, what was main goal of *No Outsiders*? What was it all 'about'?**

Appendix Q: Interview Schedule, Eastfield teachers and Deputy Headteacher (Diana, Chloe, Georgina, Louise)

Gender and sexuality

- Do you notice children's behaviours as being particularly gendered in the classroom?
- Do you notice a difference in girls' and boys' behaviour on the playground e.g. the sorts of games they play, the space that they use, the children they play with?
- Does gender play a role in children's interactions with you? Do you notice yourself acting differently with girls/boys e.g. talking/congratulating/reprimanding them?
- Are there any children in your class in particular who seem to be understanding/performing gender in interesting ways, e.g. not conforming to norms?
- Do you notice sexuality playing a part in children's behaviours in the classroom or playground? E.g. language, jokes, relationships? Does it differ according to gender/age? Are you aware of any relationships between children at this age?
- How would you respond to e.g. use of 'gay' as insult?

Gender and sexualities equalities work

- Are you aware of any work that goes on at Eastfield around gender/sexualities equality? (E.g. alongside discussions of race, ethnicity etc.) How does this compare to other schools you've worked in?
- If not, do you think the school would benefit from incorporating this into the curriculum? What might this look like? What opportunities do you think there are for exploring this in the curriculum? (E.g. areas?)
- How did you feel about reading *King and King*? Risky, at all? Were you surprised by any reactions?
- Is there anything that you wouldn't feel comfortable talking about with your class? Anything you'd have reservations about in terms of carrying out gender/sexualities equalities work?
- What do you think stops primary teachers from addressing gender/sexualities equality in schools and classrooms? What do you think would make it easier?
- Are you aware of any lesbian or gay parents of children at Eastfield? Do you think the school is welcoming towards all different families? Do you think it could be more so? In what ways?
- Do you have openly LGBT teachers on staff? Do you think the school is welcoming/supportive of LGBT teachers? Do you think those teachers would be comfortable being open about their sexuality with children and parents?

Learning and equalities role

- Tell me about your role as learning and equalities champion – what does this entail? What sorts of situations do you mostly work with? Involved with curriculum at all?
- Do you work with any issues in particular around gender and sexuality?
- How does Newhaven compare to other schools you've worked in with regard to equalities? Do you see this reflected in children's behaviours?
- Is an 'equalities champion' a role that a number of schools have? Do you think it's important that it is?
- Do you deal with issues around bullying at Newhaven? What sorts of things are you aware of children being bullied for? How does bullying compare here to other schools?
- Around for *No Outsiders*? What was your impression?
- Anything that's felt like a great success/milestone in relation to equalities work? Anything that's been a significant challenge?
- Involved in Stonewall work upcoming? Impression of this?
- Do you notice work around gender/sexualities equality as being particularly prominent at Newhaven?

Gender and sexualities

- Do you notice children's behaviours as being particularly gendered in the classroom?
- Do you notice a difference in girls' and boys' behaviour on the playground e.g. the sorts of games they play, the space that they use, the children they play with?
- Are there any children who strike you as understanding/doing gender in interesting ways? E.g. not conforming to gender norms?
- Does gender play a role in children's interactions with you? Do girls/boys act differently with you? Do you notice yourself acting differently with girls/boys?
- Are you ever asked by children about your own relationship/s?
- Do you notice children engaging with or exploring sexuality in any ways? Does it differ according to gender/age? Are you aware of any romances/relationships between children at this age?
- Aware that Newhaven has high number of children with same-sex parents, have you worked in particular with those children? Do you get any impression of how they experience this?

Appendix S: Interview schedule, Stonewall *School Champions* trainee (Cheryl, Eastfield)

- How did you get involved in the Stonewall training? What did you anticipate taking away from it?
- What was the response of other teachers to the offer of training/your participation in it?
- Tell me about what the training covered – what sorts of issues were addressed/what did you take away from it? E.g. curricular interventions/classroom strategies?
- What will be your role as trainer?
- Do you feel there are barriers to the doing of gender/sexualities work? If so, what sorts of things are concerning/how do you imagine overcoming them?
- Are you aware of any current/past work at Eastfield around gender/sexualities equalities? (E.g. alongside 'race/ethnicity', religion etc.?) If not, is there a reason for this? (Lack of resources/issues around teacher training/confidence?)
- Are you aware of any policies at Eastfield around gender/sexualities?
- Are you aware of any lesbian or gay parents of children at Eastfield? Do you think the school is welcoming towards all families? Do you think it could be more so? In what ways?
- Do you tend to know the parental set up of the kids in your own class?
- Do you have openly LGBT teachers on staff? Do you think the school is welcoming/supportive of LGBT teachers? Do you think those teachers would be comfortable being open about their sexuality with children and parents?
- Was there any focus on gender/sexualities during your own teacher training?
- Are there any children who strike you as understanding/doing gender in interesting ways? E.g. not conforming to gender norms?
- How do you deal with issues of homophobia/homophobic language at school?

Appendix T: Thematic analysis – nodes i-iv (NVivo)

| | <i>i. Discussion groups</i> | References | Sources (Total = 38) |
|----|----------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| | Node | | |
| 1 | Heterosexuality | 180 | 29 |
| 2 | Boys transgressing gender norms | 175 | 33 |
| 3 | Homosexuality | 125 | 28 |
| 4 | Boyhood as desirable | 88 | 28 |
| 5 | Researcher positionality | 76 | 26 |
| 6 | Girlhood as undesirable | 68 | 27 |
| 7 | Characteristics of girlhood | 67 | 26 |
| 8 | Bodies, genitals | 58 | 23 |
| 9 | Girls transgressing gender norms | 56 | 25 |
| 10 | Girlhood as desirable | 55 | 25 |
| 11 | Girls and boys as different | 50 | 22 |
| 12 | Challenging gender norms | 41 | 22 |
| 13 | Boyhood as undesirable | 40 | 19 |
| 14 | Sport, strength | 40 | 18 |
| 15 | Characteristics of boyhood | 39 | 17 |
| 16 | Swearing | 36 | 11 |
| 17 | Girls and boys as friends | 33 | 20 |
| 18 | Violence | 33 | 15 |
| 19 | Sex | 32 | 12 |
| 20 | Girls and boys as enemies | 39 | 15 |
| 21 | Toilets | 25 | 10 |
| 22 | Bullying | 24 | 13 |
| 23 | Vulgarity | 24 | 14 |
| 24 | Naughtiness, trouble | 18 | 9 |
| 25 | Girls and boys as similar | 15 | 9 |
| 26 | Grown up capital | 15 | 6 |

| | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 27 | Making intelligible via discourse of 'parenting' | 11 | 7 |
| 28 | Technology capital | 10 | 7 |
| 29 | Equalities discourse | 9 | 7 |
| 30 | Subverts my line of questioning | 9 | 8 |
| 31 | Trans | 9 | 8 |
| 32 | 'Race', ethnicity | 7 | 5 |
| 33 | Alcohol | 5 | 4 |
| 34 | Girl/boy colours | 4 | 4 |
| 35 | Parents regulating gender | 4 | 4 |
| 36 | Aspirations | 3 | 3 |

| | <i>ii. Story groups</i> | References | Sources (Total = 33) |
|----|---------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| | Node | | |
| 1 | Homophobia, gender policing | 123 | 18 |
| 2 | Intelligibility | 60 | 17 |
| 3 | Women's bodies/'beauty' | 49 | 16 |
| 4 | Kissing | 46 | 19 |
| 5 | Defense of gay rights | 43 | 18 |
| 6 | Relation to real life | 36 | 17 |
| 7 | Boyfriend-girlfriend culture | 22 | 14 |
| 8 | Familiarity with story | 19 | 11 |
| 9 | Identification with character | 19 | 11 |
| 10 | Repudiation | 18 | 9 |
| 11 | Girls and princesses | 17 | 10 |
| 12 | Imagined same-sex futures | 16 | 7 |
| 13 | Expectation of hetero-trajectory | 14 | 12 |
| 14 | Princess as deserving prince | 7 | 5 |
| 15 | Expectation of masculinist trajectory | 6 | 6 |
| 16 | Gay women vs gay men | 4 | 4 |
| 17 | Sex | 3 | 2 |

| | | | |
|----|-------------------|---|---|
| 18 | Teachers' lives | 3 | 3 |
| 19 | 'Race', ethnicity | 2 | 2 |
| 20 | Liking the story | 2 | 2 |

| | <i>iii. Teacher interviews</i> | References | Sources (Total = 12) |
|----|------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| | Node | | |
| 1 | Imagining/doing equalities work | 87 | 12 |
| 2 | Risks/barriers | 36 | 11 |
| 3 | Gender difference | 28 | 9 |
| 4 | Teacher perception of children | 25 | 9 |
| 5 | Need/otherwise for equalities work | 21 | 10 |
| 6 | Gay as insult | 19 | 10 |
| 7 | Age-innocence | 15 | 6 |
| 8 | Gay teachers | 13 | 8 |
| 9 | Gender non-normativity | 13 | 9 |
| 10 | Heterosexuality in childhood | 12 | 9 |
| 11 | Teachers' lives | 12 | 7 |
| 12 | Gay parents | 9 | 8 |
| 13 | Mixed-sex friendships | 9 | 6 |
| 14 | Teacher training | 9 | 6 |
| 15 | Gender-sexuality conflation | 8 | 4 |
| 16 | Same-sex relationships | 8 | 6 |
| 17 | Policy | 7 | 6 |
| 18 | Teachers interpellating children | 7 | 5 |
| 19 | Trans | 6 | 5 |
| 20 | Teacher discourse as legitimising | 4 | 4 |
| 21 | Gender vs sexualities equality | 3 | 2 |
| 22 | Gender/sexuality 'blindness' | 3 | 2 |
| 23 | Researcher positionality | 3 | 2 |
| 24 | Religion | 3 | 1 |

Nb. As well as reflecting the greater number of discussion/story groups conducted, the difference in number of 'references' across children's/teacher's data should be understood also as reflective of the often quick-fire, back-and-forth nature of children's group conversations, in comparison to the longer, more sustained narratives of teacher interviews.

| | <i>iv. Fieldnotes</i> | References | Sources (Total = 2) |
|----|-----------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| | Node | | |
| 1 | Researcher positionality | 116 | 2 |
| 2 | Doing girlhood | 101 | 2 |
| 3 | Heteroglossia | 99 | 2 |
| 4 | Doing boyhood | 98 | 2 |
| 5 | Heterosexuality | 98 | 2 |
| 6 | Characteristics of girlhood | 69 | 2 |
| 7 | Interpellation by teachers | 69 | 2 |
| 8 | Different-ness | 38 | 2 |
| 9 | Homosexuality | 37 | 2 |
| 10 | Bodies, uniforms | 30 | 2 |
| 11 | Equalities work | 20 | 2 |
| 12 | Repudiation | 18 | 2 |
| 13 | Girls and boys as friends | 11 | 2 |
| 14 | Method | 10 | 2 |
| 15 | Teachers' lives | 8 | 2 |
| 16 | Girls and boys as enemies | 8 | 2 |
| 17 | 'Race', ethnicity | 6 | 2 |
| 18 | Sex | 6 | 2 |
| 19 | Religion | 4 | 1 |

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