

Figuring out peer group hierarchies in secondary school

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers children's engagement in peer group hierarchies in transition to secondary school. Nineteen children in Year six in schools in South East England participated in the study, six of whom were revisited in Year seven, in secondary school. Data were gathered through loosely structured interviews and drawings, then analysed through contrasting lenses to consider the children's identity work from different perspectives.

In-group/out-group behaviours in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) were seen to establish and reinforce hierarchical interactions between groups of children in school contexts particularly in relation to perceptions of attractiveness, academic ability and popularity or reputation. The school context seemed to contribute to the formation of the power hierarchies enacted by the children. Some children navigated the complex social interactions within their peer groups so they could position themselves uncontroversially in the middle of the hierarchical structure. Other children either adopted or were ascribed roles which they enacted apparently uncritically.

The work also considers the role of media stereotypes of secondary school peer groups. The children in this research drew on stereotypical identities in their talk about children and schools in general terms but adapted and refined these when talking about particular schools or individuals.

Finally the work considers how or if the children maintained a coherent sense of self in the transition between schools. The children's talk demonstrated how they used talk about past selves to account for sameness and change. They reinforced those aspects of self which they felt were representative of what they were 'like'. Where their beliefs or behaviours had changed they used narratives such as those of 'growing up' to account for perceived changes in their identity performances.

As a contribution to theory about identity, the thesis develops the mathematical concept of fractals, which form chaotic yet coherent systems consisting of recursive self-similarities. The notion of 'fractal identity' provides a means by which identity can be understood as a complex patterning of being which consists of 'self similarities' which contribute to an overall coherent, yet inchoate, 'whole'.

PART I

CHAPTER

ONE

INTRODUCTION



“I’m a nerd because I’m clever and
I wear glasses. I’m such a
stereotype”
David, aged 11, Year 6

*Credit: R. Austin private collection
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I was in awe of a girl called Toni when I was at secondary school. In the all-girl environment of the grammar school I attended Toni was a legend. Her name for one thing – edgy and cool – no-one I knew or had ever met before was called such a daring name. And Toni wore trendy shoes – not only to the school discos, but actually in the school itself. One of the few times Toni addressed me directly was when I somehow happened to be in the toilets where she was giving smoking lessons to one of her friends. She looked at my shoes which had at last been passed on to me as my elder sister had grown tired of them, “I used to have a pair of those,” she said with a half-smile. Toni was talking to me! About shoes! Oh how my spirits soared. Then she added, with the casual brutality of one practised in the art of put-down: “When they were in fashion.” My spirits sank to the bottom of my not-so-trendy-any-more black, high-heeled shoes and I slunk from the toilets knowing for certain that Toni and I were worlds apart.

With hindsight, one of the things that struck me was that although I could recognise what made her cool – aspired to have her notice me and talk to me – I did not know how to be like her and in fact I knew that I *could not* be like her; that I lacked something that she had. No matter how hard I tried, I was never going to be a ‘cool girl’. Conversely, years later, as my own children came to make the transition from primary to secondary school, they felt stuck with a label that they didn’t want. They felt trapped by the identity assigned to them by others: “I’m a nerd,” sighed David, “because I’m clever and I wear glasses.” Unlike me, who knew a particular label was inaccessible to me, my children felt that they were being given a label which they did not want. As I played with these ideas I was intrigued by where these seemingly stereotypical identities which Toni, David and I enacted and/or acknowledged came from and how it was that we knew about them – knew how to perform and respond to them. How was it that we knew where we stood in the peer group pecking order? David, at the time of making his declaration, had had very limited engagement with the secondary school context, except what he knew from his older sister – but he knew about ‘nerds’. I knew that he watched a lot of Disney and other American television channels, which included many children’s programmes based around children of a high school age and were often, at least in part, set in high

schools. In addition this was the era of *Disney's High School Musical* which, in true Disney fashion, encapsulated through overt use of stereotyping and caricature, the peer groups and their hierarchies which are commonly associated with the American high school: the nerd, the jock, the popular kids¹. I, on the other hand, would have read Enid Blyton's tales of all-girl boarding schools and other such stories – which offered differently constructed but similarly stereotyped (as well as somewhat sexist, racist and elitist) characterisations of school pupils and their rankings. Might it be that these stereotypes proffered as part of a collective cultural understanding of what secondary schools and their pupils (and teachers, too, of course) are like, are a cultural resource on which children draw when they enter the secondary school context? If so, how do these stereotypes and the 'figured worlds' (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998) which they populate affect the identity work which children undertake on entering the secondary school phase?

Childhood is typically a time where opportunities to wield power could be seen to be limited and adolescence, when most children undertake their secondary schooling, is a time when an emerging sense of 'adulthood' is not always acknowledged by the associated access to power even over decisions which directly affect their lived experiences (Fine, 2004). In the vast majority of secondary schools, access to power is for the most part restricted further – with compulsory attendance, a myriad of rules and regulations and material restrictions such as the requirement to wear a uniform and the banning of mobile phones and other accessories. The construction and playing out of peer hierarchies could be seen as one way in which the imposition of adult-dominated power structures are resisted or countered (Eckert, 1989; Milner, 2004). In Foucauldian terms (Foucault, 1977) it is as if power in one form provides the opportunities for other forms of power to come into existence thus creating complex power networks rather than simply an adult-child downward acting chain.

Power, not accessible through and within the adult controlled structures, is potentially converted to 'social sorting' power structures – within a figured world – through peer group delineations. These

¹ A list of the terms and definitions relating to high school peer groups used in this thesis can be found in Appendix B

delineations for the most part, seem to lean towards what might be seen to be valued by adolescents (physical attractiveness – through looks, dress and sportiness for example) rather than by adults (academic achievement and ‘proper’ behaviour).

Children do not opt to attend school. They are likely to have only limited, if any, say in which school they attend and who will attend the school with them and yet it appears that they are plunged into a world – a game – where who you are, your behaviour, your beliefs, your appearance and your aptitude alongside who it is that others (particularly your peers) say you are is of the utmost significance in terms of social, academic and personal well-being and success (Adler & Adler, 1998; Brady, 2004; Brown, 1990; Eckert, 1989; Eder, 1985; Francis, 1998; Francis, Skelton & Read, 2010; Hey, 1997; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Martino, 2000; Milner, 2004; Paechter, 2002; Pratt & George, 2005; Reay, 2001; Swain, 2000; Warin, 2010; Weller, 2007; Willis, 1977).

If identity can be understood as the intersection of the individual (who I say I am), and the social (who others say I am) (Jenkins, 2008), and the cultural models at hand offer powerfully essentialising prototypical identities which are potentially constricting and profoundly hierarchical (and therefore play a significant part in networks of power), then there are things which bear closer examination in the outworking of this for children in the context of secondary schools. The ‘fateful moment’ (Giddens, 1991) of transition to secondary school from primary school can be understood as a significant time for children in their on-going work of identity. Their understanding of, engagement in and response to the manifestation of peer group interactions and identities has the potential to impact on their personal and social self-understandings both within and beyond their time in school (Barber, Eccles & Stone, 2001; Côté, 2002; Thomason & Kuperminc, 2010; Warin & Muldoon, 2009). In the move to secondary school children may be required, either consciously or unconsciously, to look again at how they see themselves, how they present themselves to others and how they understand who they are. And it seems likely, that in order to maintain some kind of coherent narrative of identity throughout this process, children need a means by which they can understand

themselves (their present and on-going identity work) alongside the construction of past identities. Identity work in secondary school is concerned, therefore, with both the social and the personal. Where this takes place alongside the transition from childhood to adulthood – the culturally constructed timeframe of adolescence – there are further complexities to be managed.

Understanding something of children's responses to the figured world (Holland *et al*, 1998) of peer relationships in secondary school is thus the aim and focus of this thesis. Rather than being about transition *per se*, the thesis focuses on the identity work undertaken by children as they navigate their entry into the culturally constructed, figured world of secondary school and seeks to examine how, (or indeed if), children maintain their internal 'coherent story of self' (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Ricœur, 1984; Warin, 2010), whilst dealing with the necessity of responding to the identity work required by the social context and associated power networks within which they find themselves.

The Research Questions

The focus for the thesis is therefore developed around four key strands which each address a broader over-arching research question.

Identity, Adolescence and Peer Groups

RQ1: How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

Sub questions:

- Does the school context contribute to the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies?
- What is the significance of adolescence as the time frame in which this identity work takes place?
- What is the significance of school transfer in identity work?
- Does children's talk about themselves and their peers show how they identify with and position themselves within peer group hierarchies in the school context?

Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships

RQ 2: How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do they perform or resist available identities?
- To what extent/how are they critically aware of the identity performances of themselves or others?

Figured Worlds, Stereotypes and the Media

RQ3: What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do children draw on media stereotypes as cultural resources in their identity work?
- To what extent/how do they resist stereotypical narratives of peer groups and their interrelationships?

The Coherent Self

RQ 4: How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?

Sub questions:

- How/does children's talk about themselves and others demonstrate continuity in their identity work in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?
- What role might the reproduced voices of others and self through reported speech play in the development of a sense of a coherent self?

The Thesis – Structure and Approach

Researching identity presents some challenges. The exact nature of what it is that counts as identity is nebulous and any attempt to pin it down by framing it within bite-sized nuggets of data in empirical research will inevitably diminish the complexity of the whole. Yet ‘messy’ (Law, 2004) qualitative or narrative research approaches serve to further complicate our understandings (or not) of social realities and, in a postmodern context, resist the lure of definite ‘answers’. No matter how richly conceived, no research can offer more than a partial picture of what might be said to be what identity ‘is’ and how it is played out in the social sphere. To research identity requires the researcher to be prepared to both ‘set out her stall’ – to take a stance, a position from which to investigate, examine and discuss identity but also to be mindful of the dangers inherent in too rigidly asserting how things ‘are’. This thesis is, then, a partial picture: an attempt to offer a way of looking at identity which adds to the existing body of knowledge and contributes to the ways in which identity is conceived, understood and investigated and tends more towards qualitative disorder than empirical order in its approach. The process of inscription must attempt, however, to make the research comprehensible and this is reflected in how I have structured and presented this thesis.

In the process of the research, as findings emerged in relation to the research question and as part of the writing process itself, a particular way of structuring the thesis surfaced. There was a need to clarify the position from which I addressed the idea of identity – the conceptual underpinnings and the core understandings which informed the research. The best way to address this seemed to be with a contextualising chapter early in the thesis. Furthermore, it became apparent that the four themes – the research questions – whilst connected to each other in the research context, reflected quite discrete bodies of literature and existing research that could be more plainly examined as separate threads and then woven together in a concluding chapter. This meant that I would not need discrete ‘literature review’ and ‘data analysis’ chapters if my work was organised so

that each research question had its own chapter containing a pertinent literature review and data analysis section. This is summarised in the table below:

| THEME | KEY QUESTION | THEORETICAL/ CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING | ANALYTICAL THEMES |
|---|---|---|--|
| Identity, Adolescence and Peer Group (Chapter Four) | <i>How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?</i> | Social Identity Theory | Embracement of and distancing from the behaviour and identity performances of others in identity work (Snow & Andersen, 1987) |
| Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships (Chapter Five) | <i>How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?</i> | Figured Worlds | Saliency, identification and savoir faire within the context of peer group relationships (Holland <i>et al</i> , 2001). |
| Figured Worlds, Stereotypes and the Media (Chapter Six) | <i>What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?</i> | Figured Worlds Stereotypes and Representation | Saliency and identification of/with media stereotypes in the context of peer group relationships (Holland <i>et al</i> , 2001). |
| The Coherent Self (Chapter Seven) | <i>How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?</i> | Narrative Identity | Use of anecdotes as dismissive or illustrative of self (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2010) Reproduced voices in identity work (Bakhtin, 1981; Maybin, 2006) |

This table is revisited in Chapter Three where the links between this structure and the methodological approach of '*bricoleur*' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) are discussed further.

The thesis is therefore structured in the following way:

Part I

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: What is Identity? Situating the Thesis

This chapter offers an overview of the perspectives on identity which underpin the thesis. Each aspect is introduced and explained in this chapter and acknowledged and applied throughout the thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodological Issues

This chapter explains the principles underpinning the research design and the approaches taken to data collection and analysis in the light of the perspectives on identity explored in Chapter Two.

Part II

Chapter Four: Identity, Adolescence and Peer Groups

How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

In Part II the focus is the role of peer group hierarchies in school. This long chapter reviews research which addresses aspects of this and examines in detail the ways in which the children engage in the interactions which establish themselves within the peer hierarchies drawing on a range of the data across the phases of the research. The ways in which the children ranked themselves and each other through a process of embracement and distancing from others is explored.

Part III

In Part III the remaining research questions are addressed as discrete themes within a chapter. Each chapter takes a particular theoretical lens through which to examine the data and includes a review of the applicable literature and analysis and discussion of the data as it relates to the theme. Thus data is revisited in different

chapters – viewed through alternative lenses – in order to provide a rich picture of the meanings and social realities which it might represent.

Chapter Five: Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships

How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

In this chapter peer relationships in secondary schools are viewed as figured worlds within which children participate in their identity work. The children's expertise as they undertake identity work within figured worlds and the degree of engagement with and criticality of the 'game' which they play in school is used to discuss the outworking of identity in such figured worlds.

Chapter Six: Figured worlds, Stereotypes and the Media

What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

The focus for this chapter is the role of stereotypes in children's identity work. In particular the ways in which children talked about representations of particular groups in school is examined. This is set alongside a discussion of the representation of stereotypes in *Disney's High School Musical* (2006) and *Waterloo Road* (2006). The ways in which the children used the overarching, generic 'big' stories of figured worlds and media representations in their 'small story' identity work is seen to be pertinent in a nuanced understanding of the role of stereotypes in identity work.

Chapter Seven: The Coherent Self

How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?

This chapter uses narrative identity theory to consider how the children accounted for continuity and change in their story of self as they transitioned between phases of schooling. The ways in which they talked about themselves and in particular how they reproduced their own voices in their talk about themselves, is used to consider how embracement and distancing behaviours are used to establish a coherent sense of self. In this chapter, as a unique contribution to the field, I put forward the concept of 'fractal identity' as means by which continuity, change and coherence can be accounted for in theorising about identity.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The conclusion reunites the threads of the previous chapters and elucidates the ways in which the research has provided insights and ideas about the performance of identity within peer group relationships in secondary schools.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS IDENTITY? *SITUATING THE THESIS*

Caterpillar: *Who are you?*

Alice: *Why, I hardly know, sir. I've changed so much since this morning, you see.*

Caterpillar: *No, I do not see, explain yourself.*

Alice: *I'm afraid I can't explain myself, you see, because I'm not myself, you know.*

Caterpillar: *I do not know.*

Alice: *I can't put it any more clearly, sir, because it isn't clear to me.*

Alice in Wonderland

Carroll, 1865

Introduction

This thesis draws on understandings of identity from the fields of social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology in order to consider a rich and complex picture of the concept and to facilitate possibilities for interpretation and analysis of the data from different perspectives. This chapter sets out the theoretical positions on identity which underpin the research and which are the foundations for the approach taken to its conceptualisation and execution.

Much of the interest in identity lies at the intersection of the social and the personal in the outworking of identity in social life (Woodward, 2002). The social world can be understood as a function of the identity roles we both inhabit and assign (Jenkins, 2008) and our personal sense of identity can be seen, in part, as drawn from those very identity roles which we enact in the social context (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology as fields of study each focus on both personal and social aspects of identity. Social psychology leans towards a focus on the implications for individuals within social groups; sociology focuses on the effects on the structure and functioning of societies and the conduct of social interactions within them; cultural anthropology is concerned with the ways in which patterns of behaviour develop and propagate within different social groups so that ways of being and doing develop as cultural frameworks which in turn constitute identities. In common across all fields is the understanding that for any meaningful interaction to take place in any given context we need to recognise the person with whom we are interacting as a particular kind of person; ourselves as the same or different particular kind of person and we must know what kinds of interactions 'count' between us in the social context within which we find ourselves so recognised (Gee, 2000). How we come to these knowings of self-and-other and how we develop and sustain shared knowings of the social and cultural practices that define these identities, lies at the heart of on-going questions about identity and this, in turn, lies at the heart of this thesis: the intersection of children's personal understandings of self within the social hierarchy of secondary school peer groups.

Understanding identity matters because whilst identities can be seen to play a key role in creating and sustaining social interactions and cultural practices, it is clear that the personal out-working of identity-roles must also be a factor in facilitating social and cultural change (Giddens, 1991; Holland *et al*, 1998). Ways of being and doing do not remain constant within societies and cultures – things flex and change and what may count as a particular kind of person in one instance does not remain fixed – just as how particular kinds of people are recognised within social worlds is subject to ongoing change (Gee, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Jenkins, 2008). In the context of adolescents in school this is particularly evident as children work to perform the identities required of them in lessons; in the playground and at home which often make competing and contradictory demands on them – for example Phelan, Davidson & Thanh (1991) consider the ‘multiple worlds’ within which the students’ live and the ease or difficulty with which they are able to articulate and perform identities across the boundaries of these worlds as they are required to be and be seen as different people in different contexts. The intersection of ‘who I say I am’ with ‘who others say I am’ and the resonances and conflicts this creates is fundamental to an understanding of our socially lived lives as individuals within social groups and the potential in societies and cultures for both inertia and change. Identity, as the collision (and, perhaps, collusion) of the personal with the social, therefore, provides a context for rich, varied, and complex philosophising, research and debate in the academic sphere. For example Butler (1990, 2005) considers performance aspects of identity particularly in relation to gender; Giddens (1991) considers identity in relation to modernity; Foucault’s (1988) work can be used to view identity in relation to discourses of power and the subjection of individuals; Althusser (1971) links identity to state ideology.

The following sections elucidate the understandings about identity which underpin the thesis. In writing about identity there are any number of theorists whose work might usefully be employed to frame the discussion. In this chapter, whilst I have referred to some and alluded to others, the key perspectives used are Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Social Identity Theory; Bruner (1987, 1991) and Ricoeur (1984) and Narrative Identity Theory; Bakhtin and Dialogism (1981); Goffman and the

'presentation of self' (1959) and Holland *et al's* conceptual framework of Figured Worlds (1998).

Taken together these theorists have enabled me to consider and reflect on identity as:

- embedded in social contexts
- narratively constituted
- performed in interaction with the performances of others
- agentively enacted within social structures

Personal and Social Identities and Social Identity Theory

For the purposes of this research, elements of personal identity are examined from a psychological perspective which takes 'identity' as that which makes the individual unique and suggests that patterns of thinking and behaviour arise from responses to external stimuli and experiences which mould the person (Erikson, 1968). In this way, in school, pupils can be seen to be acting as individuals and their responses to contexts and events could be understood as personalised in relation to their previous life histories (alongside their particular point of cognitive and/or biological development). This view of identity sets it apart from understanding individual enactments of identity within social contexts and instead sees personal identities as following particular developmental paths related to and potentially predicted by experiences in childhood and beyond. These developmental paths are linked also to cognitive and physical development factors.

From a sociological or social psychological perspective the role of the social group(s) to which individuals belong are foregrounded as being particularly relevant for the ways in which the individual defines him or herself – the personal identity being, in part, constituted from a 'social identity' (Jenkins, 2008). In the field of social psychology, 'social identity theory' (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) proposes that our personal identity – our self-concept, the sense of who we are – is derived

in part from our position within social groups and our understanding of how we are like or unlike others.

The study of social identity (identities held by or assigned to social groups) is concerned with what unites us, what enables us to interact and understand each other in our shared endeavour to make sense of our social lives. A social identity perspective considers what it is that makes us like others and how we can sort others (and ourselves) into groups who share some kind of sameness (Jenkins, 2008). Within that social context, our *personal* identity could be seen to be about our difference from others – what makes us unique – why it is we are as we are and why we behave as we do.

Seeing personal agency and individual thought and experience set alongside the enactment of social identity raises questions about how and why it is that we act as individuals in some contexts whilst deferring to group thought and behaviour in others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As social animals we sometimes act as members of a particular social group (being and doing the same as others) but can also function as unique agentive individuals (being and doing differently from others). If we only ever act within our group identity expectations and limitations then it is difficult to explain social change; yet to always only ever act as an individual without reference to social groups makes it impossible to explain social cohesion.

How and why it is that we act as either a group or an individual has received much attention (Brewer, 1991; Stangor, 2013). The extent to which we are constrained to identities assigned by social structures, power networks, discourse and ideologies (Althusser, 1971; Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1988) and the extent to which we are free to act according to our own will and reason is highly significant in the examination of our understanding of the individual within the social world and is a key theme throughout the thesis.

In addition, in order to understand our role within society, we need to be able to have some understanding of how we are perceived by others. We must, in some way, be able to self-objectify.

Snow & Anderson (1987), writing in *The American Journal of Sociology*, suggest that we can understand social identities as concerned with who others say we are – in the situating of persons as ‘social objects’, whereas personal identity is the individual’s sense of who they are – their ‘self-attributions’². That is, I recognise who I am because you are who you are and reciprocally recognise me as the person who I say I am. In the playing out of identity roles, therefore, we can only ‘be’ a particular kind of person if we are recognised and treated as such by others (Gee, 2000) and if others take on the appropriate corresponding roles: I can only ‘be’ (behave as, enact) your mother if you ‘are’ (behave as, enact) my child. In this way, the mere biological assignation of ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ could be seen to be of limited significance if the associated identity performances are not enacted. An important aspect of identity work, particularly regarding gender, is concerned with such enactments – performances – and the corresponding labelling, the naming of identities before, during and after the performance and how the performance itself constitutes the gender identity (Butler, 1990).

The personal and the social are intimately entangled; as individuals we must fulfil, perform and play out roles within a myriad of overlapping social contexts. All and any of the roles we play require some form of label or sense making device, so that we can make all facets of society and its functioning intelligible. Reflexively, however, our understanding of social life is constituted through our attempts to describe, explain and understand the performances of those who constitute it – including ourselves (Giddens, 1991). For society to function we need to assign and perform social identity roles and those very roles are the means by which we understand, sustain and perform our personal identities – our sense of who we are and where we fit. Without a social context in which ‘I’ am, there is no ‘I’ to be and thus personal identities are inextricably linked to the social world and cannot exist without it. In school, the identity roles for individuals and groups are bound by the context within which they exist as well as the ways in which they arise and are recognised, ascribed and enacted within that context and this presents a rich setting for research about the ways in which

² Snow & Anderson’s work is used to frame the analysis of the data in Chapter Four

children see themselves as agentic individuals as well as constrained to a particular social group (Côté, 2002; Kinney, 1993; Holland *et al*, 1998).

Structure versus Agency

How are we assigned and how do we assume, identity roles within society? What are the processes by which we come to be seen, to see ourselves, as particular kinds of people? Whilst it seems unlikely that the mantra 'you can be who you want to be' can be applied in all contexts and situations it appears equally unlikely that we are unable to have any agency at all in who we are, how we act and the identities we perform.

From a structural perspective, this thesis draws on the philosophical notion that identities are constructed through discourses within the social context (see Foucault, 1988; Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, who you are is also defined by who you are not – discourses (which exist 'outside' of self) categorise and subjectify (act on and within the self) individuals and groups and by so doing create the conditions within which identity positions are made (im)possible for individuals. In the context of a school, for example, children are discursively constructed as pupils and in the process of this they are prevented from taking on the identity of teacher. The discourse creates and sustains them as pupils but denies them the identity role of teacher since the discourse itself requires others (adults) to be cast in the role of teachers in order that the identity role of pupil exists. The discourses thus emphasise the difference, the other, and in so doing create and maintain relations of power between the identity roles and the social groups they create. School environment emphasises this through creating spaces from which children are excluded. Children cannot 'be' teachers in the school context and are thereby denied access to the power wielded over pupils by those in the teacher role (Youdell, 2006). It is important to note, however, that such discourses are culturally dependent and change over time – the 'monitor' system in school in the Victorian era, for example, did allow for some pupils to take on and enact aspects of a teacher identity with the corresponding access to some aspects of the associated power.

Hegemonic power structures (Gramsci, 1971) within social contexts, however, tend to perpetuate the differences created through the identity discourses and thereby maintain the power relations, the social roles and the ideologies which underpin them (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1977). From this structural position, identity roles are seen to be unconsciously taken up by individuals within social structures and accepted as part of the natural order, as a given. They are sutured or interpellated (Althusser, 1971) to the subject positions made available to them. Thus a child in school could be seen to take up the identity of pupil within the school context and enact it as part of the way things 'are' and does not see (or indeed look for) any other identity position.

However, this thesis also draws on an understanding of the interplay between human agency and choice and the ability to act outside of the structures which might be seen to reduce and constrain them to particular roles. This interplay of the macro societal structures and individual agency is theorised by Giddens (1986) as structuration which attempts to reconcile how individuals might exercise agency which might lead to structural change.

This means that there is a social structure – traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently.

Gauntlett, 2002 (unpaged)

Why and how people might start to 'behave differently' is, again, of interest in research and key to understanding social and cultural change. Foucault's (1988) notion of the 'technology of the self' however, suggests that the activities of individuals to 'improve' themselves (by doing things differently) are often the result of governmentality – a response to societal norms created by others and as such the subject becomes merely the agent of the state whilst believing that they are acting autonomously.

[Governmentality] While appearing to act in the name of individual freedom, autonomy, and choice... ultimately give[s] the power to experts to determine the ways in which identity can be defined.

Buckingham, 2008 p10

Thus, from this perspective, the choices of individuals are not seen as free choices, but rather as 'playing into the hands' of those who have already decided and limited what those choices can be. In schools, as previously suggested, the identity choices for individuals are limited and decided by those in positions of power. Children's access to identity roles in school is therefore limited – and they have a limited range of options for how to 'be' and 'do' in the context of secondary school in particular.

These arguments feed into discussions about why or how it might be that individuals or groups of people might begin to think and do differently in the outworking of societal activity. This key question continues to fuel the discussions (Giddens, 1991; Holland *et al*, 1998) about the challenges inherent in the attempts to disentangle the personal and social roles required for personal and societal coherence and continuity alongside social and individual development, change and progression.

The Presentation of Self

Goffman's (1959) work compares identity performances to those of actors performing in a play. He suggests that individuals are continually aware of how their identity performance is received by others and alert to the performances of others. He suggests that the performances are reciprocal and interdependent and, like theatrical performances, are bound by the script and setting for the performance. 'Dialogism' in identity work as expressed by Bakhtin (1981) can be understood in part as the presentation of 'self' in the expectation always of a response from others: an asking and an answering. This is discussed later in this chapter.

Further, a performative view of identity reflects on the relationships between what you do and who you are and sees the two as complexly interrelated and interdependent. Drawing on Austin's (1975) work about the performative utterance, Butler (1993) developed an understanding of the performatively constituted subject in relation to gender, arguing that gender identity performances

are not merely a response to discourse but the means by which the discourses (and associated identities) are produced, and that the repetitive act of performance ‘...functions to produce that which it declares’ (Butler, 1993 p107) – that is, we ‘are’ because we repeatedly ‘do’. However in an attempt to understand, as above, the agentic power of the individual, her work suggests that “... the performatively constituted subject can still deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive” (Youdell, 2006 p9). Thus, whilst Butler’s work is concerned in particular with the performance of gender, it offers insight into the ways in which those who are discursively and performatively constituted in one way or another across a range of social contexts, might still choose to perform in ways which enable them to be constituted differently. For Butler this is to be found in the repetition of ‘queer’³ performances which challenge the hegemonic societal norms and destabilise the ‘natural’ order. Outside of the context of gender and gender performance it is possible to understand how the link between the ‘label’ and the ‘performance’ for any identity which could currently seem to be bounded within a particular ‘way of being’, might be destabilised through individuals’ and groups’ repeated ‘queer’ performances.

Narrative identity

Within the debates about identity there is a focus on the ways in which personal identities are understood through the lifetime of individuals. Self-narrative, the development of a story of self, is seen as a means by which persons engage with their self-understandings to hold together past, and present selves and consider possible future selves (Bruner, 1987; Markus and Nurius, 1986; Ricœur, 1984) so that they are able to act in a way that is coherent and makes sense to themselves and to others.

In this way narratives of identity must draw on shared language, shared stories, so that the life stories told to the self facilitate the comprehensibility of the ‘I’ to others. As noted above, unless we

³ ‘Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ (Halperin, 1995 p62)

can identify those 'others' with whom we find ourselves interacting, we cannot understand who we, ourselves, are. But in the process of creating the 'stories of self' – in the choices we make about the form the stories take and the way that we tell them we reciprocally create ourselves. The 'I' of the life narrative is created by the stories we tell, bound to the narratives that already exist and shaped by the language with which we tell them. This is succinctly explained by Ricoeur (1995):

The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.

p147-8

Furthermore, Bruner (1987), in discussing the 'narrative achievement' of our lives, considers how the language and stories of our culture infiltrate our personal storying to the extent that they have the power to shape and even, to some extent, direct them.

...eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end they *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives. And given the cultural shaping to which I referred, we also become variants of the culture's canonical forms.

p694

As has been argued above, however, the need to account for agency and the possibility for self-direction in post-structuralist thinking requires that we consider ways in which we can use those very stories and the language they employ can be used in order to revise and re-author past selves and direct our future selves. Narration of self-stories must be seen as more than

... conservative, as an act that merely sustains and perpetuates the already existing discursive and cultural norms of the communities in which the narrating individual exists.

Worthington, 1996 p16

They hold a transformative power – power to change individual's self perceptions and also power to change the 'discursive and cultural norms' within which they are told. Thus the overarching

narratives of societies can be mediated by the 'small stories' of individuals (Bamberg, 2006, 2011; Georgakopoulou, 2006)⁴

Notwithstanding the source of the stories and their associated language, the stories of self we tell are understood to be powerfully instrumental in the creation of the 'I' of the teller (in the present) in and through the recreation of the 'me' of the told (in the past) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The language we use, understood as a signifying system, underpins conceptual, cultural and ideological self-positions and self-attributions which both describe *and* create the past, present and future selves which we tell and retell to ourselves and others. In the examination of the narratives of self we undertake, Bruner (*ibid*) suggests:

... that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualising that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future.

p708

The narratives of self we tell are told to others, presented to others, as well as to ourselves. As such they require an audience, a response. In Bakhtinian terms, as indicated above, there is always, integral to the telling, the expectation of a response. The dialogic nature of language, of interaction, requires that the stories I tell are presented with the expectation that my audience, my listeners, my readers, will respond to me, to my story, so that the actualisation of self is rendered possible only through the dialogic response of the listener. Without a responsive audience the 'I-for-others' cannot facilitate the on-going and reflexive activity of the construction of I-for-the-self. And the 'other-for-me' of my audience cannot meaningfully present themselves to me (Bahktin, 1981).

The stories we tell of self can be seen as heuristic in their endeavour- it is through the telling that we find the means for also working out who we are (particularly from a psychological, therapeutic perspective) and how we can direct our future selves – a lifelong undertaking (Ezzy, 1998; Ricœur,

⁴ Bamberg (2011) defines 'small stories' as '... narratives-in-interaction, the way stories surface in everyday conversation ...' (p15) and presents these as an alternative to understanding identity construction through the narration of 'big stories' such as the retelling of life events.

1984). So our stories are not ever complete or finished – they are continually subject to revision and reinterpretation – our pasts are revisited in the light of the present and the present in the light of the past and revised retellings of the past (Bakhtin, 1981, Bruner, 1987, Ricoeur, 1984). Our narrative is adjusted to account for new self-knowings and new self-knowings redirect the narrative both into both the future and in the re-telling of the past. Markus & Nurius (1986) describe how these self-narratives allude to ‘possible selves’ – projected future identities which are either desired or feared. So that the stories which we tell of future selves ‘try out’ a range of possibilities – and can be used to guide the choices made by individuals in the ways in which they present themselves to others.

The stories of self however remain imaginative constructs, imaginative recreations of our lives and selves which serve to facilitate a sense of self, a sense of I and me which is coherent and cohesive – intelligible to self and others. As such, these stories cannot said to be ‘true’ – they are a representation of the self – imaginatively constructed, drawing on cultural resources and discourses in order that the personal self is understood within the socially encultured context within which it is experienced (Bruner, 1987). They cannot, either, be said to be fictive – existing outside of what is ‘real’ or possible – yet they are clearly interpretive in nature and also open to the interpretation, the reading, of others. But without the facility to narrate ourselves into being in some form that enables us to make sense of our lives as individuals and as part of wider societal structures we would be unable to perform ourselves – and therefore our role in our social context – with any kind of certainty.

Giddens (1991) develops this as the ‘reflexive project of self’ saying:

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going ‘story’ about the self.

p54 (italics in original)

Côté (2002) describes 'identity capital' in a similar way – and this can be seen as a valuable means by which a coherent self can be maintained – through the ability to weave together apparently disparate threads of identity into an overall consistent narrative.

In order to construct this narrative of self we need to draw on narratives which will facilitate the sense making process – and thereby make use of canonical stories and story forms – shared narratives which tell stories of the generic which we can particularise to ourselves. In the process of developing a narrative identity, individuals draw on a shared understanding of 'story' within their own cultural context, drawing on the discourse and language of stories in order to make sense of their lives and their experiences as they understand them. These 'life stories' therefore commonly draw on both the 'cultural canon' of stories available to them and key elements of narrative prose (Bruner, 1987; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Ricœur, 1984).

A narrative approach to identity enables us to conceptualise the distinction between 'I' – as author of the story of self (self-as-subject) and 'me' as the protagonist (self-as-object). This can also be set alongside the notion of a personal identity (I as the author of the life story) and a social identity (me as a character in the socially shared narrative). In this way we see the agency of personal identity through the process of authoring alongside the bounded identity presented to us through the social context (the shared narratives) within which we tell our stories.

The examination of shared narratives as they appear within cultural contexts is a significant means by which identity narratives can be viewed and interpreted. Whilst autobiographical and biographical accounts of self and other might be more obviously useful, fictional texts, too, offer representations and narratives which contribute to the stories available to individuals as they develop their story of self (Clough, 2002). This thesis draws on stories told in fictional television programmes and their representations of identities as one of the cultural resources on which children draw in their identity work – this is examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

Figured worlds

Figured worlds as theorised by Holland *et al* are described as collectively understood cultural models which provide an imaginative template by which we can predict the events, discourses, actions and players within particular cultural activities so that we can understand how to play our part in them.

By 'figured world', then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents [...] who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state [...] as moved by a specific set of forces ...

Holland *et al.*, 1998 p52

This links once more to the presentation of self as an actor within a performance (Goffman, 1959). As a 'realm of interpretation' figured worlds provide a means for understanding how individual agents navigate the social worlds which they inhabit and also how they are able to act with agency within societal structures. Drawing on Vygotskian notions of the role of social interaction in the learning of culturally specific symbols and the Bakhtinian perspectives of the 'inner' life – figured worlds represent a means by which we can respect both social and personal aspects of identity and recognise how individuals draw on the cultural resources available to them in order to fashion, to form and re-form their self-understandings, their personhood, within the social sphere. Individuals are driven to behave in ways which arise from cultural principles and expectations but are also required to respond to situations which may conflict with or challenge cultural precepts and for which there are no clear 'rules' for behaviour or where the usual rules cannot be applied. These situations, therefore, require that a behavioural response is improvised – drawing on whatever cultural resources are to hand to construct the response. Holland *et al* (1998) mark these improvisations as the 'openings' for both cultural and individual change.

Figured worlds are an eminently suitable conceptual model therefore, for the examination of identity in adolescent peer groups because they provide a framework which embraces the complexity, contradictions, tensions and power struggles which characterise the domain. Schools

and the peer hierarchies within them can be conceptualised as figured worlds which children have internalised as simplified stories, or typical pictures which help to frame their understanding and responses to social situations, drawing on the cultural resources to hand.

Summary

This chapter presents a conceptualisation of identity which understands the individual as a unique being in interaction with other unique beings within social structures.

Identity is understood to be both socially and personally constituted and that the outworking (or performance) of identity in interaction with others who act as both audience and co-performers is integral to the actualisation of self. These performances are constrained by the associated identities and 'scripts' described by the social contexts in which they are performed. Where individuals are able to engage in the conscious or unconscious performance of 'other' identities at a micro level within social contexts, there is the potential for the social scripts and associated identities to undergo change at a macro level.

The means by which each unique individual develops a sense of continuity across time and in variable and overlapping social contexts is through the creation and sustenance of a 'story of self'. This story is told by drawing on culturally available narratives including the contextualised social scripts and is continually re-written and re-performed in an attempt to create a coherent narrative which underpins a continuous and consistent self. These acts of the narration and performance of self are also seen to be reflexively constitutive of the self.

CHAPTER

THREE

METHODOLOGICAL

ISSUES

Chaos was the law of nature;

Order was the dream of man.

Adams (1918, p377)

Introduction

Chapter One established that the focus for the thesis is developed around four key strands:

Identity, Adolescence and Peer Groups

RQ1: How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

Sub questions:

- Does the school context contribute to the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies?
- What is the significance of adolescence as the time frame in which this identity work takes place?
- What is the significance of school transfer in identity work?
- Does children's talk about themselves and their peers show how they identify with and position themselves within peer group hierarchies in the school context?

Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships

RQ 2: How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do they perform or resist available identities?
- To what extent/how are they critically aware of the identity performances of themselves or others?

Figured Worlds, Stereotypes and the Media

RQ3: What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do children draw on media stereotypes as cultural resources in their identity work?
- To what extent/how do they resist stereotypical narratives of peer groups and their interrelationships?

The Coherent Self

RQ 4: How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?

Sub questions:

- How/does children's talk about themselves and others demonstrate continuity in their identity work in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?
- What role might the reproduced voices of others and self through reported speech play in the development of a sense of a coherent self?

Chapter Two, in the discussion of the perspectives from which identity is examined, situated this research within the post-modern turn (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Whilst I tend towards a post-modern sensibility in my suspicion of grand narratives of truth and knowledge (Lyotard, 1984), I recognise in myself the instinctively human pull towards a more modernist desire for certainty, facts and knowing (Edwards & Usher, 2002). This is also set within the context of the inexorable requirement to 'make a contribution to knowledge' through the presentation of this doctoral thesis. Therefore, whilst the research reported here seeks to do no more than to offer a particular way of looking at peer group hierarchies in schools and avoids overt claims to incontestable truths, I have

also tried to make sense of the data in a way which can make at least tentative claims to possible new understandings – a contribution to knowledge.

It is evident that any research questions will be only partially and tangentially addressed by the collection and analysis of data – whatever form the data takes and no matter how it is analysed or inscribed. This research offers, however, a way of looking at children's identity work in schools which contributes to the on-going attempts to engage in scholarly ways with the conceptualisation of identity and its significance in children's social lives.

Researching the Social World: Positioning

The nature of our existence in the social world, what it 'is', how it is perceived, what can be known about it and how this can be shared with others is persistently troubling for researchers (Denscombe, 2009). The research described here does not seek to 'know' or uncover a 'reality' or 'truth' and eschews the notion of a social world which can be discovered, described and explained and made sense of in an objective and rational way (Edwards & Usher, 2002). Social life, in the context of this thesis, is seen to be a complex, messy business (Law, 2004; MacLure, 2003) and the purpose of this research is seen not as bringing order to the messiness but a means to illuminate the complexity and contribute to the debate (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe, 2001; Radford, 2006; Stenhouse, 1981).

Thus I do not seek to make grand claims to know, to understand or to explain, but instead I have looked at one aspect of social life in a particular way, from particular angles and written about what I have seen and set it amongst how others have looked at the same sort of thing and what they have seen and said. The position throughout the thesis is that "... uncertainty and ambiguity are recognised and accepted as an inevitable feature of a conflictual and uncertain world ..." (Usher in Scott, 2002 p62) and that this is inevitably reflected in any kind of research into the social world.

In accordance with the broad understandings of identity previously described and the perspectives from different disciplines outlined in the Chapter Two, the approach taken in this thesis could be described as that of the *bricoleur* mooted by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) from the term generated by Levi-Strauss (1966) and further taken up and explored by Kincheloe (2001).

The qualitative researcher-as-bricoleur uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials are at hand.

Denzin & Lincoln 1998 p4

Kincheloe (2001) suggests that such multi-perspectival, interdisciplinary approaches can avoid ‘one-sided reductionism’ and create a ‘new kind of rigour’ (p682) in research which does not hold itself accountable to just one way of seeing. Such approaches aim, through the research process, to assemble the *bricolage*: “... a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998 p4). Whilst the approaches to data collection – the methods applied – were reasonably homogenous, the *bricolage* emerged through the use of the different frames through which the data were analysed.

As explained in the introduction, this thesis is structured in such a way that each of the chapters in Parts II and III takes a different perspective from which to examine the data. In some instances, within the context of different chapters, the same section of transcript is examined and different possible understandings are elucidated using different tools of interpretation. For example, children’s talk about popularity status can be considered as an aspect of the figured world of peer group hierarchies in school (examining themes of salience, identification and savoir faire within the data – see Chapter Five) but also as the enactment of their social identity, in line with social identity theory, through analysis of the in-group, out-group behaviours demonstrated through the ways in which they embrace or distance themselves from ‘the popular kids’ (Chapter Four). The intention, therefore, was to use different layers of analysis which when viewed together create a complex and multi-perspectival representation of the work of identity with which the children are engaged. This ‘messy’ approach is a conscious choice – an attempt to acknowledge and replicate the messiness of social life itself. Whilst Kincheloe (*ibid*) suggests that the depth of knowledge and understanding of the perspectives and methods which cross disciplines to which the *bricoleur* aspires is out of reach for neophyte researchers working within the timespan of a doctoral programme – he nevertheless advocates, the ‘naming of the process’ in order to foreground the aim and reach of the research. This, therefore, is my purpose here.

With the above in mind there have been conscious decisions and choices about where to stand and how to look: about what is worth seeing and how I will be able to see it. So whilst I did not consider methods and approaches with the idea that they would simply and unproblematically provide me with 'facts' or tell me how it 'is' for children, I did look for methods of data collection and approaches to analysis which might help me see things in different ways and which had the potential to open up possibilities for seeing rather than close them down. Loosely structured, open-ended group interviews using drawings as elicitation tools (this is explained more fully later) were, for example, seen to be a means by which children's talk might flow more naturally, allowing them some space to direct the conversations towards what was salient to them rather than being solely directed by my questions – allowing for their possibilities, not just mine (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002). Rogan & de Kock (2005) characterise this as a performative narrative approach to data collection – where the researcher takes a non-directive, participatory, listening stance which allows the participants opportunities for 'long turns' so that the data collected are correspondingly rich and layered and participant-centred. Additionally, in recognition of the complex ways in which identity work manifests itself in social life, the identity work that children undertook within the context of the interview itself: their performances to me and to each other (along with the 'performance' of their drawings) – constituted data which would contribute further to the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The process of analysis (described in more detail later in this chapter) opened up possibilities through the multi-perspectival approach discussed above – applying different frameworks for analysis from different approaches, contexts and disciplines to the same data.

Presenting the Research: Writing

Part of the complex messiness of the post-modern research process is the paradox which requires that research 'findings' are communicated – and this would seem to require the presentation of some kind of 'truth' (Bridges, 1999). Fictional approaches to the writing of research are one means by which researchers within the post-modern paradigm retain some possibility of ambiguity in terms of what the research 'means' (Banks & Banks, 1998; Clough, 2002; Spindler, 2008). Whilst this appeals to me as a means by which research findings can be mediated in an effective and authentic way (authentic, because this approach acknowledges the inherently fictional/narrative status of identity in social life (Hall, 1987 in Thornham & Purvis, 2005)) – it was beyond my expertise as a researcher to take such an approach in this thesis.

However, this research had to be written and the writing of it is integral to its realisation. But this act of writing both opens up and closes down what the research 'is' – part of the doing of it and part of its un-doing.

Writing gets you 'closer' by condemning you always to be separated from that which you desire – separated by the very words that are bringing you close.

MacLure, 2003 p 165

Without inscription – or retelling – the research remains apart and unknowable but the act of dissemination in any form expedites the inevitability of the mis-telling. There is always a gap between what is written and what 'is' or might be, for writing must always and inevitably involve loss (Derrida, 1973). In writing this thesis I am writing only a very small part of the totality of what constituted the research process (nor have I written at all about what I considered lay beyond the bounds of what I had nominated as the 'research'). I have selected what to tell and how to tell it – which story to tell and with which words it should be told. I have selected and crafted the writing – I am, again, the *bricoleur* (Levi-Strauss, 1966) in the writing as well as the doing, piecing together the

fragments of what, from my vantage point, weaves together to make a whole, drawing on the tools – the words – which are to hand. What is not written is potentially no less important, no less relevant, but has been left out of any telling. This, like all research, is a mis-told story.

Bakhtin (1981) reflects on the role of reproduced voices within heteroglossic texts in the construction of identity and this is developed in Chapter Seven. Reproduced voices are, also, central to the interpretation and analysis of the data in this thesis. However, they are also pertinent within the context of the methodological underpinning for the research approach. Research relies on words for its dissemination; on the words of others to situate it within a research context and in this case, the words of children provided the data for analysis. Whilst *children's* reproduction of voices are embedded in the data, in writing the thesis I replicate this process – by reproducing the voices of both scholars and children for my own purposes (Baynham, 1999).

Moreover, from a Bakhtinian perspective, the words I use are not neutral and objective in their representation of the research but they are 'shot full of intentions and accents' (Bakhtin 1981 p293). They are words which have been used before and carry previous meanings and uses with them and as I appropriate them they merge with my own authorial voice and my own intentions – my signature. As I write, I construct – by drawing on the discourses, the language, the words of others to present my interpretation of what I see – using the words of others to create my own meaning which will always, nevertheless, be tied to the meanings the words themselves bring with them and the context in which they were used – the 'taste of their previous use' (*ibid*). And, in the reading of what I have written my readers will apply their meanings – creating further distance – further loss- but at the same time drawing closer to the authorial intent (Smith, 2008; Spindler, 2008; Winter, 1991). Whilst I looked for layers in the doing of this research, I must acknowledge, too, the layers that are created by the writing of it.

The Research Design: Doing

The Research Design: Overview

The data collection was designed in two phases:

- Phase One – small group, loosely structured interviews with drawings and photographs with children at the end of Year 6 (their final year in primary school setting); nineteen children in total
- Phase Two – individual or pair, loosely structured interviews with some of the same children in Year 7 towards the end of their first year in secondary school; six children in total

The Research Context

As in the UK, most countries have a transition between a 'primary' and 'secondary' phase of schooling and in most cases this is around the age of 11 or 12 – an age commensurate with the period of life referred to as 'early adolescence' (the inherent ambiguities of this term are discussed later in this thesis). This transition is generally understood to be significant for children from educational, social and personal perspectives (for example see Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Pratt & George, 2005; Warin, 2010; Weller, 2007).

This research was undertaken in South East England. In this part of the UK, primary schooling is provided from the age of 4 to 11 (Year R (Reception) to Year 6) then secondary schooling from the age of 11 to 16 (Year 7 to Year 11). On completion of primary school children can progress to a range of different types of secondary school contexts:

- Selective Grammar Schools (both single sex and co-educational)
- Non-selective High Schools (co-educational only)

- Technology Schools (some with their own selection process)
- Independent schools (with a selection process)
- Church Schools (attendance at church is required for admission)
- Special Schools
- Additionally any of the above schools might have a further specialism such as languages or the arts which distinguishes them from other similar schools

There is an element of parental choice but this is subject to a range of criteria (as well as the grammar school selection process: the 'Kent Test') including relative distance lived from the chosen school. The schools vary in size – some children might move from Primary school with less than 100 pupils to a large secondary school with up to 1500 children. Year 6 children are generally informed as to which school they will be attending in Year 7 in the March preceding the September start in the following academic year. Schools then offer various transition activities before the summer break to acclimatise children to their new school and to some of the expectations of them and for them (Kent County Council, 2014).

Although not a focus for this research, the process by which children and their parents understand and make choices about the context for their secondary schooling is significant in their understanding of the kind of pupil they are and the expectations for them in terms of academic or other success or failure in school and beyond (Barrow, 2012; Ball & Gewirtz, 1997; Gewirtz, 2001).

The Researcher

As discussed above, the researcher and her positionality through the research is significant and from a post-modern standpoint is seen as a constituent part of the whole research process (Alexander, 2006; Greenbank, 2003). Why I am researching this, asking the questions I ask and seeing what I see in the data is because of who I am. How I am now inscribing the process is inevitably further evidence of me in the research – and my authorial intent (Bakhtin, 1981) and as Denzin (2000) reminds us ‘writing is not an innocent practice’ (p256) – I am writing from a position. I came to this research as someone who had been involved in Primary Education as both a teacher and a teacher educator and someone involved with secondary school as a parent. Although I was in some senses an ‘insider’ I wanted to come across to the children as an ‘outsider’ – someone to whom they would have to explain and describe and perform identities so that what might be implicit could be made more explicit. In the interview process in particular, my role as the ‘other’, the audience for their present performances of self and their retellings of themselves, was particularly significant and this is discussed later in this chapter.

As the mother of children who were engaged in the transition to secondary school I was also party to some of my own children’s thoughts and their articulation of their understanding of what it would be like and how they saw themselves in the contexts of both primary and secondary school. As a mother I had also watched the television programmes my children had watched and seen some of the same representations of high school that they had. My own imaginative construction of what high school was like, the figured worlds which I recognised as ‘high school’, shared something of what they, and, I suggest their peers too, had seen or would recognise.

In the doing of this research I undoubtedly undertook my own identity work in my developing researcher-identity and in the conscious decisions about how to present myself to them. In so doing there was reciprocal interaction with the children as both performers of and audiences for our joint

constructions of identity – which contributed to the process and content of the data collection (Goffman, 1959).

Ethics: Overview

From an ethical standpoint there were a number of issues to consider and the ethical procedures set in place by the University of Sheffield were followed (See Appendix A1 for the Ethics Form and Appendix A2 for confirmation of receipt of ethical approval to proceed). There was a need to consider particularly carefully the ethical issues associated with working with children in research (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2012). As the participants were all aged between ten and twelve it was necessary to ensure that they were able to assent to their participation in the research in an informed way and that they felt under no pressure to do so (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010).⁵ It was made clear to them that they could withdraw from the research at any point and that their contributions would be kept anonymous. In particular I wanted them to feel confident that their teachers would not find out what they had said to me. The headteacher of the schools involved gave their consent as gatekeepers (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000) for the research to take place and facilitated the opportunities to meet with the children on the school premises. I also obtained parental consent to interview the children – making sure that they, too, were informed about the nature, purpose and consequences of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

I was aware that power inequalities were threaded through the interviews and that my adulthood, my association with educative contexts, my status as visitor in the school and my role as a parent were all aspects of my identity that positioned me as a particular kind of person who had recourse to a wider range of ways of controlling the interview context than the children did (Punch, 2002). My approach to the interviews was designed to minimise this power differential as much as possible but

⁵ My children have also both assented to being written about in this thesis and my son has given permission for photographs of him to be used. 'David' is a pseudonym.

in the understanding that it was not something that could be completely removed and was, in any case, bound up in the work of identity throughout the data collection (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2007).

The interviews in both phases were recorded on audio and video – with the children and their parents' full knowledge and permission (Cohen *et al*, 2011). One video recording was a fixed camera on a tripod and a second, hand held 'Flipcam' was used to focus in on individual children, their responses and their drawing. A significant impact of the use of a handheld camera was that the children's drawing in progress was recorded. This meant that as part of the process of analysis the trajectory of the drawing including where children rubbed out or added pieces could be identified. The children stated that they were happy to be recorded and did not appear uncomfortable or inhibited by the presence of the cameras. My abiding aim was to ensure that I treated my participants honestly, fairly and respectfully and that they felt at ease through the research process (Aubrey *et al*, 2000). The specific ethical issues which arose in the different phases of the research are discussed later in this chapter.

The Research Design: Detail

Phase One

Small group, loosely structured interviews with drawings and photos with children at the end of Year 6

Three local schools were approached and all the Year 6 children at each school were invited to participate in the research. The schools were all located in northeast Kent. The catchment areas for each of the three schools were predominantly white working class with the number of children with special educational needs and eligibility for pupil premium identified as above the national average. At this initial visit I explained my role to the children as a teacher educator and a mother, but I made sure that it was clear that I was not a teacher and no longer worked in the school context. I told them I was trying to understand what it was like to move from Primary to Secondary school and what they thought they would be like in their new school.

As a result of this initial visit there were in total 19 participants in Phase One⁶

- Five boys and three girls from Browntown
- Two boys and two girls from Rosetown and
- Three boys and four girls from Jollytown

As part of the initial visits to the school and the invitations to participate I asked the children to list for me the television programmes with which they were familiar and/or watched which were either wholly or substantially set in secondary or high school settings. Pictures of the characters of the most popular of these programmes were then used in the second part of the Phase One Interviews.

⁶ School and participant names used are pseudonyms

Ethics – Phase One

I was aware of the potential for children to be anxious about the move to secondary school, particularly if they had not been allocated a place at their (or their parents') first choice of school. There was the additional layer of potential conflict as the children who participated were heading to different types of schools which present a hierarchy in terms of the academic 'worth' of the children who attend. Whilst this was potentially interesting in relation to the research question about peer hierarchies (for example that going to a grammar school was not necessarily seen as a good thing by children whichever school they themselves were going to) there was also potential to reiterate negative feelings about the children's status because of the type of school to which they were going. There were also other anxieties expressed during the interviews – frequently about the journey to school, the potential for bullying and the amount of homework which they would be expected to undertake. Where these were mentioned I clarified that they had raised these concerns with other adults and that they were being supported in other ways with these worries. On one occasion one of the children became upset at being teased about being a nerd because she was going to be attending a grammar school. Because my approach to the interviews aimed to be relaxed and conversational in style and I had presented myself as a friendly, mother-type figure, I talked about my daughter's similar experiences to diffuse any upset and to ensure that the child was happy to continue with the interview.

Ethically, I felt I needed to provide reassurance and support for the children about their move to secondary school and this was at times overt. The focus for the research was about them and their identity in school rather than what school itself would be like – however it is clear that their perceptions of their school would necessarily impact on their sense of the role they would play within it. This is discussed further in the analysis of the data.

Methods

Phase One Part A: Interviews and Drawings

During the interview process, I wanted the children to reflect on, present and describe aspects of identity performances by themselves and their peers in the context of school. I wanted to be sure that I did not ask them to tell me about what they thought *it* would be like at their new school –not what the school itself would be like – rather I was interested in how they themselves might change or stay the same. Importantly, I wanted to hear the children’s own words and voices in their construction of self and their reflexive understanding of the role or roles they enacted and responded to. I wanted to hear the ‘identity talk’ (Snow & Anderson, 1987) with which they engaged when presenting themselves to me as a particular kind of person in school. The interview context enabled me to ask questions which spoke indirectly to their identity work without overtly asking: ‘Who is it that you say you are? Who is it that others say you are?’ But their responses were also embedded within their performance of identity to me in the interview context. This therefore offered two perspectives on the ways which identity was being performed and re-performed – the present presentation (how they were in the interview itself) and the past re-presentation (how they talked about how they were).

Who I was and how I presented myself to them as the audience for their performance was therefore hugely significant (Fontana & Frey, 1998). Whilst I could do nothing to change the fact of my adulthood, I did not want to be seen as an authoritative adult figure from within a school context – I did not want to present as a ‘teacher’ and they my ‘pupils’. I wanted them to feel able to transgress boundaries that are usually evident in a teacher-pupil relationship particularly in terms of the language they used in our interactions. I made sure it was clear to them that I had no connection with their school. I assured them that what they said would be kept anonymous and that no-one but myself would watch the video footage of the interview. I introduced myself by my first name, wore

jeans and a T-shirt and referred frequently to my own children to foreground my role as a mother. I joked with them, they joked and laughed and indulged in 'off task' talk and behaviour. I imposed no rules for behaviour and set out no sanctions. I provided drink and biscuits as a break part way through and I attempted to facilitate a relaxed and spontaneous environment for conversation (Punch, 2002). In one of the interviews one of the participants noted that they were "... talking just like we do in the playground ...". This suggests that I had had some success in establishing a secure environment for the children's talk and appeared to have won their trust to participate openly.

As an adult who was previously unknown to them I felt that these Phase One interviews would be best undertaken with groups. This offered a more relaxed atmosphere as the children knew and were comfortable with each other and could interact with each other as well as with me (Cohen *et al*, 2011; Einarsdóttir, 2007). In addition I wanted to avoid the uncomfortable, unnatural turn taking responses that might arise from a group discussion, such as when formally sitting in a semi-circle or round a table. The children were therefore given the task of drawing a picture of how they imagined they might be when they were in Year Seven (see Appendix C for the script used to introduce this task to all groups). This was set as the 'purpose' of the interview but acted also as a means of facilitating more natural conversation around the key research questions. The drawings themselves constituted a further representation (along with what they said) of their identity performance both for the present and the projected future.

The use of drawing in this way was supportive of a loosely structured interview approach. Some elements of the key questions for the research were asked directly, for example: "What do you think you will be like when you are in Year 7?" (A question also addressed through the drawing activity). However other data were gathered through the ways in which the children talked about themselves, about each other (and other peers), to each other and to me. The interviews were therefore reflexively constitutive of data which could, in the one event of the interview context, offer potential for drawing together aspects of what might count as identity work from three

different perspectives: their talk about self, their talk about others and their drawings. The interview procedure, although necessarily in a 'false' environment, attempted as far as possible to recreate a natural, relaxed conversational approach. The questions I asked were either broad, interrogative statements or questions which were intended to avoid leading the children's answers. This included 'Tell me more about your drawing'; 'Why have you drawn that?'; 'Can you explain that a bit more?'. At other points the questions were directly focused on aspects of the drawing – sometimes clarifying what the picture represented. For example, in Tony's first drawing I asked what the symbols which bordered his picture were. At other points I needed help to interpret the children's writing where the spelling was somewhat esoteric – for example Robert's drawing of the 'Sice' teacher was clarified as 'science'. Throughout the drawing I reminded the children of the purpose of the activity by asking questions such as 'Is that what you think you will be like at secondary school?' I also prompted the children to consider how they might change in secondary school as this was significant for the research – asking questions such as 'Do you think you will be different?' or 'Is that what you are like now?' At points the conversations developed beyond the drawings to general discussions about secondary school including expectations about other children and teachers – I asked questions such as 'What sorts of children do you think you will be friends with?'; 'What other kinds of children will there be?' as their perception of other children and their relationship to them was integral to the ways in which they saw themselves. The interviews were therefore neither strictly unstructured nor structured with me participating as a genuine respondent – offering my own views, thoughts, opinions as part of the natural flow of conversation.

Because the children were engaged in a drawing activity, if the conversation flagged or naturally stalled there was the recourse to the drawing in the ensuing silence which meant the silence was easily tolerated, and appeared natural rather than disquieting (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Hunleth (2011) suggests that adult researchers need to acknowledge that using such approaches is also 'for' the adult researcher – it is a means by which they feel able to gain insights from children – not just because they might feel it is 'child-centred' or more accessible for them. The drawing activity

stimulated questions from me and also from each other. Whilst it was clear that at times the children were drawing on each other's ideas and incorporating them into their own drawings and talk, this also acted as a stimulus for further discussion and talk. I explained to the children that they could also add words or writing to their drawings if they would like to and I offered children the opportunity to write if they were unsure how they could put something they wanted to communicate in a drawing.

The strength of this approach was that it provided an extra dimension to the data collected – and enabled some further clarification of the thinking with which the children were engaging (Punch, 2002). However it is acknowledged that whilst for some children drawings were an accessible and enjoyable way to communicate through the research, for others their perceived limited drawing ability and the abstract nature of what they were being asked to draw meant that their drawings did not appear to offer any significant additions to their verbal contribution. It is therefore important to note that whilst the drawings provided another layer to the data collection they were seen as integral to the conversation – of the moment – constructed alongside the spoken words and in the context of the interview. For this reason, whilst the drawings are used as supplementary data, they were not analysed as discrete pieces of data (this is discussed more fully later in the chapter).

Phase One Part B: Interviews using photographs as elicitation tools

After a short break the second part of the interview took place. The children were shown pictures of the characters from the programmes which had been listed in my first recruitment visits to the school. The role of the photographs was to provide an open-ended means by which children's responses to the characters could be generated with as little prompting as possible from me (Harper, 2002). I wanted to know how they related to the stereotypical characterisations rather than leading them to particular use of language.

I drew on the following questions as part of the discussion as opportunities naturally arose:

- Which of these programmes do you recognise?
- What can you tell me about the characters in the pictures?
- Which characters would you like to have as your friend?

I used the photos primarily to bring talk about media stereotypes to the fore without leading or introducing language through overt questioning. In asking the children to 'tell me about the characters' I was able to open up a discussion which enabled the children to use their own choice of language to describe the characters. Again ensuring that as far as possible the children were leading the conversations where they wanted them to go (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002).

Phase Two – individual or pair, loosely structured interviews in Year 7

Phase Two of the research was undertaken approximately one year after the initial interviews in Phase One.

Ethics in Phase Two

As part of the process of consent in Phase One, children and their parents were asked to indicate if they were happy for me to get back in touch with them for Phase Two of the research. In all 17/19 of the participants agreed to this in principle. In practice the process of organising this second phase was more difficult than anticipated. Most parents had requested that I make this second contact with them and their child through their school – this proved to be problematic in a number of ways.

For example, some children had subsequently changed their choice of secondary school and were not enrolled at the school they had indicated on their consent form. It was not possible to contact these children. Where letters were sent to parents via the school, if no response was received it was difficult to ‘chase’ the response as I was outside of the school organisation. The gatekeepers of the secondary schools, particularly the larger ones, were difficult to identify and to make contact with. Although my initial contact was with Headteachers via email, I rarely received a response from them. My next contact was the Head of Year 7 who could usually be identified from the website but who might be equally non-responsive. The sense I got was that this was not important enough for many of the ‘gatekeepers’ to even merit a response. I received only one response declining my request to contact children through the school. The most common response was none at all.

Once I had made contact and received parental consent I then needed a point of contact at the school through whom to make the practical arrangements to meet with the children. This, too, was a lengthy process requiring a persistent approach to get times and days fixed. On two occasions,

once a date was fixed, one of the children whom I had hoped to interview was absent and it was not possible to arrange another time to visit the school. On one occasion when I arrived at the school to interview a child, when the Head of Year 7 tried to track down where they were, they discovered that they had transferred to a different school in the previous week.

The interviews in Phase Two were conducted on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis depending on the number of children in each school. The six children who participated in this phase came from four different schools:

- Simtown: a co-educational grammar school (1 participant).
- Ramstown: a single sex (boys) grammar school (1 participant)

In both grammar schools the numbers of children eligible for pupil premium is well below the national average, as is the number of children who speak English as an additional language and those children who have a special educational need. The pupil population is predominantly of white British middle class origin.

- Crosstown : a co-educational high school (2 participants – two separate 1:1 interviews)
- Greentown: a co-educational high school (2 participants – one, 1:2 interview)

Both high schools are larger than average and have high numbers of children with special educational needs, or who are eligible for pupil premium. The majority of pupils in both these schools are of white British heritage and from middle and working class backgrounds.

Whilst initially receiving consent from the parent for Phase One and assent from the child for Phase Two, the parents of one child at Ramstown subsequently did not give consent for the data from the Phase Two interview to be used in the research.

The Interviews

The interviews were conducted in the children’s schools and again took the form of a loosely structured interview which aimed to support the children in feeling relaxed and comfortable and to continue to develop the rapport which I felt had been established in Phase One. The interviews were undertaken with either one or two children and although the original intention was that the children would draw a picture to represent how they saw themselves in Year 7, this proved more difficult in the context of small groups. Where, in the larger group context, the time for drawing supported moments of silence during the interviews, this was more difficult when there were just one or two children in the group. I found that I was interrupting the children’s drawing and distracting them with questions, expecting them to be able to ‘multi-task’. This meant that in some instances the drawings were either incomplete or rushed or not even started.

Summary of Data collection

| Phase One | | |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Jollytown | Group 1 Parts A and B | Group 2 Parts A and B |
| Participants | Sean, Helen B., Laura | Helen K., Susan, Lee, Joseph |
| Browntown | Group 1 Parts A and B | Group 2 Parts A and B |
| Participants | Tony, Jeremy, Jonathan, Robert, Thomas | Claire, Melody, Frances |
| Rosetown | Group 1 Parts A and B | Group 2 Parts A and B |
| Participants | Kieran* | Maddy, Nadine, Christopher, |

*Two other children participated in this group but the signed letters of consent from the parents were mislaid by the school.

| Phase Two | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Simtown | Laura | |
| Crosstown | Frances | Robert |
| Greentown | Christopher Nadine | |
| Ramstown | Thomas [Jeremy]** | |

**Jeremy participated in the interview with Thomas but parental consent was subsequently withdrawn.

Analysing the Data

At the end of the data collection period in Phase Two I found myself faced with several hours of video and audio recordings together with the pictures that the children had drawn in both phases of the research. I had intended to examine the data for themes and to use an approach such as coding (of both interview transcripts and the drawings) on the assumption that this would be the best way to draw out that which was pertinent, of worth. In the event, the process of data collection highlighted to me the ways in which identity work takes place at many levels and in many ways simultaneously. The interviews themselves, as has been discussed, constituted identity work and this generated talk (and drawings) that was not just about identity, but a means by which identity work was being realised. The choices which children made in what they said, how they said it; what they drew and how they drew it – were significant for the ways in which they presented who they saw themselves to be and how they wanted others to see them (as well as how they believed that others saw them) within the context of the interviews.

I wanted to find a way in which I could emphasise this complexity, the layered-ness and keep the data as whole as possible, seeing it not just as a sum of parts but first and foremost as a contingent, messy whole. There was a desire to retain a sense of the individuality and ‘difference’ of each of the participants but also to see where and how commonalities arose with respect to the particular foci of the research.

As part of this holistic approach I wanted to articulate a sense of how the children appeared to me – a partial and perspectival account of what I had taken from the ways in which they had performed ‘the self’ to myself and their peers. In the chapters that follow this takes the form of a short ‘pen portrait’ of those participants who provide the focus for analysis. Identity, as understood throughout this research, is in part about the performance of self to others and how others interpret the performance (Goffman, 1959). Thus, although my interpretations of the children’s identity

performances are clearly subjective and contestable they form part of the complex picture of identity – one of the layers – which I wanted to present.

Whilst the data generated through the drawing clearly offered something by way of children's identity work, I was reluctant to put too strong an emphasis on the analysis of the drawings *per se*. The challenge of analysis and interpretation of any qualitative data is a given (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) and the challenge for doing this with children's drawings is particularly difficult (Bland, 2012; Eldén, 2013; Mitchell, 2006) – and I wanted to resist interpreting the drawings in a way which imposed my meanings and perhaps simply reinforced my own adult understandings (Hunleth, 2011). The children's skills as artists was fundamental to the content of the drawing and although they were told that this was not an issue in terms of what I wanted them to do – in terms of what can be understood by what they have drawn it is, of course, pertinent. In some instances, alongside the talk and the general presentation of the participants I felt able to draw additional meanings from their drawings. In this way the drawings were an enhancement to the spoken data but had to be understood within this context.

The Process of Analysis

Each of the interviews in Phase Two of the research was transcribed verbatim and then subjected to a process of data reduction (Gillham, 2005). This was undertaken in order to reduce the 'noise' - preserving what was perceived to be the speaker's meaning whilst making it more readable by removing verbal ticks, hesitations and repetitions (See Figure 3.1 for an example). This constituted, in effect, the first stage of the analysis of the data because I inevitably had to interpret the data in order to make such editing possible.

The data from the group interviews were revisited several times alongside the pictures drawn by the children and notes were made in relation to the key themes – focusing on the contributions of individuals.

| Verbatim transcript | Transcript following data reduction. |
|---|--|
| <p>Yeah, it is, I guess I'm more in that crowd if you get what I mean I'm not with the people that are like I dunno there's a couple of people that I think 'oh I don't want to be with you because I know you'll just talk about maths or something' because it's a grammar school and I can understand that there's always going to be people like that but then there's people that are my my friends they're like my type of people they're more funny and and...like they understand more than some of the others and it's just it's a lot more...fun with them than it is with the other people...um yeah...it's not...it's just...there's not a lot...there's not a lot I can say because it's not really that I'm popular but I'm not I dunno it's just like there's a group of us that are the ones that are more known to other years as well as just year 7</p> <p><i>(... represents a pause or hesitation)</i></p> | <p>Yes, it is. I guess I'm more in that crowd. There's a couple of people that I think 'Oh, I don't want to be with you, because I know you'll just talk about maths or something'. I can understand that there's always going to be people like that [because it's a grammar school] but then there's people that are my friends. They're my type of people. They're more funny and they understand more than some of the others and it's just a lot more fun with them than it is with other people. It's not that I'm popular but there's a group of us that are known to other years as well as just year 7.</p> |

Figure 3.1 Data Reduction

All the data were initially considered from a broad, open perspective and annotations were made on both the transcripts and the drawings (See Figure 3.2) highlighting any aspect which was considered pertinent to the research questions or otherwise of interest. The intention, at this initial stage, was to be open to what the data might show from a broad interpretative perspective – although this was clearly influenced by the overarching umbrella of the research questions. This open approach seemed particularly important to me – I felt that a process of coding had the potential to act in a way which would reduce and essentialise the data – something I was reluctant to do, particularly at the early stages.

identity – I wanted to draw on the meanings, the flavours of identity which peppered the children’s talk and drawings in a less fragmentary sense. Nor did I want to suggest that there was just one way of seeing the data, one ‘right’ interpretation. Rather, I wanted to show how these instantiations of identity work were doing several things at once – as the children were drawing on the range of ‘cultural tools’ which were to hand. In order to do this I wanted to find disparate ways of looking at the data which would illuminate the different things that the children’s talk was doing – and how, often, these different things were happening at the same time. This was in line with the *bricoleur* approach outlined earlier in this chapter. After the initial ‘sweep’ of the data, therefore, my broad annotations were considered in the light of the research questions and the context of the existing literature about identity. For each research question an approach to data analysis from the literature was identified which could be used to focus on particular aspects of identity from different directions.

As part of this approach I have presented throughout Chapters 4-7 examples of annotated transcripts from the data (see Figure 3.3 for an example). This is in order to provide a further layer to the analysis and to facilitate other ways of looking at the data – particularly where the same section of transcript is re-used in different chapters. Transcript analysis in research is frequently undertaken in a way that describes and discusses the data in a linear narrative form in order to tell the story of the data (Graddol, Cheshire, & Swann, 1994). In producing these annotated transcripts as diagrams inserted into the narrative of the chapters, I hope to disrupt some of linear approach with a means by which something of the ‘messiness’ of even short sections of data is exposed. It provided a means by which I could ‘dance around the data’ and further resist the closure of just one way of looking at what the children said. The annotated transcripts are presented alongside a more traditional linear narrative analysis which draws on some or all of the annotations. The annotated transcripts offer a ‘raw’ and rough analysis which provides space for broader interpretations, whereas the narrative picks up on and elaborates aspects in a more rigorous form. In this way the process of analysis is exposed as a significant factor in the articulation of ‘findings’ which inevitably

foreground certain perspectives over others. The intention is that the narrative and diagrams together should be understood by the reader as a synergetic whole which represents a richer analytic picture than a narrative alone.

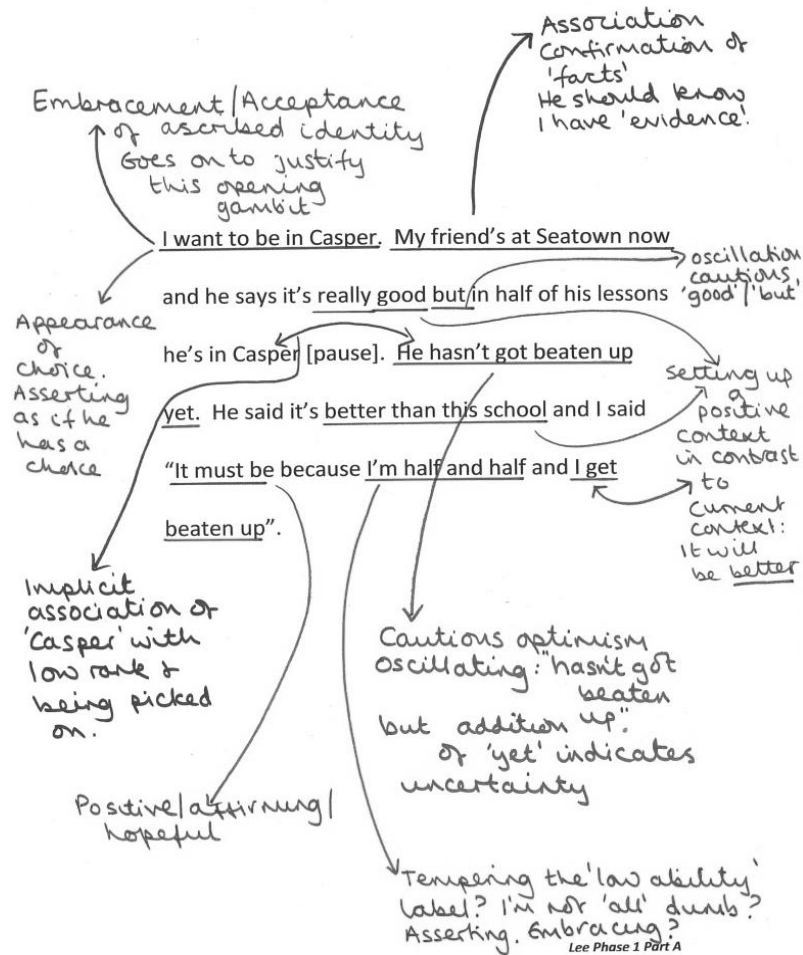


Figure 3.3 Example of Annotated Transcript

The following analytical framework was applied – as presented in Chapter One. In Chapters 4-6 data from both phases of the research are used in the discussion and analysis sections.

| THEME | KEY QUESTION | THEORETICAL/ CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING | ANALYTICAL THEMES |
|--|---|---|---|
| Identity, Adolescence and Peer Groups (Chapter Four) | <i>How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?</i> | Social Identity Theory | Embracement of and distancing from the behaviour and identity performances of others in identity work (Snow & Andersen, 1987). |
| Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships (Chapter Five) | <i>How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?</i> | Figured Worlds | Salience, identification and savoir faire within the context of peer group relationships (Holland <i>et al</i> , 2001). |
| Figured Worlds, Stereotypes and the Media (Chapter Six) | <i>What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?</i> | Figured Worlds Stereotypes and Representation | Salience and identification of/with media stereotypes in the context of peer group relationships (Holland <i>et al</i> , 2001). |
| The Coherent Self (Chapter Seven) | <i>How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?</i> | Narrative Identity | Use of anecdotes as dismissive or illustrative of self (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2010) Reproduced voices in identity work (Bakhtin, 1981; Maybin, 2006). |

Data generated from both phases through interview and through the drawings were re-examined for evidence of the analytical themes identified above in order to address the research questions and presented in each chapter alongside literature relevant to each question.

Whilst class, ethnicity and gender are acknowledged as significant in children's identity work in school (Dejud, 2007; Martino & Meyenn, 2001; Reay, 2001; Willis, 1997), the analytical themes identified above provide alternative insights into the data to provide complementary perspectives to

those which are more firmly established in the literature. These aspects of identity are therefore not examined in detail in this thesis.

Finding a writing voice

Throughout the research I was mindful of the children as people, as individuals with lived lives, hopes, fears and aspirations beyond the context of the research. I also was aware of the ways in which our identity performances intersected through the research (Goffman, 1959). When I came to write about what I had experienced and what I had understood and what I was trying to communicate, I felt that I needed a voice which would allow me to talk about the children as people rather than objectified data. I wanted to use an approach to the writing that would foreground the children's individuality and the ways in which they had elicited a response from me that went beyond a scientific 'interest' in their presentation of self. I wanted to give a flavour of who they were rather than simply communicating the parts of a dissected whole. For this reason, in writing about the data, I draw on language which speaks of how the children seemed, appeared or felt to me to be presenting themselves. This might be at odds with an objective or scientific approach but is embedded in a dialogic understanding of 'identity' in that it is not just who you say you are but also who others say you are in response (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 2000). In the context of this research, one of the 'others' was me.

PART II

CHAPTER FOUR

IDENTITY, ADOLESCENCE AND PEER GROUPS

RQ1: How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

Sub questions:

- Does the school context contribute to the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies?
- What is the significance of adolescence as the time frame in which this identity work takes place?
- What is the significance of school transfer in identity work?
- Does children's talk about themselves and their peers show how they identify with and position themselves within peer group hierarchies in the school context?

*There's the people who like computer games and things like that
and then there's the people who like sports
and all the girls are interested in them
and there's the people that are always top in the class.*

Nadine Phase Two

Overview

This chapter examines the identity work that children undertake in school contexts in relation to their interaction with their peers. This identity work is contextualised here within the timeframe of adolescence, the institutional context of school and the transfer from the primary to secondary phase of education. Research from across disciplines is reviewed – with a particular interest in those which foreground school as a social (rather than educational) context for adolescents’ identity work. The data are analysed using categories of embracement and distancing to consider the ways in which children identify with the peer group hierarchies.

Setting the Scene

This literature review examines research from the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) as well as elsewhere which takes place either within the secondary school phase or in transfer to it. I use the term 'high school' interchangeably with 'secondary school' to indicate a generic school in the secondary phase of children's education which typically begins at some point during adolescence.

The key strands of the literature examined in this chapter are those which address:

- The role of school as a significant social context during adolescence
- The specific nature of identity work in adolescence
- The significance of the transfer between phases of schooling
- The nature of the peer group interactions in secondary school

The role of the school as a significant social context for identity work during adolescence

The significant breadth of interest in identity work in the school context consists of both large and small scale projects from across a number of disciplines such as psychology (for example, Flum & Kaplan, 2012); sociology (for example, Ingram, 2011; Willis, 1977); anthropology (for example, Ek, 2009); education (for example, Ball, Rollock, Vincent & Gillborn, 2013) and medicine (for example, Stead, McDermott, MacKintosh & Adamson, 2011). This breadth of interest ensures that debates proliferate about the nature of identity, its significance for children in schools and what the issues are and whether or how to address them.

Much research into identity work in school is used to examine how children develop understandings of themselves as learners (for example Rubin, 2007) and how they navigate the differences between home and school identities (for example, Carter, 2006; Hedegaard, 2005; Kumar, 2006; Phelan, Davidson & Thanh, 1991) In particular, research often focuses on an aspect of identity such as social class (for example, Willis, 1977; Eckert, 1989), gender (for example, Hey, 1997; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Marsh & Lammers, 2011; McRobbie, 1991; Paechter, 2002; Reichert & Kuriloff, 2004; Skelton, Francis, & Read, 2010), ethnicity (for example, French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2000; Bernal, Saenz & Knight, 1991) or sexuality (for example, Walls, Kane & Wisneski, 2010) and frequently seeks to identify how this impacts on children's academic achievement and school performance (for example, Rodriguez, Jones, Pang & Park, 2004; Wright, 2011); self-esteem and well-being (for example, Dejud, 2007; Warin, 2010) and adjustment to school (for example, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus & Harpalani, 2001) among other aspects.

The focus for the research in this thesis, however, is children's identity work in school where school is seen primarily as a significant social, rather than educational, context (for example, Read, Skelton & Francis, 2011). A number of researchers and scholars acknowledge the significance of the school context and its role in children's identity work (for example, Lannegrand-Willems, 2006; Gee, 2000) and other longitudinal studies focus on both social and educational aspects of adolescent identity work in school (for example, Eckert, 1989; Adler & Adler, 1998; Milner, 2004; Warin, 2010). There are fewer examples however, of work which foregrounds the social role played by identity work in school as significant in itself. There is a growing body of research which focuses on the role of friendships in transitions in schooling (Pratt & George, 2005; Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011) and Eckert, 1989 contends:

The social structure of the school is not simply the context of learning; it is part of what is learned. What a student learns in the classroom is indeed a very small other part.

p 179

This chapter considers how expectations of schools along with the ways in which they organise children's lives directly or indirectly influence children's identity work in their interactions with and relationship to their peers. Understanding peer relationships in school as a 'figured world' is a further way in which children's identity work can be examined and this is taken up in the subsequent two chapters.

Gee (2000) suggests that understanding one aspect of identity as an 'institutionally authorised' identity can help in the discussion and analysis of identity in the context of schools (and other institutions). He suggests that identities in institutions are sanctioned by those who wield power within (and without) the institutional context – thus 'teachers' and 'pupils' are identities which exist because of the institution of school itself. Additionally, schools, in the wider social context, are created and sustained by political power. Gee suggests that such identities can be seen as a 'calling' (for teachers, perhaps) or an 'imposition' (inevitably for pupils) – and to some extent this is linked to choice. Teachers can choose whether or not to be teachers; pupils do not choose to be pupils. Aspects of these institutional roles might be further distilled and developed in schools, suggests Gee, through discourse – the ways in which pupils and teachers for example, talk about themselves and each other; and through the extent to which each engages with and feels affinity with the identity which has been assigned to them and to others like them. Nevertheless it is clear that within the social construct of school there is a narrow range of institutionally constructed and imposed 'authorised' identities available to children and these identities form a clear hierarchy of acceptability (within the institution) in terms of the embodiment of identities through behaviour, dress, academic achievement and engagement in school (Brady, 2004; Youdell, 2006).

For children entering school, therefore, their work of identity necessarily requires some engagement with these institutionally sanctioned identities – but these identities interweave with the children's own peer group 'subcultures' produced through the social interactions inside the institutional, educative context of school (within lessons as well as on the playground and outside of teacher-pupil

interactions). It is the interplay between these different identity 'sets' that makes identity work in the school setting of such interest (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eckert, 1989; Milner, 2004).

Peer group subcultures in and out of school are generally seen as highly salient for the ways in which children view themselves and others and in relation to how they perform in school (for example, Kinney, 1993; Martino, 2000; Bishop, Bishop, Bishop, Gelbwasser, Green, Peterson, Rubinsztaj & Zuckerman, 2004). They are, however, often positioned precisely as 'sub' cultures – cultures which exist below the surface of the received, institutional identities to which children are recruited in school contexts. The role of school is positioned in such research as primarily educative in its goal and understanding the identity work of children in this school context is seen to be about understanding how to support children as learners within this educational context (for example, Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Rodriguez *et al* 2004; Wright, 2011). This thesis examines children's identity work in the light of their social (that is, their relationship to their peers) rather than academic identities and focuses on school as a social context within which children develop social (and therefore personal) understandings of self which are important in and of themselves irrespective of how these self understandings relate to their learning.

Pratt and George (2005) suggest that:

... friendship plays a critical role in providing support, reassurance and security for boys and girls at this stage in their schooling.

p17

Schools therefore represent unique social contexts for identity work at a unique point of psychological, cognitive, physical and social development in children's lives.

Identity Work in Adolescence

Within the research field, adolescence is widely understood as the time of life between childhood and adulthood, signalled by the physical changes which take place in puberty and leading to the achievement of the adult physique. As such, the age-range this encompasses is very broadly defined within the literature. This thesis is based on work with children between the ages of ten and twelve years of age – this is a period frequently referred to as ‘early adolescence’ (the *Journal of Early Adolescence* focuses on the 10-14 age range) or ‘pre-adolescence’ (Adler & Adler, 1998). For ease of reference I use the term ‘adolescence’ to include early and pre-adolescence.

Adolescence as a specifically recognised (while socially constructed (Lesko, 2012)) transition between the dependency of childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood emerged in the post war era of the 1950s alongside a boom in consumerism, the introduction of compulsory schooling and the rise of popular culture (Platt, 1993). For the first time in history, all children between the ages of 11 and 14 and beyond were required to spend significant amounts of time together in the adult led and constructed environment of school (Palladino, 1996). In this context there was the opportunity for children to stake claims to identities previously unavailable to them and they could identify themselves by their possessions, their ‘style’ and their interests – particularly in relation to music and film (Danesi, 1994). Thus the combination of the rigid structure of school and the developing personal and societal freedoms outside of school presented a distinctive context into which the culture of the adolescent ‘teen’ could emerge. In addition, as discussed later, it provided the context within which forms of power, expressed through the rise of adolescent subcultures, could circulate and take hold (Milner, 2004; Eckert, 1989).

During puberty and beyond there are documented psychological, biological and cognitive changes which take place which are allied with perceived ‘adolescent’ behaviours which are often attributed to the effect of hormonal changes in the body (Kaplan, 2003). In addition, many writers draw attention to the changes in the social context of ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ which require children

to undertake significant identity work in the social arena as they transition from one position to the other (for example, Fine, 2004) moving away from 'family' as the source of self knowings and towards the peer group as a significant factor in developing both social and personal identities which support the growth towards adulthood (Brown, 1990).

Much research into identity in adolescence draws on Erikson's (1968) work in developmental psychology regarding identity confusion, where adolescents are understood to be exploring identity roles in their desire to create a sense of an 'authentic' self. Erikson put forward the idea of this time as a time of significant questions about self and belonging within a social context. Research which draws on this perspective is often undertaken from a scientific stance, which seeks to isolate and identify adolescent identity behaviours and understandings. There is a move, however, within and without the field of psychology, to recognise the significance of qualitative approaches to understanding identity as it is '*in situ*' – as it is enacted in social contexts – as opposed to the more traditional experimental approaches (Jackson & Sherriff, 2013).

In addition, adolescence as a time of 'storm and stress' (Hall, 1904) has long been questioned. In 1955 when the 'teenager' was just emerging as a concept, Elkin & Westley (1955) challenged the 'myth of adolescent culture' and questioned the assumption that it could be simply and generally characterised as:

Compulsive independence of and antagonism to adult expectations and authority ...
compulsive conformity within the peer group ... irresponsibility, specialised lingo, dating,
athleticism and the like ...

p681

This understanding of a level of complexity in adolescents' identity work is echoed in more recent qualitative studies in research. Studies across disciplines present a more nuanced view of agentic adolescents navigating a range of complex and often contradictory expectations of them and their social roles (Fine, 2004; Jackson & Sherriff, 2013; Jabal & Rivière, 2007; Martino & Meyenn, 2001).

Adolescents are seen as less rebellious, less influenced by their peers and less egotistically driven than the folk knowledge or 'myths' surrounding adolescent behaviours might suggest.

Identity work in transfer between phases of schooling

The above sections have discussed the significance of both school and adolescence in identity work. The coincidence of school transfer and the onset of adolescence adds another level of interest to the discussion of children's developing identities. In addition to navigating the differing social demands of childhood and adulthood, and negotiating all the possibilities that this entails, children are often required to add a change of school context to their developing sense of self. This can be seen as a 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991) in identity work – change is required. For some children the changes required might be minimal but for others this could mean a significant amount of work (Dijkstra, 2013).

In the UK the transition between Primary and Secondary schooling generally involves a move from smaller, community-based, supportive environments to larger, less local, more centralised and less personally supportive contexts (Güroğlu *et al*, 2012). The change of environment alongside the need to interact with a wider range of their peers means that the establishment of social networks becomes central to children's identity work (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Pratt & George, 2005; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Weller, 2007). As suggested above, the coincidence of adolescence intensifies further the role of the peer group in social and personal identity development (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran & Foddy, 2010).

Kingery *et al*, 2011 found that:

... students' concerns prior to the middle school transition [could be] grouped into three areas: academic (e.g., having more homework, more difficult classes), procedural (e.g., finding their way around the school), and social (e.g., making new friends, getting along with peers, fitting in).

p232

They argue for the need for support for children in the development of friendships during times of transition between schooling because of the significant role friendships play in children's well-being and learning in school.

Warin's (2010) longitudinal research which followed six children from the age of three to seventeen, identified the importance of times of transfer between school phases in children's identity work. She draws on Côté's (2002) concept of 'identity capital' – children's conscious and unconscious '... ability to establish and accumulate identity gains ...' (Côté, 2002 p120) as significant in children's ability to negotiate such 'fateful moments'. Weller (2007) also describes the importance of friendships in transition to secondary schooling as significant in the building of social capital which might have long-lasting effects into adulthood. This is explored further in Chapter Seven in consideration of the coherent life narrative of children through adolescence, including school transfer. Nevertheless Warin's work highlights how the changing school context can work both for and against children in their struggle to fit into a differently configured social context. Similarly, Pratt & George (2005) highlight the importance of maintaining and/or making friendships in the transition to secondary school both for children's integration into the new context, but also for their identity work and well-being.

Peer group hierarchies

The existence of peer group culture both in and out of school is well established and ongoing research seeks to understand how these peer groups emerge, how they interact and how the impact of peer groups can be mediated (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eckert, 1989; Milner, 2004).

As with the notion of 'adolescent culture' much of the research seeks to move away from simplistic generalisations which suggest that peer group culture is uniform and homogenous. Research

suggests that peer group categories⁷ are flexible and dynamic, supported by and subject to parental and school influences and part of wider networks of relationships within which adolescents circulate (Brown, 1990; Adler & Adler, 1998; Warin, 2010).

There is, however, overwhelming evidence for the significance for adolescents of their relationships with their peers (George & Pratt, 2005; Martino & Meyenn, 2001) and the relatively consistent hierarchical nature of peer group structures across different school environments and over time. Shaw's (1954) research was concerned with the social stratification that was evident in children's interactions in primary school and he undertook to find out what distinguished the popular from the less popular children:

The popular child: works quietly, is not talkative, is active in games, is daring, initiates games, never loses his temper, is cheerful and jolly, good-looking, tidy, is liked by everybody, enthusiastic, likes the opposite sex, enjoys a joke on self, is humorous, fights, does not seek attention, is friendly, loyal and sociable. The unpopular child is restless, talkative, not daring, not good looking, unkempt, not liked, not friendly, not sociable. He lacks initiative, loses his temper, does not enjoy a joke on self and tells tales.

p 216-217

Whilst there may be more recent and more nuanced understandings put forward regarding the complexity of peer group interactions – these are aspects of peer group identities in adolescence identified by Shaw which are still of interest to researchers more than fifty years later. In particular, association of popularity with looks, sportiness, interactions with the opposite sex, humour, 'daringness' – or bravado and sociability are also evident in a range of more recent research along with significant shifts in understanding how 'popular' children might also be the 'mean girls' (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1985; Hey, 1997).

⁷ The use of 'category' and 'clique' follows Eckert's (1989) definition: "As well-defined bounded groups cliques have clear memberships. Categories do not have memberships *per se*, but represent ideologies and cultural forms that are variously adhered to by individuals and groups" (p18/19).

A social identity approach can be used to understand the interaction between group and personal identity and the ways in which group memberships are understood and developed. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is concerned with how personal identity is determined in part through understanding of membership of social groups; Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, 1985) considers how social groups form and how individuals sort themselves and others into such groups. It considers the interplay of personal identity in relation to the social groups within which identities are enacted. Tajfel and Turner's work (*ibid*) identifies how a sense of personal 'self' is intricately associated with understandings of the 'social self' – how and where we fit within the social groups with which we associate. We do this through a process of self and othering or in-group/out-group associations where the in-group associations are presented favourably in contrast to those in the out-group.

This results in the creation of hierarchies in terms of social groups – those groups with access to more power will hold the higher status. In one sense the adolescent is involved in a continual othering from both childhood and adulthood, moving from positions where childlike behaviours are expected or required or implied to those situations where they are expected to demonstrate qualities and understandings associated with adulthood (Fine, 2004). Jackson and Sherriff (2013) present the case for the importance of a qualitative approach to the examination of peer group interactions in 'messy' school contexts. They draw on social identity theories to present qualitative data from work in secondary schools which suggests that it is important to acknowledge the complexities and contradictions in peer group interactions. The data reveals '... contradictory, dominant discourses that circulate ... and [of] the complexity of intergroup relations, desires and power dynamics' (p264). For example they unpick the students' competing understandings of the value of academic achievement for later life chances against the dominant discourses of the 'uncool' nature of being seen to be trying to succeed in school work.

Much of the research in school is interested in how these hierarchies are played out in the school context, whilst fewer attempt to explain how they emerge in the first place. Milner's (2004) research suggests that the peer group hierarchies emerge as a reaction to students' limited access to other forms of power – such as political or financial. His work is primarily concerned with the role of consumerism and popular culture as the means by which status is conferred and sustained by pupils. He identifies some key categories which contribute to the shaping of status structures as related to looks and athletic ability, clothes and style, uniforms and emblems, unique vocabulary and 'talk', collective memories and humour, body language, popular music and accessories – echoing once more Shaw's much earlier findings. Milner (2004) suggests ways in which the hegemonic status of the 'popular kids' can be reduced and peer group hierarchies softened through reducing access (in school) to some of those consumer goods which are used to confer status, for example.

Adler & Adler's (1998) longitudinal ethnographic research with 'preadolescents' (defined as "aged between eleven and fourteen, fifteen "(p5)) categorised the factors which contributed to children's 'popular' status. They found differences between the genders – for boys their popularity was influenced by their athletic ability, 'toughness', *savoir faire* (this term is also differently associated with analysis of children's interactions in figured worlds in the next two chapters of this thesis), academic performance, cross-gender relationships. Along with other research (Pratt & George, 2005) they see a rise in cross-gender friendships in correlation with the children's age in preadolescence. For girls, the factors were different family background (socioeconomic status, *laissez faire* – the extent to which parents allowed children to engage in 'risky' behaviours) physical appearance, social development (precocity, exclusivity) and academic performance.

Exact peer group definitions vary but most include a reference to how peer groups are ranked both inter and intra-group. Research identifies groups of students who are able to exert influence or power over their peers in terms of subtle forms of influence through their association with others or by more overt bullying behaviours (Eder, 1985; Read, Francis & Skelton, 2011). These groups are

frequently referred to as the 'popular' children and research consistently identifies key factors associated with looks, sportiness and access to key status goods such as clothes, phones, bags as significant in these children's popularity (Adler & Adler, 1996; Borch, Hyde & Cillessen, 2011; Read, 2011).

Adler & Adler's research identified the main social groups as the popular clique (a clique generally being seen as a self-selecting group as opposed to 'crowds' or 'social categories' which are broader generalised social groups); the wannabes – those who sat on the periphery of the popular group, mimicking their behaviour yet not accepted within their group; smaller, middle friendship circles and social isolates. They acknowledged the interchangeability of these groups for some children alongside an intransigence of the status of others. They found that those children who appeared most well-adjusted and secure were those in the middle friendship circles – with a small number of close friends with whom they regularly interacted. Those in the popular group did not necessarily forge genuine friendships with those with whom they associated – they were grouped together by default and were often engaged in intragroup power struggles and shifts in friendship status. Similarly the lower status groups tended to be 'isolates' or, again, grouped by default rather than due to genuine friendship connections between individuals. The least secure were the wannabes – those children who were on the edge of the 'popular' clique and desperate to be part of it, engaging in 'like' behaviours, suffering indignities at the hands of those more popular in the hope that their own status would be elevated and rarely forming genuine friendships.

Data Analysis:

Part A: Lee, Joseph, Tony, Nadine and Laura

In this section of the data analysis, I consider five of the children as a focus for discussion. Their responses in the interviews and through their drawings are described and discussed. I explore the different issues raised for each child and the implications for them. Key themes which emerge are then developed in Part B with reference to data drawn from other children. At points, specific sections of transcript are examined in more detail⁸ drawing on the notes made during analysis of the raw data – some of these notes therefore might raise questions rather than offer definitive insights or explanations but serve to provide a sense of the ways in which the data was unpicked. In this way the data are examined at both a macro, holistic level in the discussion of ‘whole’ children but also at a micro level in the discussion of significant snippets or details of the data.

This chapter is particularly concerned with how the children’s talk and their drawings alongside their talk were used to position themselves within the perceived peer group hierarchy. Drawing on social identity theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1986) and the use of ‘embracement’ and ‘distancing’ talk (Snow & Anderson, 1987) in-group/out-group associations made by the children were identified. Whilst these categories were used in the context of Snow & Anderson’s research with homeless people and their identity work through ‘self talk’ they offer a convenient way of looking at children’s identification with and disassociation from their peers and particular groups of peers in line with social identity theory. Snow and Anderson (1987), examined the performance of self through the role of ‘identity talk’ in the verbal construction and assertion of personal identities. Their categories of ‘associational distancing’ and ‘associational embracement’ are particularly useful for an analysis of ‘in-group’/‘out-group’ talk and behaviours in the data.

⁸ This an approach taken throughout part II and III of this thesis and was discussed in Chapter Three

Associational distancing is described by Snow & Anderson as:

“... one’s ability to manage his image by drawing distinctions between himself and others he does not want to be associated with.”

1987 p1349

Snow & Anderson saw that associational embracement

“...entailed reference to oneself as a friend or as an individual who acknowledges the norm of reciprocity and who thus takes his social relationships seriously.”

p1356

In the analysis I have also used this term where the children claimed or embraced a ‘proxy’ identity through their association with others since: ‘... one’s claim to a particular self is partly contingent on the imputed social identities of one’s associates ...’ (p1349)

Using these categories gave an indication of the social ranking the children applied to different groups as well as demonstrating how the children aligned themselves with particular groups and distanced themselves from others. Throughout, the terms ‘distancing’ and ‘embracement’ refer to the categories as described above.

Lee

Lee participated in the Phase One interviews at Jollytown. He was in a group with Helen K, Susan and Joseph.

Lee is a small and lively member of the group. He talks very quickly and excitedly – often laughing loudly – almost raucously – at comments made by himself and others. He frequently interjects abruptly into the flow of the conversation with assertions about himself or to put forward his perspective. He makes comments about the others – their appearance, their qualities – in both affirming and negative ways. He appears to admire Joseph and often interacts with him – listening carefully to what he has to say and usually offering a response which is sometimes serious but more often joky or offhand.

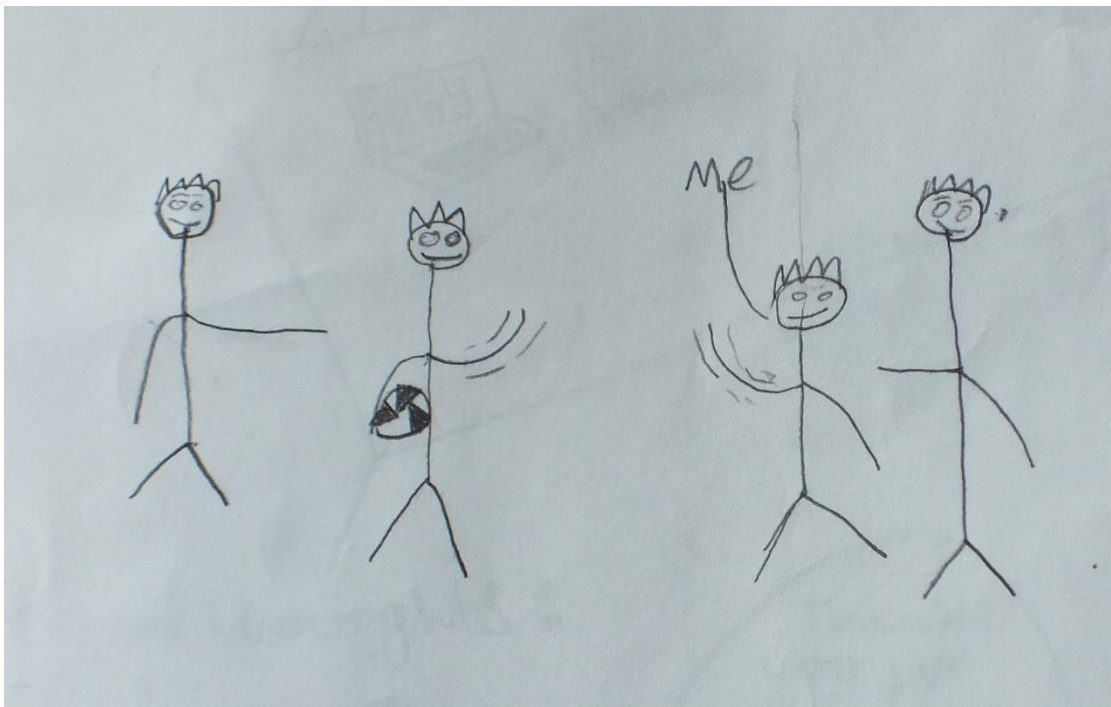


Figure 4.1 Lee – Drawing Phase One Part A

Throughout the interview, Lee referred frequently to his smaller than average size, his low academic ability and his perceived potential, therefore, as a target for bullying in secondary school. His drawing (Figure 4.1) shows him as the smallest figure, to the right of centre. He is waving to the boy holding the football – the leader, perhaps, or the captain.

Lee appeared keenly aware that he was a 'low achiever' in school. He seemed to accept this as a given – something, which like his height, was out of his control. At one point during the interview, there was a discussion among the group about the size of their relative secondary school and how they will be expected to move between classrooms and teachers for different lessons – in contrast to the one classroom/one teacher model with which they were familiar in Primary school. Lee initially complained about the distance he would have to walk in his school (Seatown) but then added:

There's only one class you have to stay in and that's if you're really dumb.

Phase One Part A

This class is called 'Casper' and Lee clarified this a little further into the conversation (Figure 4.2). Here he conflated the labelling of those who are the lower achievers academically with being subject to bullying – and therefore of low rank within peer group relationships. He suggested that he was beaten up in his current school for being 'half and half', that is, he had half his lessons in a 'unit' outside of 'normal' classes, but this is not something he elaborated on.

Thus within his peer group, Lee clearly felt identified and identifiable as 'dumb' due to the hierarchical organisation of the children as learners in school and the corresponding way in which he was treated. The school context both created and perpetuated this identity which had a direct influence on his perception of his social ranking amongst his peers.

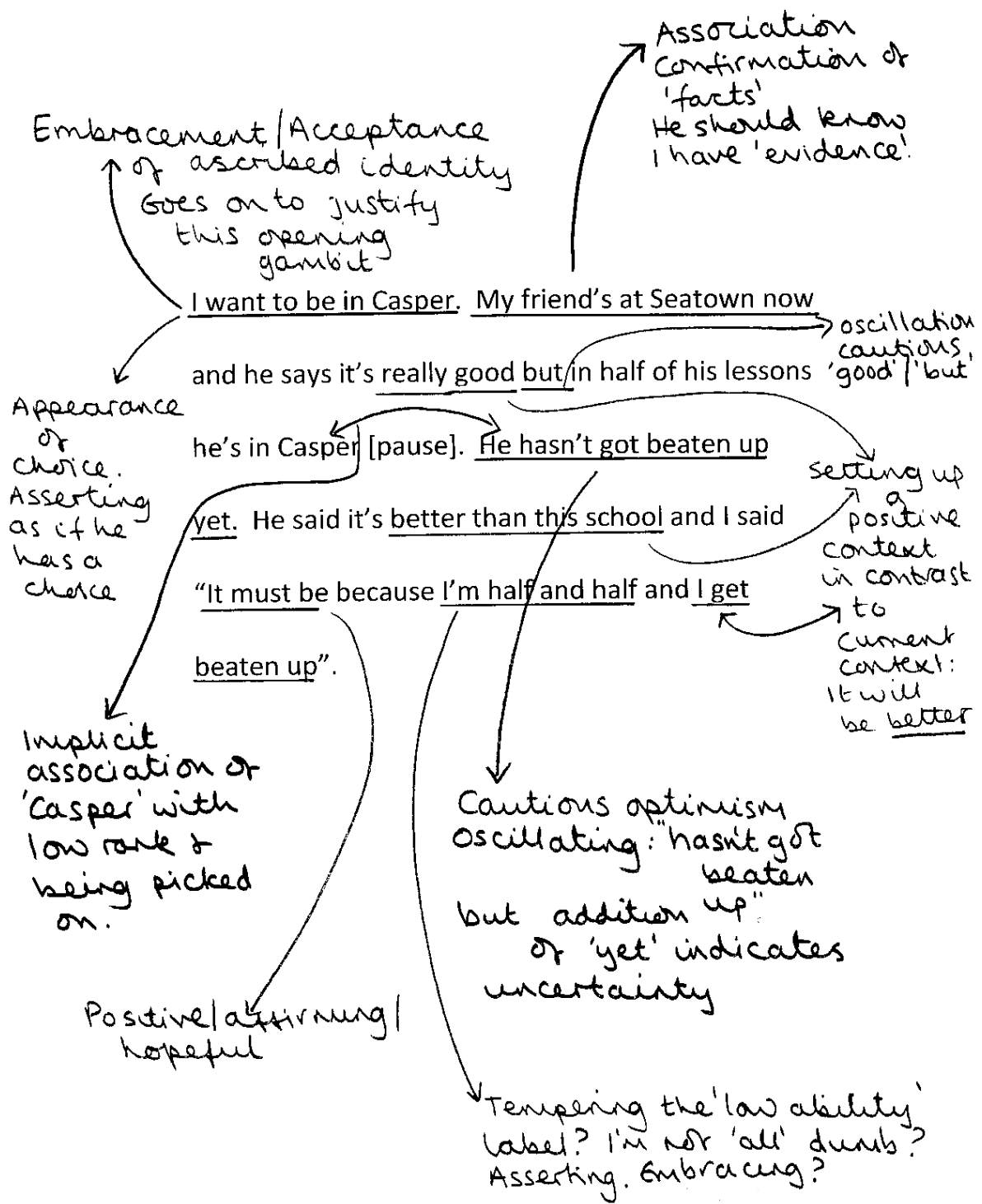


Figure 4.2 Lee – Annotated Transcript Phase One Part A

He had been assigned, and accepted – embraced – a 'low' position which, from Lee's perspective, made him, along with his physical size, fair games for the 'bullies'. His 'schooled' or ascribed academic identity (Gee, 2000) significantly affected his perception of his social status in school.

However, later in the interview Joseph suggested that there would be 'nerdies and geeks' at secondary school. Lee interjected with "...and emos!" and sniggered – demonstrating distancing behaviour from these groups. Although he proffered through the interview in some ways a view of himself as a victim, of low ability and small stature it would also seem that he saw himself as superior to 'nerdies, geeks and emos' within the peer ranking system. The foregrounding of his 'mouthiness' (something he offered as a further reason why he might get bullied) the relation of his involvement in 'fights' and even what could be seen to be a veiled pride in being 'beaten up' appeared to be in part intended to set him up as a 'tough' guy in contrast to the more effeminate categories which he appeared to deride. The 'cool' or 'popular' boys in school are seen as those who enact a typically heterosexual male identity (Renold, 2004; Martino, 2000; Martino & Meyenn, 2001) and Borch *et al*, (2011) and Bellmore, Villarreal & Ho (2011) highlight how aggression in boys is viewed favourably in terms of 'coolness' and therefore popularity status.

Lee appeared to accept that he is of 'low' ability because the powerful narratives in school override any other interpretation, but he also drew on a more hopeful narrative in relaying the experiences of his friend for whom being in Casper had been a good thing and hadn't resulted in the anticipated bullying. So whilst Lee told the story of his ascribed and imposed identity he drew on alternative narratives to support a possible different enactment of this identity and one which he could be seen to take on for himself: "I *want* to be in Casper". Whilst this could be interpreted as an optimistic stance, it could also be seen as a means by which Lee retained some element of control over how he was treated or viewed in school. He was aware that the overwhelming likelihood was that he would be in Casper – so to assert that this is what he wanted enabled him to position himself more agentively. Mendick & Francis (2012) describe 'abject agency' – 'wherein the claiming of abject positions potentially offers a source of powerful defiance' (p21) and this might be a way of interpreting Lee's position here.

In terms of Adler & Adler's (1998) descriptions, Lee's behaviour appeared to fit with how they described the 'wannabes' – those who are not part of the 'popular group' but who hover on the periphery of that group and mimic their behaviour in an attempt to be included. Whilst there are ways in which Lee's behaviour could be seen to fit this pattern: his attention to Joseph during the interview, for example and the apparent deference to (yet also the proximity to) the 'leader' in his drawing, there is also a sense of his acceptance of his place, or rank, due to factors which appear to him to be outside of his control: his size, his ability.

Joseph

Joseph was in the Phase One Interviews in the same group as Lee above at Jollytown – Helen K and Susan were also in this group.

Joseph is a good-looking boy who appears completely at ease in the interview context – both in the relaxed nature of his banter with his peers and in the confident way he talks about himself to me and the others. He also shows a keen interest in the research project itself – asking questions about what I want to know about and why. He is at pains to explain himself clearly (understanding what I need to know as an ‘outsider’) and sometimes pauses in his narrative to allow for some irrelevant interjections from the others before continuing with his train of thought. He appears to be liked and admired by the others in his group.

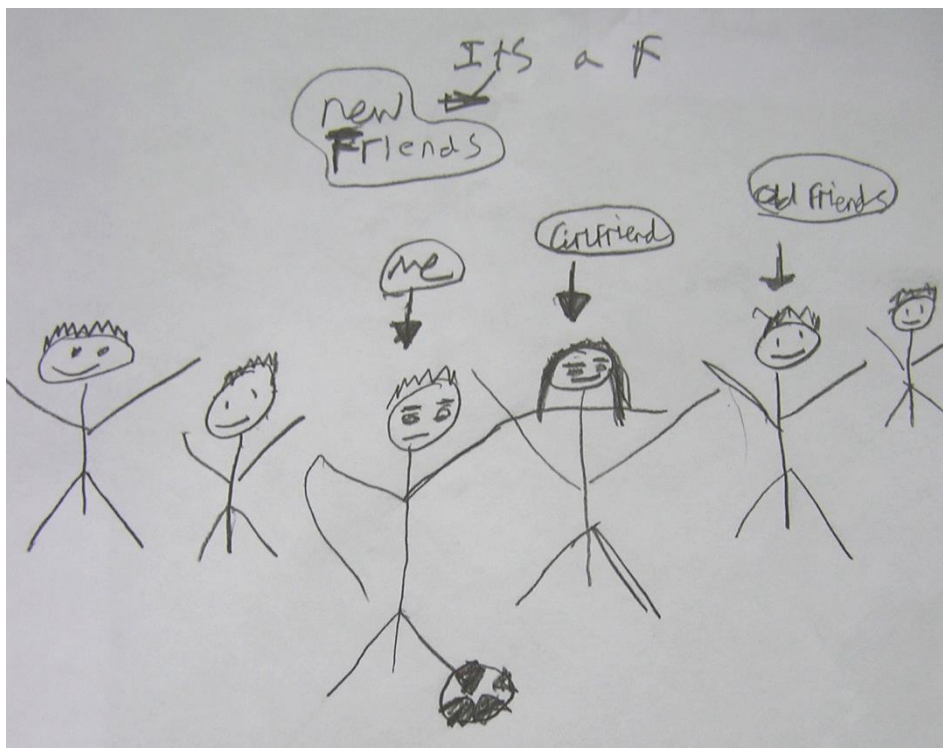


Figure 4.3 Joseph – Drawing Phase One Part A

Joseph's drawing (Figure 4.3) is interesting in juxtaposition with Lee's. Joseph is in the front and centre of the drawing – and although he used stick people to represent himself and his peers there is

something of a confident pose being struck by him as he stands with the football at his feet and his arm around his girlfriend. With his hand almost resting on his hip it could be possible to read something triumphal into his stance.

Joseph, whilst expressing concern at the thought of possible bullying reflected thoughtfully on this saying he did not think it would be a problem because:

I'll be in a big group with loads of people.

Phase One Part A

His popularity (and therefore 'high' social rank) was his defence against bullying. He added that he was Captain of the football team – involvement and talent in relation to sport being a further high status rank and that:

I'm not really really smart. I'm like in the middle ...

Phase One Part A

This distanced him from the 'nerd' category and reinforced his perceived position as a popular, sporty child – just clever enough to get on in lessons and therefore not 'picked on' as low ability, but not so clever that he would be setting himself up for bullying or teasing as a 'nerd'.

Martino (2000) describes this as part of the enactment of masculinity within the popular/cool discourse:

... the footballers establish themselves at the top of a pecking order of masculinities in schooling. They differentiate themselves from the boys who choose to work hard in class, do not play football, go to the library at lunchtime to complete an assignment or otherwise do not meet the criteria for acting cool.

p106

He did not see that the transition to secondary school would be significant in terms of his identity work (Figure 4.4).

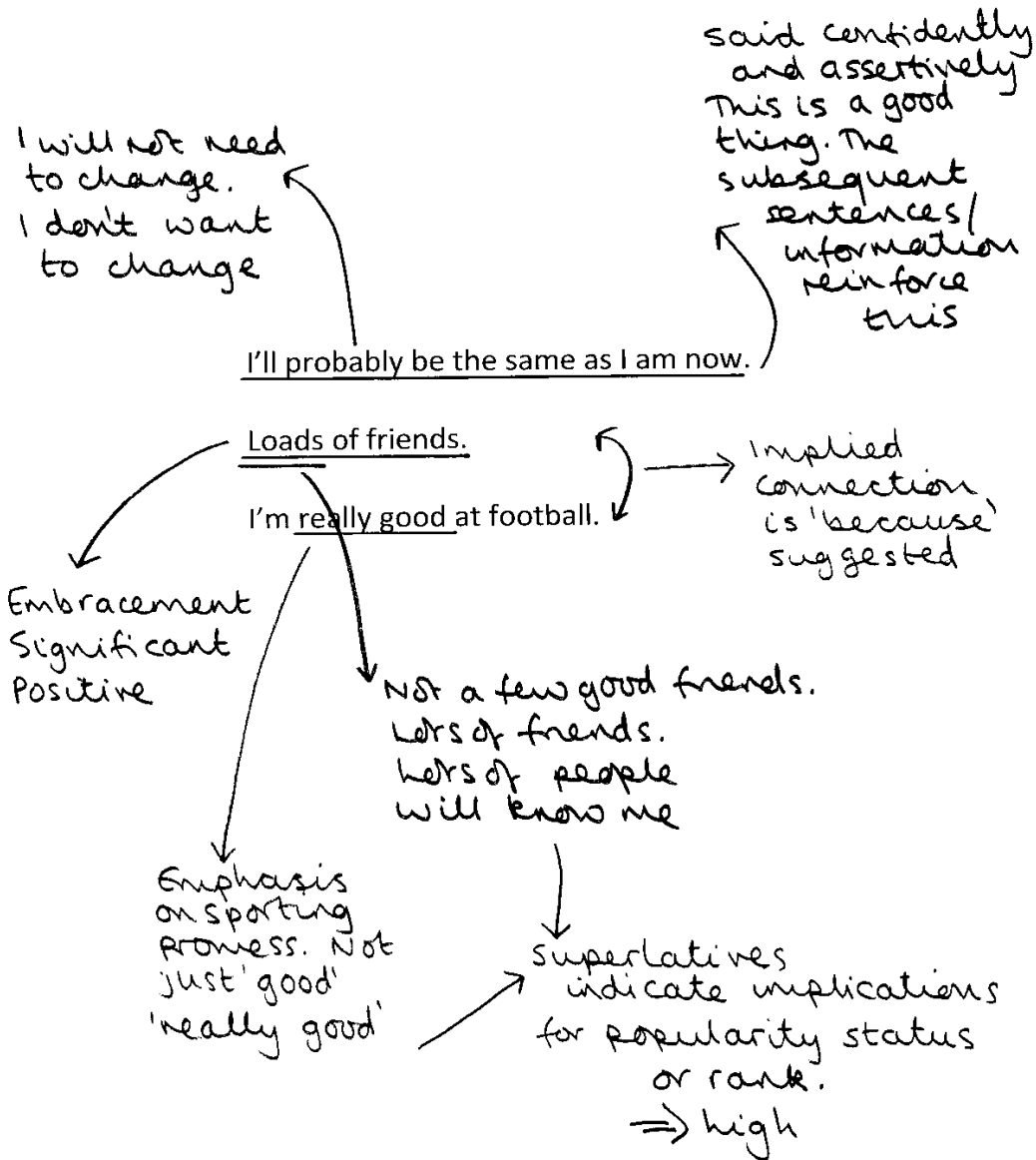


Figure 4.4 Joseph – Annotated Transcript Phase One Part A

Joseph also explained that the girlfriend he had drawn was not his current girlfriend but a 'better one' who he would 'get' in Year 7. Further evidence of his popularity and status was communicated through the procurement of a girlfriend who would reinforce his social position although seemingly as an accessory to be acquired, rather than a relationship to be developed (Adler & Adler, 1998).

In contrast to Lee, Joseph's ascribed 'natural' or 'given' or qualities appeared to set him up as high status and therefore highly unlikely to be subject to bullying – the amount of work required to maintain his identity within this group seems to be minimal. The attributes he has been assigned: looks, the 'right' amount of academic ability and talent in sport allow for him to be 'sorted' as the 'popular kid' in line with Adler & Adler's definitions. This was also acknowledged and recognised by others. Lee reinforces his position relative to Joseph in terms of ability by agreeing: "Yeah, he's in the middle. I'm the lowest." (Phase One Part A)

Tony

Tony participated in the Phase One interviews at Browntown in a group of boys. The other members of the group were Jeremy, Jonathan, Robert and Thomas.

Tony is reserved boy who seems slightly detached from the rest of the group. He rarely contributes to the discussion unless he is directly asked a question. He has a self-deprecating manner and whilst he talks warmly of his family – his brother and sister – he foregrounds his own perceived lack of ability in school. He speaks in truncated sentences and what he says is sometimes difficult to catch as he tends to keep his head down and talk quietly and hurriedly. He projects a defeatedness in the way in which he talks about his transfer to secondary school and expresses no positive feelings about the possibilities which lie ahead.



Figure 4.5 Tony – Drawing 1 Phase One Part A

Tony was going to go to a special school for his secondary schooling something that he appeared to be resigned to but not particularly happy about. The first picture he drew of himself in Year 7 (Figure 4.5) was unrelated to the school context and was himself with his brother and sister. He explained his drawing as him walking to the beach with his brother and sister after school. The speech bubble coming from his mouth says: "I'm happy".

His second drawing (Figure 4.6), in school, was quite different

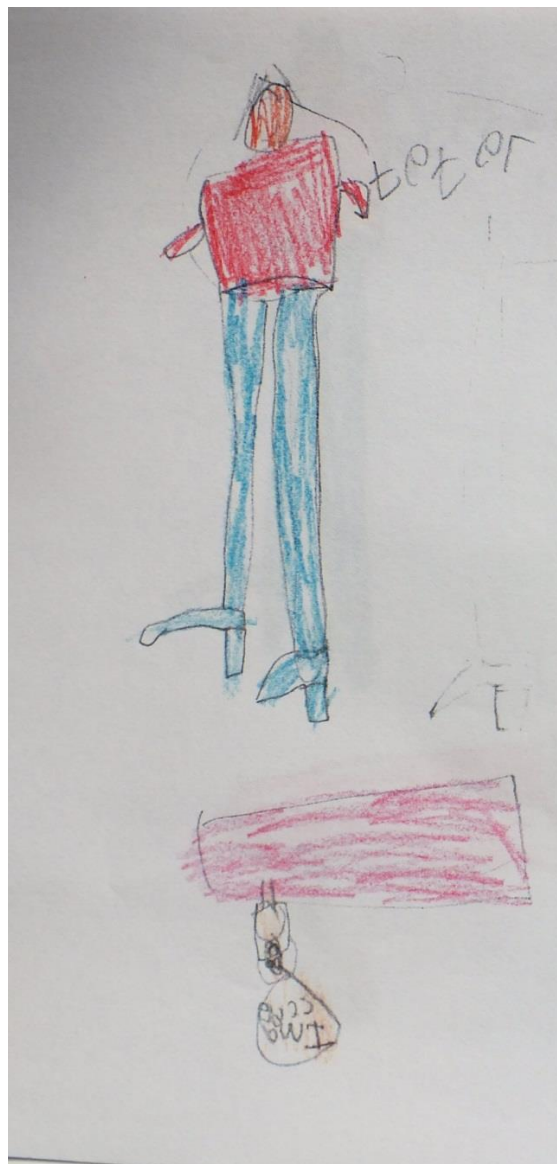


Figure 4.6 Tony – Drawing 2 Phase One Part A

Here, the teacher is large and foregrounded facing the viewer (Tony originally drew the teacher slightly larger but had to rub it out and start again when the drawing wouldn't fit on the page). Tony himself is small, at the bottom of the page and facing away from the viewer. The speech bubble this time says "I'm scared". There is a desk separating Tony and the teacher in a traditional representation of a classroom. Tony explained that each class would have eight children and two teachers.

This adult led context is in stark contrast to the freedom of the walk to the beach with his brother and sister. Whilst his personal, family narrative is one of independence and trust, his school context is one of authority and control – in fact of increased (from the primary school context) adult intervention and fewer perceived freedoms.

For Tony's identity narrative it is not surprising that the two drawings are so dissimilar. Tony is required to navigate the complexity of a life where on the one hand he is offered increasing freedoms as befits a child who is moving towards adulthood and on the other further restraint – the apparent schooled perception that children 'like Tony' need to be in environments where there is greater adult control (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2013).

The two sections of transcript shown in Figure 4.7 along with the drawings, suggest that for Tony there is a sense of his embedded belief in who he is in the context of school which has been channelled through the labels assigned to him through the institution of school. For him this is a 'problem'. This hasn't been offered to him as something that can help him make sense of who he is – what his strengths are – but something that presents him as a deficit, as a lack. This institutional identity is then filtering through to his understanding of how he makes friends, how he fits within the social world. Within the school context at least, he understands his place in the social strata through the labels which have been assigned to him.

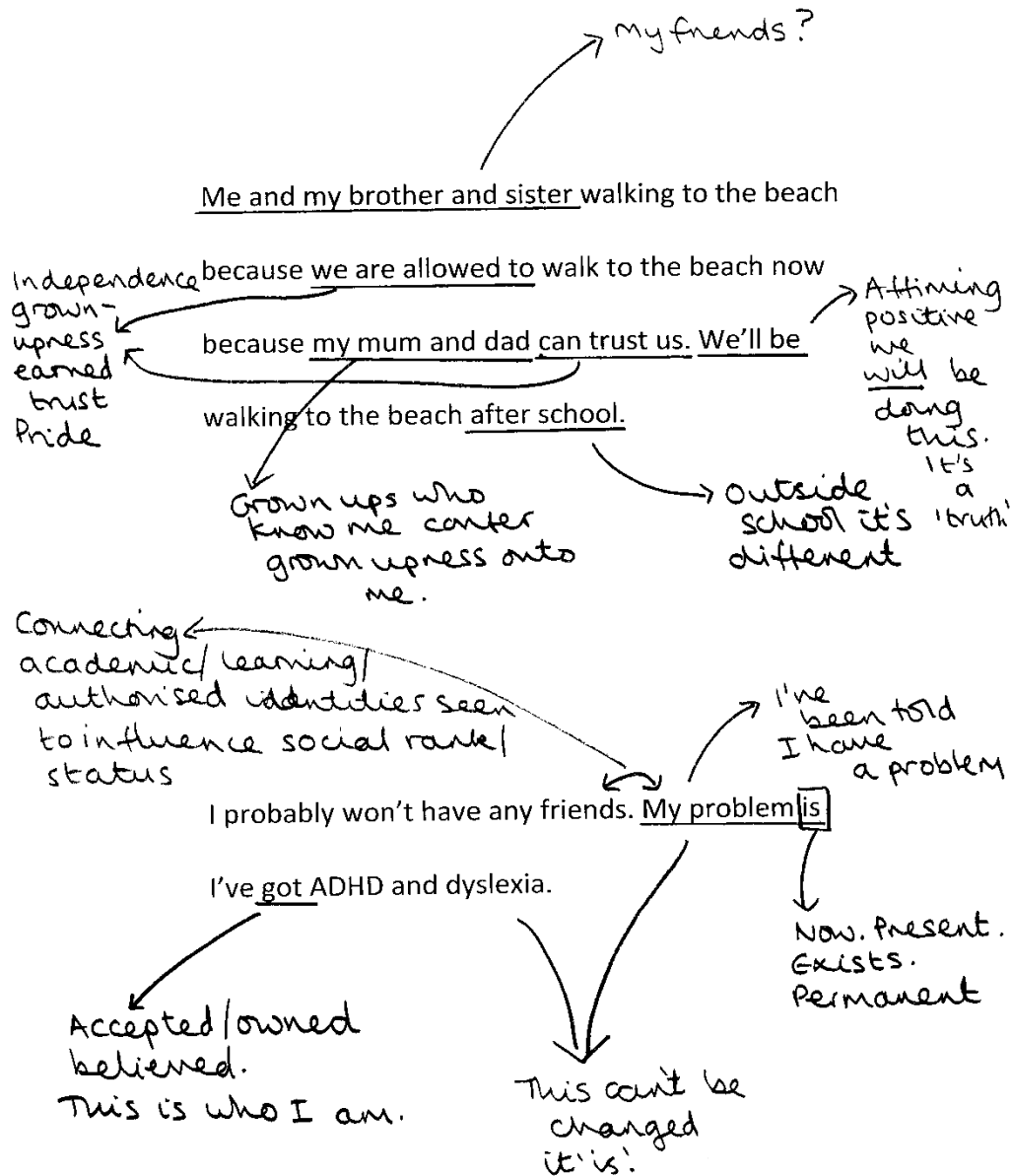


Figure 4.7 Tony – Annotated Transcript Phase One Part A

From Adler & Adler's (1998) research Tony could be seen to be describing a possible self in secondary school (Markus & Nurius, 1986) which would fit with their description of an 'isolate'. For Tony, the changing social context at this particular point in early adolescence is setting up a significant challenge for the development of his social identity which could have implications for his positive development of self and well-being (Tanti *et al*, 2011).

Nadine

Nadine participated in Phases One and Two of the research. In Phase One she was in a group at Rosetown with Maddy and Christopher and in Phase Two she was interviewed with Christopher at Greentown.

Nadine is slight, quiet and unassuming. She has long dark hair pulled back from an elfin-like face. She doesn't volunteer much information in the Phase One interviews – instead responding in a considered way to my prompts and questions – or to the contributions of others. In Phase Two she seems much more confident and talks easily about her experiences in school – often showing some insightful awareness and appearing very tuned in to the focus of the research. She offers thoughtful reflections on the ways in which she and her peers interact. She also talks with confidence about the support she is receiving for difficulties with her health and is plainly proud of her achievements in secondary school.



Figure 4.8 Nadine – Drawing Phase One Part A

Nadine's drawing in Phase One (Figure 4.8) foregrounded her friendships in Year 7 – herself in the centre – two existing friends (both girls) slightly smaller and further back from her. Her 'new friends' are drawn further away still – one boy and one girl. In the second phase interview Nadine explained that she had been quite worried in Year six about whether or not she would make friends and expressed her relief that she did find people with whom she got along. She talked in the Phase Two interview about how now, at the end of Year seven, the girls were still getting in to their 'proper' groups – indicating the fluidity of the groups in this transitory stage between schools (Bishop *et al*, 2004).

She was also interested in and talked about how mixed gender friendships were becoming more the norm:

I think in high school the girls and the boys have started to mix sort of together with the groups but in primary school you'd be in small groups – like either two, three or four at the most and you'd all be either all girls or all boys. But in high school it sort of changes.

Phase Two

She observed, in line with a range of research (Adler & Adler, 1998; Pratt & George, 2005) that alongside the development of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships she felt that there was greater opportunity to have friends who were boys:

... boys are more of your friends now rather than just being [pause] boys!

Phase Two

Alongside this, however, she talked about the 'pressure' girls are under to 'look nice' by doing their hair a certain way and wearing make-up (Read, 2011). She said, though, that she quite liked this and saw it as part of 'growing up' – distancing herself, however, from 'some people' who:

... wear loads of make-up and straighten their hair every single day ...

Phase Two

These are a group of girls who she later referred to as 'chavs'⁹. Nadine saw chavs as a high status groups and therefore 'popular' and saw looks as part of the 'package' – alongside having the 'right' interests.

... with the girls it's more of really how you look. If people look nice and like certain things and like certain music and things like that then they'll be more popular.

Phase Two

She positioned herself in the social ranking, however, very carefully through her talk about herself and others using embracement and distancing to show how she fitted 'in the middle' (Figure 4.9). Nadine appeared to be very comfortable being in the 'middle' with her own group of friends, (and this also fits with Adler & Adler's definitions) keenly aware of the ways in which being either 'popular' or a 'nerd' could be an undesirable label:

When you're popular you sort of have to be someone you're not like you have to try and fit in with all the people but when you're sort of in the middle [*gestures with hand*] you just be yourself really.

Phase Two

⁹ The use of the term chav and its associated stereotypical representation is examined in Chapter Five

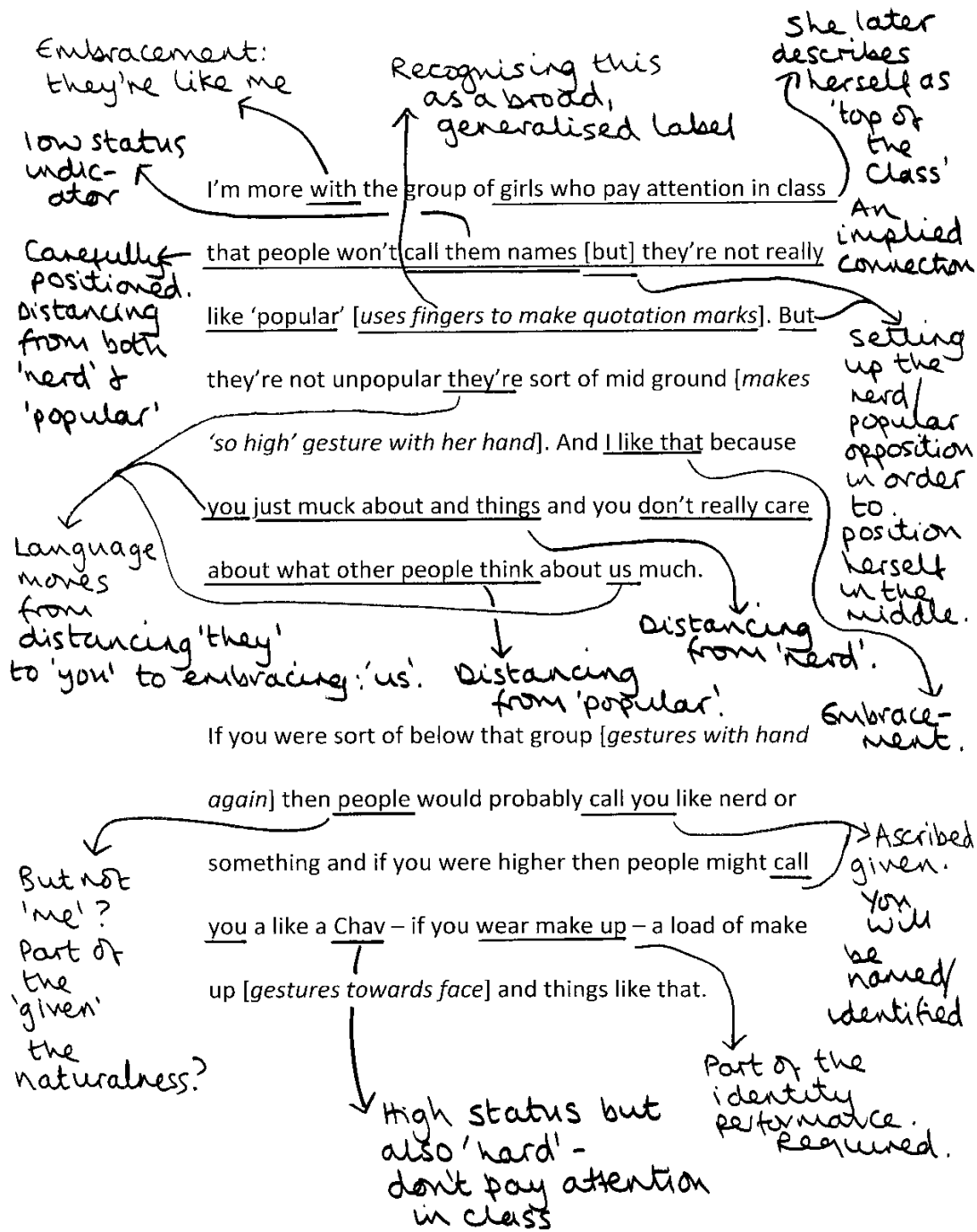


Figure 4.9 Nadine – Annotated Transcript Phase Two

Laura

Laura is a tall, pretty girl with long blond hair. She herself refers frequently to her looks – in the Phase One interview she wears a paper rose in her hair which she plays with as she talks. She talks about herself with confidence and is assertive about what she will be like in secondary school (in the Phase One interviews) and what she is like (in Phase Two). She refers frequently to her friends and her friendship groups and how they affirm who she is.



Figure 4.10 Laura – Drawing Phase One

In the first interview Laura firmly rejected her association with a grammar school – concerned that it will be a school of ‘nerds’ – her drawing (Figure 4.10) reflects this with the strong imperatives to respect teachers and get your homework done. This is, perhaps, exacerbated by the fact that she did not have any friends from Primary school going to the same school and had had little knowledge of what a ‘grammar school’ was like.

Later, in the second interview, she rationalises this negative attitude:

I thought: I'm going to be in this school with a load of people I don't want to be with. I'm going to be with people that are annoying and boring. I think if you're at grammar school you're always going to have a load of stuck up snobby kids. I've always thought it. I dunno why. I used to live in Essex and my cousin got into a grammar school in Year 4 I think. I was thinking: Oh my god! Snobby little brat! I used to think that about my cousin just because they're going to a grammar school. I didn't know what it was when I was in Year 4 and she told me and I was like 'Not my type of thing'. But now that I'm here I'm actually glad that I'm here ...

Phase Two

Laura was able to look back on this and offer some retrospective rationalisation – perhaps she was young, ignorant then but now she has experienced it she knows the truth. I revisit Laura and the ways in which she links her past and present and future life in Chapter Seven. Here she showed how the school reputation and its broad categorisation as a school for 'clever' children influenced her understanding of who she will be in secondary school (Reay, 2006). The institutional context of a 'grammar' school meant to her that she would be mixing with 'annoying and boring' children, but that was clearly not how she saw herself. Before starting school she distanced herself from the nerds, from the 'good' children by announcing that she wanted to get a detention on her first day and by roundly rejecting any suggestion that she was a 'nerd' simply by virtue of the fact that she was attending a grammar school.

Me: So if you're clever but don't wear glasses and don't do your hair like that are you still a nerd?

Sean: Yeah

Laura: No you're not! [*bangs desk*] Because that would mean that I'm a nerd but I'm not! Because you know I'm not!

Phase One Part A

Whilst the nerd identity is not institutionally sanctioned it could be seen to be institutionally driven. The school regimes set up positions for children which are then reassigned in alternative ways through the negotiation of peer group hierarchies. Laura therefore positioned herself as 'anti school'

in order to resist the role she felt she was obliged to take up. This counter positioning was also the means by which she was able to re-position herself in the social peer hierarchy – if she's not a nerd, she can be in the higher ranked 'popular' group – by showing some of the rebellious traits that 'popular' children are perceived to 'own' (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eckert, 1989)

Laura demonstrated significant embracement and distancing behaviours – to some extent in the first interview in the distancing from the nerd label but in the second interview there was a stronger level of sophistication to her in-group out-group identification. She was aware of this as an active process. She talked about 'her' group of friends:

They understand what you're talking about. If you tell people that aren't in [your] group of friends they'd be a bit like: Oh I don't see what you're talking about. But then the people in our [group] they're like: D'you know what? Yeah! I've done that, something like that, oh, yeah!

Phase Two

Here she articulated a sense of sameness and difference and highlighted how sameness unites. Throughout the interview she offered designations of different groups of children and was clear that that was just how they were and that it was as if it were part of the natural order that she would be friends with those like her. Whilst maintaining that it was ok for everyone else to be different she persisted in her view, in line with social identity theories, that she was friends with those like her. This is made clear in the transcript in Figure 4.11.

A complicated double negative which highlights the need to embrace 'popular' as a good thing but to distance herself from the desire to be popular.

I am 'known' => popular. Reputation is important to her.

I would say that a lot of people know me. I wouldn't say that I'm not popular but that just sounds shallow. But I don't know how to explain it without saying that I'm popular. I guess I'm more in that crowd. There's a couple of people that I think: Oh I just don't want to be with you because I know you'll just talk about maths or something.

Part of the 'naturalness' of who she 'is'!

Modest embracement. It's just 'is'.

Because if I associate with you I'll be seen/know as 'like you'.

People who aren't like me. Distancing

You're that kind of person. Disassociate from talk about school work.

Because that's how things 'are'!

People who are 'like me' & I am like them.

Popular/nerd opposition set up.

I can understand that there's always going to be people like that because it's a grammar school but then there's people that are my friends. They're more my type of people. They're more funny and they understand more than some of the others and it's just more fun with them than it is with other people. It's not that I'm popular but there's a group of us that are known to other years as well as just year 7.

They're like this & therefore so am I.

Contradictory oscillating still Caught between wanting to self-assign but also recognising that popularity identities have to also be assigned by others

=> other people say I'm popular because they 'know' me

Figure 4.11 Laura – Annotated Transcript Phase Two

She continually reiterated the 'fun', the 'funniness', the interestingness, the niceness of the children with whom she associated – this associational embracement enables her to claim a proxy identity –

this is the group that I associate with, this is what they are like and I've told you I get on with the people who I am like and therefore I must be like that too. She was at pains, however, to stress that there was a sense of a lack of choice. She had to be with that group because that's where she fitted – and that it is others who have identified her as such – her friends because she is like them and 'others' because they 'know' her. She reinforces this in talking about the children with whom she doesn't 'fit':

... there's a group of [people] that aren't my friends because they don't talk about much. They just talk about lessons because they don't really have anything in common. And I don't have anything in common with them and I just don't find that I'm interested in what they're talking about then there's a big group of girls and they're really nice and I really like all of them they're just not the same they're not as funny and they're not as fun to be around. But they're nice and I like talking to them so I'm not like one of those: 'I'm just in this group so I'm not talking to *them*'. I'm more like spreaded. But I just don't like talking to people who really don't have anything in common with me at all.

Phase Two

There was a clear sense of ranking through a process of in-group/out-group talk in Laura's explanation. She would talk to those with whom she has something in common, and who are nice. But those who have nothing in common with her (and she also perceives that they have nothing in common with each other) are not those with whom she wants to be associated with. Laura sees herself as more 'fun' than those who can only find lessons to talk about. She sees such children as of lower social status and avoids interaction with them – Eder's (1985) research found this to be particularly the case with female adolescent peer relationships.

Part B: Discussion

Ranking and Positioning

Throughout the children's talk they used language which identified their peers in terms of their social standing or rank in broad and generalised terms – referring to groups such as 'popular kids'; 'cool kids'; 'nerds' and 'chavs' as well as less specific groups such as those who 'pay attention in class' or those who 'think they're cool but they're not' or those who 'like to play computer games'. Using these broad generalisations or categories as benchmarks they appeared to then position themselves within those ranks through a process of identifying their similarities to and differences from the groups in line with social identity theories – but using much more nuanced interpretations of the groups' identifying features. The use of embracement and distancing talk (Snow & Anderson, 1987) enabled children to position themselves within the broad groups but to distance themselves from negative attributes associated with groups. This process also produced a kind of dialectic where the children's talk oscillated between the 'like' and 'not like' discourse (Jenkins, 2008) in sometimes contradictory ways (akin at times to Erikson's (1968) notion of 'identity confusion') as they tried to articulate a sense of who they were in positive and self-affirming ways (Tarrant, 2002) and how they enacted this within the social context of school (Jabal & Rivière, 2007).

There were a range of attributes (or, as Laura referred to them, 'traits') which were used in the ranking and positioning talk. For the purposes of this discussion, in order to concentrate on the ways in which social hierarchies develop, I focus on three: academic ability; attractiveness and 'fashion'; friendships, popularity and reputation. In this section, I draw on the five children described previously as well as data from the other children in the study.

Academic Ability

The ways in which academic ability was ascribed, perceived and enacted was referred to frequently through the children's talk and was significant in the ways in which the children ranked and positioned themselves and each other. There was a distinction between 'actual' academic ability as ascribed through school and the ways in which children engaged in lessons and in class (generally described through the slightly euphemistic term 'paying attention'). For Lee and Tony for example, their academic standing was decided for them and non-negotiable – they were positioned by the discourses in school (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gee, 2000; Youdell, 2006) rather than positioning themselves. Conversely Joseph embraced his position as 'bottom of the top' in school and it seemed that he did not want to move either up or down the ability hierarchy – recognising that he was in a 'safe' place. To be more or less 'able' would mean a shift down the ranks in terms of social standing. And for Laura the rebellion against the association with the nerd label was a means by which she could assert an 'other' identity which supported a higher social rank (Brady, 2004).

The extent to which children 'paid attention in class' was frequently referred to through the data. This would appear to be part of the ways in which children's identity performances indicated the importance of school learning to them and the extent to which they conformed to or rebelled against school rules. Whilst a certain amount of rebellion was tolerated by the children from those who 'played up' in class there was a fine distinction drawn between those who were 'funny' and those who were 'annoying' – this links to the behaviours associated with being 'cool' as well. Nadine tried to distinguish between those who were 'nerds' and those who simply wanted to do as well as they could. She demonstrated pride in her achievements in school but distanced herself from those who 'always pay attention in class' – thus avoiding associating herself with the 'nerd' identity which would lower her social rank. Frances (who is a focus for the next chapter) talks about children who navigate the social/schooled requirements in quite complex ways:

They'll be all clever [in class] and then they'll go out saying 'Oh, I couldn't do this, I couldn't do that'. You'll be like a teacher's pet one moment and then you'll be talking about the teacher in bad ways and stuff.

Phase Two

The children who Frances describes here appear to be engaged in layered performances or 'embedded identity games' (Jabal & Rivière, 2007 p 199) which are required to enable them to continue to hold on to the 'popular' designation outside of lessons whilst conforming to institutional requirements to be seen to be 'paying attention' in lessons. The fact that Frances (and presumably others) see through, yet accept this performance is part of the ways in which Frances' own social rank is identified and maintained (Read, Francis & Skelton, 2011). She does not challenge or 'out' these children in or out of the classroom and therefore maintains her position as 'friendly with' but not 'part of' that particular group of girls.

Attractiveness and Fashion

Joseph's talk about popularity and friendship was embedded in his role as Captain of the football team – his sporting prowess – and therefore perceived attractiveness – as a determining feature of status (Swain, 2000; Skelton, 2000). Nadine's perception from the quote at the beginning of the chapter was that all the girls were 'interested in' the sporty boys.

The role of looks was underlined throughout the discussion with particular reference to the way in which girls did their hair and the amount of make-up they wore. There was a sense that some children had to 'make themselves' prettier and others were just naturally pretty but this did not seem to affect their peer status. Laura and Maddy both stress the importance of looks – prettiness – in school. Maddy says that she wants her new friends at secondary school to be '...pretty – I don't know why, they just have to be pretty' (Phase One Part A). This is in line with Read's (2011) discussion of this in terms of the idealised femininity that dominates in school and also so that Maddy, in mixing with 'pretty' friends claims 'prettiness' for herself as well.

The fact that being attractive or good looking enables you to make friends and be popular is also reinforced by the boys. The boys talked about hair styles – Thomas described how one boy was ostracised because of a ‘weird’ hair cut he had and many of the children associated boys ‘gelled’ hair as a high status look (Phase Two).

The way that the children dressed – including how they wore school uniform was highlighted. Sean, Helen B. and Laura talked about the need to have ‘fashion’ in school and as part of this discussion demonstrated how school ties needed to be tied in order to avoid being ‘picked on’ (Phase One Part A). The cool girls were seen to roll their skirts to make them shorter and carry their blazers over their shoulders rather than wearing them (Phase Two). The boys untucked their shirts and wore their ties loose. This is also part of the enactment of a rebelliousness against adult authority which plays into the ‘cool’ behaviour of the popular children.

Friendships, Popularity and Reputation

As schools are seen as one of the major sites where peer relationships are formed, as well as the arena where future social identities are shaped, we would suggest that boys and girls need such friendships in order to make sense of their new situation and in the development of their own identity.

Pratt & George, 2005 p24

Discussions around friends, old and new, were prevalent throughout the interviews. In Phase One there were various anxieties expressed about whether or not new friends would be made and reflections on retaining existing friends or reuniting with friends from the past. The confidence to make friends is understood as an important aspect of school transfer:

Moreover, those children who transfer to a new school either with a stable base of bonds or with the confidence to make new friends are often able to expand their networks through a process of snowballing.

Weller, 2007 p349

Kieran articulated this in the Phase One interviews:

I've got my old friend I used to go to life saving practice with and he's going to Greentown and so I'll talk with him and his friends so I might make a couple of new friends. If I make friends with them they'll show me their friends and you'll gradually get bigger and bigger.

Phase One Part A

Friendship groups were generally seen as naturally occurring – that you would become friends with those people with whom you had a natural affinity – most likely described in terms of the similarities they shared with you. Laura articulated a sense that the people who were in her friendship groups were those who share experiences, interests and humour. Robert, who is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, talks about how his friendship groups formed through his shared interests – again as a natural way of being and for Tony his 'natural' state meant that he would be unable to make friends.

Whilst children used the term 'popular' throughout their discussions they were also clear that children who were popular were not necessarily well-liked. Many of the children drew a distinction between the 'nice popular' and 'mean popular' children. There was also an understanding about the notion of a reputation – of being 'known'.

Frances said of the popular girls:

... everyone likes them – well not everyone *likes* them – everyone *knows* them.

Phase Two

She went on to explain how it is that children want to stay on the 'right side' of the popular girls to avoid being bullied – the strategies she used in her identity work in the figured world of peer relationships are described more fully in the next chapter. Nadine described similar behaviours among the popular girls in her school and Thomas talked about the popular boy, Gavin, who "...sometimes makes people go get stuff from his locker because he can't be bothered." (Phase Two)

Summary

RQ 1: How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

Sub questions:

- Does the school context contribute to the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies?
- What is the significance of adolescence as the time frame in which this identity work takes place?
- What is the significance of school transfer in identity work?
- Does children's talk about themselves and their peers show how they identify with and position themselves within peer group hierarchies in the school context?

The school is seen here to serve a key function in the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies – through the various ways in which schools are organised and the ways in which children are sorted and ranked. Whilst the overtly stated role of schools might be within the sphere of learning and education, the school structures and associated identities have a corresponding impact on the social status of children within their peer group interactions which was evident through children's talk about their role and status in school.

In the process of navigating a transition from childhood to adulthood they demonstrated through their talk how they associate and dissociate themselves with others in the process of determining their own sense of who they are. This resulted in typical oscillating behaviours (Fine, 2004) which moved between claims to identity in fluid but sometimes contradictory ways.

The transfer between phases of schooling sets up an additional context within which identity work takes place. Children, already uncertain about the roles and identities to which they can lay claim are required to 'figure out' what is required of them in a new context – where the available identity roles might be different or more complexly understood. Their friendship groups, which in

adolescence are significant yardsticks against which they assess their sense of who they are may undergo considerable shifts in the transfer to secondary schooling.

There is a clear hierarchy in the social status of broad peer groups or categories and those who are designated 'popular' status are more likely to be able to exert power over others (either within the context of their own peer group or over others from different peer groups). Throughout, children's talk about themselves and their peer groups drew on the language of status and ranking. Whilst there was evidence of clear delineations regarding peer group hierarchies and their status or rank at a macro level (in what was said about peer groups in a generalised way), at a micro level (in the descriptions of actual behaviour) these were often seen to be more flexibly enacted.

PART III

CHAPTER

FIVE

**FIGURED WORLDS
OF SECONDARY
SCHOOL PEER
RELATIONSHIPS**

RQ 2: How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do they perform or resist available identities?
- To what extent/how are they critically aware of the identity performances of themselves or others?

*Well you wouldn't expect someone, not being horrible,
but people with big glasses and a bit funny and weird.*

I wouldn't expect them to be popular

Laura, Phase Two

Overview

In the last chapter peer relationships in school were examined in terms of their situatedness within the institution of school (and school transfer) and in the context of adolescence. Children's identification with the peer group hierarchies was considered in line with social identity theories.

In this chapter peer relationships in school are considered in terms of 'figured worlds' (Holland *et al*, 1998). Figured worlds have been increasingly used in research in education as a means for locating, describing and understanding identity within school contexts and are seen as useful in accounting for complexity and fluidity in identity work. Figured worlds can be used to frame particular contexts such as classrooms or schools (Rainio, 2008; Urrieta, 2007a) or the ways in which concepts or ideas such as learning or 'smartness' are understood and circulated (Hatt, 2007; Rubin, 2007; Luttrell & Parker, 2001).

The figured worlds of peer relationships are enacted *in situ*, in schools, but media representations present stereotypical characters and storylines which form part of a cultural resource which is drawn on by children as they interact in the figured world. The next chapter considers how these media representations, with associated stereotypes (as befits a 'figured world') are appropriated as cultural artefacts in children's identity work and how they contribute to children's understanding of the figured worlds they inhabit and to their understanding of both 'big' and 'small' stories of self and others (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006).

This chapter, however, is concerned with children's critical engagement in the figured world of peer relationships in school as they enact their identities in practice. I examine the ways in which children are recruited to and perform particular identities in peer group relationships in school, their engagement with these figured worlds and the extent to which they offer a critical or resistant response to the identities they encounter and perform. In addition, figured worlds provide a further

opportunity for the examination of the ways in which subject positions are taken up and enacted within the context of relations of power.

Setting the Scene

Figured Worlds

A figured world is, according to Holland *et al* (1998):

... a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents ... who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state ... as moved by a particular set of forces.

p52

Thus individuals or 'actors' are recruited to figured worlds in their daily lives and play out their roles using the figured world as a framework for action, drawing on cultural resources to hand and heuristically developing their identity in practice and both reproducing and re-creating (that is having the potential to change) the figured worlds themselves:

Players become ever more familiar with the happenings of a figured world ... and learn to author their own and make them available to other participants. By means of such appropriation, objectification and communication, the world itself is also reproduced, forming and re-forming in the practices of its participants.

p53

Whilst figured worlds might frequently be relatively stable and durable – sometimes reproduced over years or decades – the opportunities they afford for agentive action by individuals and therefore 'new' ways of being and doing within the figured world, mean that there is also the potential for cultural and social change. Holland *et al* use figured worlds to combine understandings of agency and identity from both cultural and social constructivist perspectives so that agentive action is not seen to arise merely from the tenets of the cultural contexts which consciously and unconsciously direct action from birth, but also from the moment by moment social interactions which take place within the context of hegemonic power structures. Their model allows for a notion of identity as 'history in person':

... the sediment from past experiences upon which the individual improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded to one in the present.

p18

This is set alongside cultural notions of identity as the ways in which, from birth, persons ascribe to themselves and others ways of doing and being that exist within the cultural context in which they live. It also incorporates constructivist understandings of identity as enacted contingently within social worlds in response to hierarchies of power.

The model arose from the desire to be able to explain improvisational, agentic acts of 'identity in practice' beyond a purely culturist or constructivist understandings. Drawing on Bakhtinian notions of the dialogic authoring of self in cultural worlds and Vygotskyian ideas of the 'self' as it is developed and learned in social interactions, Holland *et al* postulate figured worlds as imagined constructions of particular social activities within which players take on roles and use material, cultural resources in order to play out their activities – and thus bring into being their 'identities in practice'. In this way the figured worlds provide a framework of interpretation – they sketch out the parameters within which identity work will take place and prefigure broad, typical stories of the stereotypical actors and performances. Thus there is a framework, a partially written script (as discussed in Chapter Two), from which the actors improvise – drawing on whatever is to hand whilst maintaining the coherence and integrity of the figured world to which the script belongs. Therefore each vignette, each story which is played out, carries with it culturally pre-determined and socially configured contexts which can be individually enacted, 'authored' by the characters which make them up: stories which are never fully predictable yet recognisable and contained. Each 'actor' brings self as history in person and objectifications of the social self to the script, drawing on the cultural tenets and their understanding of the positioning and power within the 'game'. Therefore

this broad interpretative framework allows for culturally driven behaviours as well as individual actions which are socially contingent instantiations of identity in practice.

The recognisability of identity performances within and between figured worlds and the notion of constrained unpredictability in identity work is picked up in Chapter Seven of this thesis where the idea of 'self-sameness' (Ezzy, 1998) is used to explore how individuals might maintain a coherent sense of self across time and contexts.

Figured Worlds in Educational Research

Using Holland *et al*'s conceptualisation of identity as enacted in figured worlds offers a particularly good vantage point from which to consider how children interact within their peer group relationships in school. Figured worlds are many, varied and overlapping. Individuals engage with different figured worlds at different times and in different ways. In school children could be understood to be navigating the institutionalised 'figured world' – where the actors are strict or kind teachers, hard working or naughty pupils and the scripts are around performances of identity which fulfil particular behavioural and academic roles; but they are also engaged in the figured world of peer group relationships where the actors are 'popular' or 'unpopular' children, class clowns or nerds and the scripts are around social positioning through accessories and behaviours – linked to academic and behavioural performances but with different understandings and values associated with such performances. To be clever is highly salient, highly valued in the institutional figured world (Gee, 2000; Youdell, 2006), but within the world of peer group hierarchies being clever can result in lower social positioning (Brady, 2004; Kinney, 1993; Skelton, Frances & Read, 2011). As was seen in the previous chapter, children in school are navigating competing identity narratives which position them differently in different contexts. For some children this requires significant identity work in order to 'do' and 'be' in ways that straddle conflicting figured worlds (Dijkstra, 2013).

Within educational research there are a number of examples of figured worlds being used to conceptualise, examine and understand children within the context of school. In a special edition of *The Urban Review* Urrieta (2007a) puts forward the conceptual framework of figured worlds as a particularly helpful tool in educational contexts as they are to do with how people 'figure' themselves in social contexts (p107). As discussed in the previous chapter, adolescence is a time of significant identity figuring and the social context of school provides one of the contexts in which this figuring takes place. One of the strengths of figured worlds in the context of education is that they can be used to describe specific aspects of children's social and learning experiences in school. Thus figured worlds can be used to describe the construction of learner identity as (in)competent within the figured worlds of learning (Rubin, 2007); Chicano activist figured worlds can be used to understand identity formation for Mexican Americans (Urrieta 2007b) or to identify the different ways in which 'smartness' is understood within a school context (Hatt, 2007). Figured worlds can be used to focus on 'small cultures' (Holliday, 1999) as developed in individual classrooms and schools as well as opening out to larger cultural understandings which encompass such things as curriculum or educational success.

As Rubin (*ibid*) suggests, figured worlds can help to draw attention away from the actors themselves and point to the contexts in which learner or other identities in school are enacted. The ways in which power operates within the contexts can also be more clearly identified and understood.

As with the research examined in the previous chapter, there has been less explicit use of figured worlds to consider children's peer relationships within the context of school. Whilst much of the existing research is socially situated there is less attention paid to the overlapping ways in which social and cultural interactions inform the heuristic process of identity formation. Again, the tendency in educational research using figured worlds appears to be one that focuses on children's engagement with or achievements within an educational, learning context rather than as a forum for the development of understanding about social relationships, hierarchies and interactions (as in the research cited above).

This research is focused on peer relationships *per se* – on the performance of identity within the social sphere irrespective of (whilst clearly related to) the concomitant performances within the academic or institutional sphere. To acknowledge that identity performances overlap and interweave is not to discount the ways in which particular social spheres can be acknowledged or examined separately.

Data Analysis

Holland *et al's* (1998) work with young women and the figured world of romantic relationships forms a useful parallel in examining the context of peer relationships. For their research, Holland *et al* considered the salience of, identification with, and savoir faire within, the figured world for each individual. They suggest that the development of women's 'expertise', their savoir faire, within the figured world of romance was closely related to how significant romance was to the individual and to what extent they identified with the expected roles and behaviours. As (or indeed if) salience and identification developed through their interactions within the figured world of romance they became more expert at navigating and performing within it:

For the women we studied, the cultural interpretation of romance became salient and compelling as their expertise with romantic relationships increased and as they came to form an engaging interpretation of themselves in the world of romance. Women who were vague and unclear, or resistant to envisioning themselves in the world of romance, were the ones who remained less expert and who found romance relatively unimportant in their lives. Expert women were those who clearly identified with the world and for whom romance was highly salient.

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Thus, they argue, cultural 'know how' is not necessarily fully understood and appropriated by individuals in a homogenous way – existing inequalities of social position and hierarchical power will come into play in the ways in which individuals are recruited into and take on roles in figured worlds. The figured world of peer relationships in school, as with the figured world of romance, is linked to notions of prestige. In more explicit ways than in the world of romance, it is also clearly to do with the distribution of social power. But the ways in which identities develop in both worlds are to do with the navigation of social interactions and in the presentation of particular identities in particular ways in response to the other identities, the other actors, within the figured world.

In order to look at critical engagement with the figured world, the data were analysed using categories as described by Holland *et al* of the identification with and salience of figured worlds of

peer relationships to individuals and the 'savoir faire' of the actors within them. This provided a structured 'way in' to the data yet still allowed for multiple and complex readings.

Identification with the figured world of peer relationships was seen where the children associated themselves or others with particular groups and in the use of like/not like characterisations of them.

The salience of the figured world to the participants was demonstrated where they used elements of the figured worlds to explain or understand the ways in which identity performances were enacted in school – and how much this 'mattered' to them.

Their savoir faire was presented in the ways in which they were able to demonstrate how their identity performances were linked to their knowledge of the 'workings' of the figured world.

In this chapter the analysis begins with an overview of the ways in which children engaged with the narratives and characters of figured worlds. Four of the children's identity work/performance is then examined in more detail and differing degrees of engagement and criticality and expertise are described. This, again, allows for different layers of interpretation at different levels of analysis.

Part A: Overview

In the Phase One data there was evidence of the salience of the figured world of peer relationships to the children – for example all children foregrounded the importance of friendships – of making ‘more’ and ‘new’ friends (Pratt & George, 2005, Weller, 2007). While only a few children were specific about the kinds of children they wanted to be friends with (Helen B. insisted that her new friends would be pretty; Laura distanced herself from the ‘nerds’) and the number of friends that they would have (Joseph was assured that he would have lots of friends and therefore remain ‘popular’, whereas Tony saw that his ‘ADHD and dyslexia’ would mean that he wouldn’t make any friends) for all children the importance of friendships were evident (Kingery *et al*, 2011). Key narratives in the figured worlds of peer relationships are to do with the number of friends you have and how well-known you are (Warin & Muldoon, 2009) and, as discussed in Chapter Four, who it is that you associate with. In the figured worlds of peer relationships, it appears, you are known by the company you keep (Hey, 1997; Read *et al*, 2011). The children in this study demonstrated this in their narratives – and in their discussions of the television programmes’ stereotypical representations of identity (this is developed in the next chapter). However the key talk about friendships – and this was replicated in the drawings – was about maintaining (or re-uniting with) old friendships and making new friendships with ‘nice’ people and avoiding the ‘weird’ or ‘not-so-nice’ children and the bullies (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Weller, 2007)

Some of the children in Phase One also demonstrated identification with the peer group relationship hierarchies – Joseph in his position at the top of the social order and Lee towards the bottom as we saw in the last chapter. There were also more subtle ways in which identification was seen in narratives of independence and ‘growing up’ – also discussed in Chapter Four. A number of the children identified with ‘sport’ (Swain, 2000; Skelton, 2000) – Robert, as we shall see later distanced himself from sport whilst acknowledging its salience to the secondary school context. The girls leaned towards identification with looks (Read, 2011) – Helen B. and Laura were keen to talk about

themselves as 'pretty girls'; Susan was proud of her ginger hair – reconfiguring the popularised negativity associated with hair of this colour.

Behaviourally, the children tended to talk about conforming to 'strict teachers'; getting homework done and generally behaving within the institutional expectations (Kingery *et al*, 2011). Both Joseph and Jeremy described how they would behave differently in the context of the classroom recognising the need to perform one particular identity for teachers and a different one for peers – yet somehow retaining a balance between the two (Martino, 2000).

Laura was the only one to overtly voice a narrative of disobedience – in order to counteract the strong suggestion of 'nerdiness' connected with attending grammar school that was being presented from her peers (and herself). Identities which 'sucked up' to teachers were referred to in Phase One and presented as negative models of behaviour in terms of peer group status, alongside those who were 'bad' or 'naughty' or 'not nice'. The latter group of children, however, those who played up or did not 'pay attention' in class were more likely to be identified in the Phase Two interviews as in line with 'cool' or popular behaviours (Bellmore *et al*, 2011; Martino, 2000;).

Some of the elements of 'savoir faire' that were identified in Phase One were related to their interpretation of television shows. Jonathan talked about the trials of the 'wimpy kid' in the film *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. The 'wimpy kid' is trying to perform 'cool' but is thwarted by his friend from junior school – who is the epitome of nerd. Jonathan explained:

... in one of them they came in in the same clothes and he [the wimpy kid] had to change because he didn't want the same clothes as him [the nerd].

Phase One Part B

Jonathan understood the 'rules' but, as discussed in the next chapter, this is not 'savoir faire' in the sense of acting out an identity in practice within the context of a figured world – this is part of the process of learning the narratives, the scripts, from the cultural resources provided by children's

television programmes in order that, when the time comes, they can be drawn on as and when they may or may not become salient in context. The next chapter discusses this further.

Data – Dis/Engaged and Un/Critical: Robert, Frances, Nadine and Laura

Robert

Robert participated in both phases of the research. In Phase One he was at Browntown in a group with Tony, Jeremy, Jonathan and Thomas. In Phase Two he was at Crosstown (the same school as Frances) and took part in a 1:1 interview.

Robert is a neatly presented boy with short dark hair. He has a slightly anxious and somewhat self-deprecating manner and he tends to fidget on his chair while he talks. His contributions to the interviews in both phases consist of short snippets of information describing how things 'are' in quite decisive and apparently inflexible ways. Only rarely does he talk at any length and his talk is frequently interspersed with short, nervous laughs. In the interview in Phase Two he appears uncomfortable when asked questions which require him to talk about himself or others in evaluative ways.

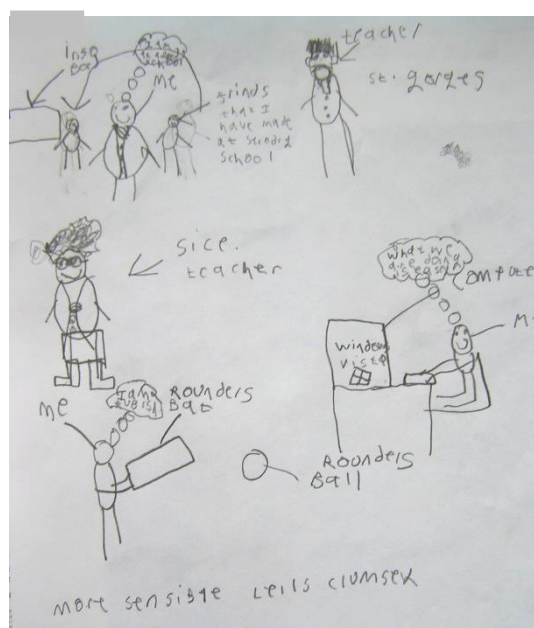


Figure 5.1 Robert – Drawing Phase One Part A

In his drawing (Figure 5.1) Robert imaginatively ‘figured’¹⁰ himself in secondary school – and his drawing told us how he saw himself, how he saw himself in relation to others and how he saw himself in the context of a secondary school. Thus the figured world of secondary school emerges. He drew himself with ‘new’ friends and a strict, grumpy teacher. Throughout the data from the interviews in Phase One ‘strict’ teachers who were imbued with the power to dish out sanctions were represented over and over again (see Laura’s drawing in the previous chapter) – a feature of the figured worlds of secondary school which was in contrast to the majority of the children’s references to their current, primary school, teachers. The science teacher in Robert’s drawing, however, is smiling and reflects, perhaps, Robert’s own interest in science as a subject which he alluded to in the interview in Phase Two.

Robert drew himself with a rounder’s bat and ball – other boys in his interview group talked animatedly about sport. Robert, however, added a speech bubble which says ‘I am rubbish’. He acknowledged that sport has a role to play in school – drawing on the focus of the conversation of others – but he identified himself as ‘non sporty’ within this figured world narrative. By contrast beside the drawing of himself with a rounder’s bat, Robert went on to draw himself at the computer and this time the speech bubble says ‘What we are doing is easy’. Robert appeared to juxtapose what he saw as his strength as a counter to his perceived lack of prowess in sport. In this way, however, he positioned himself as a ‘geek’ or a ‘nerd’ in being willing to foreground his interest in and perceived expertise at computing. Whilst other children might enjoy computer games as a leisure activity – it is a feature of the stereotypical ‘nerd’ character that they enjoy and pursue computer-based activities over and above other things. Lee and Joseph in the previous chapter demonstrated a distancing from this nerd identity Robert does not appear to see any need or desire to do this (Kinney, 1993).

¹⁰ Figured worlds are used to understand the ways in which identity is enacted in social contexts. Here Robert is providing an imagined construction of a ‘possible self’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in a hitherto unknown in practice figured world. In this way he could be thought to be; prefiguring’ or ‘priming’ his identity work of the future as well as offering an indication of his present self understandings.

In the second interview, Robert appeared on several levels to be completely oblivious to the figured world in which he was participating. In Holland *et al's* work they looked at the ways in which the actors in the figured worlds identified with the worlds into which they were recruited; the salience of the figured worlds and the *savoir faire* with which they played their role. For Robert there appeared to be almost what might be described as a naïve lack of understanding of the social world which existed around him in terms of the peer group hierarchies. He presented as non-expert and outside of the 'game'. Questions which asked him to self-objectify or to say how others saw him and his group of friends were very difficult for him and he frequently responded with 'That's a hard question'. When asked what stopped him being 'cool' in school he responded with what seemed to be genuine bewilderment:

I don't know! I don't know! I'm going to have to ask somebody!

Phase Two

Similarly he found it hard to identify what made someone cool or popular. He recognized Laurence as someone who is cool but when asked why people would describe him as cool he replied:

Err [*pause*] not sure. But I know people would.

Phase Two

He responded to prompts about Laurence's looks and behaviour as possible indicators of coolness but could not offer a definitive description beyond a vague perception that he was 'funny' and 'girls like him'.

He demonstrated his disengagement from the figured worlds further when describing girls whom Frances described (as discussed in the next section) as 'popular' (Figure 5.2).

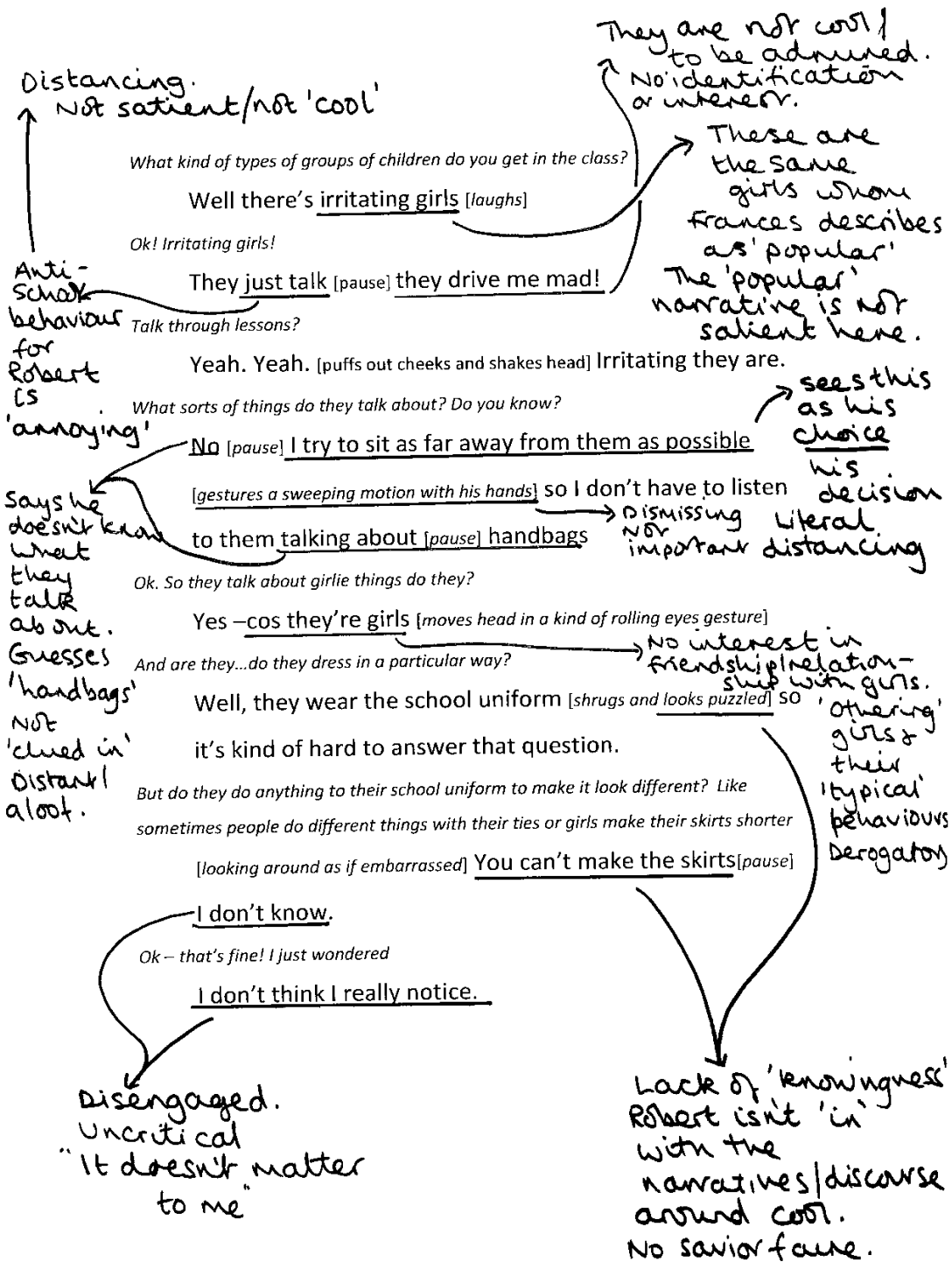


Figure 5.2 Robert – Annotated Transcript Phase Two

Robert offered a stereotypical story of women as shallow and interested only in clothes, hair, makeup and accessories – this is a figured world of ‘girliness’ overlapping with the figured world of peer relationships and, for Robert, more salient at this point.

He also referred to times when he and a teacher had colluded in teasing these girls about their hairstyles (what he refers to as their ‘door handle’ pony tails), or their ‘girliness’. In choosing to align himself with the teacher in this context Robert was seemingly unwittingly further enacting an identity which situates him towards the ‘nerd’ identity.

Frances

Frances participated in both Phases of the research. She was at Browntown in Phase One in a group with Claire and Melody. In Phase Two she was at Crosstown with Robert but was interviewed 1:1 at the school.

Frances is a quietly spoken girl. She talks quite seriously about herself as someone who has to work hard academically but also speaks with pride about her achievements in dance. She refers frequently to her relationship with her mother – someone whose opinion she appears to value highly (even though they also fall out at times). She can articulate a sense of careful reasoning behind the ways in which she interacts with her peers – she seems to weigh up consequences before committing to actions. She describes herself as shy both in and out of class.

Frances appeared to understand how the peer hierarchies work. She demonstrated 'savoir faire' with the way the figured world of peer relationships works and her position within it. But unlike Laura (who is described later) she also demonstrated an 'outsiderliness' to her observations about the identity performances which go on. She was able to identify and articulate the behaviours which the popular girls exhibit and demonstrated understanding of the performances which are being enacted – and what lies beneath them – and the difference between being 'known' and 'liked'. She demonstrated some understanding of the 'inauthenticity' (Read *et al*, 2011) of the popular girls' performances (Figure 5.3).

Ok. So you said earlier about the popular kids were horrible about the girls – the clever girls?
So what kind of things do they do then?

Well, there's a girl called Donna and when, like, people say 'nerds' they think of clever people or like ginger haired, glasses, stuff like that. But now they think nerds are cool.

Right. Who thinks nerds are cool?
The popular people like they put geeky glasses on [mimes action] like to be in with the fashion [does quotation marks with fingers].
But Donna, she's really clever. And whenever she says anything they go 'Wooo ooo' and stuff like that.

Right, so to sort of tease her?
Yeah
Right, OK. But even though they, they kind of want to be nerdy too? Do they?
Yes
Do they want to be clever? Are they clever?
They want to be... They're not very clever
Right
They pretend, well they pretend they're not. But they pretend like they want to be

She's a 'clever girl' who doesn't know how to play the game

geek 'chic' = 'owning' the stereotype

Salience of looks or ability in the 'label'

'Cool' kids need 'nerds' to tease in order to enact cool.

Looks are the salient thing here. Looking clever - not being clever. An act. A performance

They can't be very clever without tipping into 'nerd'

I can see the layers of pretence:
- Pretend you're not as clever as you are (to your peers?)
- Pretend you want to be clever (to the teachers?)

Frances, Phase 2

Figure 5.3 Frances – Annotated Transcript Phase Two

Alongside this, though, Frances was aware of her reciprocal performance – of how the performances of others were intertwined with her own, dialogic response. The popular girls required the less popular children to do as expected; otherwise they could not 'be' popular (Gee, 2000).

Although Laura (discussed in Chapter Four and later in this chapter) and Frances attended different schools it was possible to see how Frances might have been the sort of girl whom Laura referred to as the 'nice' girls who she talked to but who were not 'in' her group. In the same way that Laura might represent the popular girl with the power and therefore the potential to act in a bullying way towards others whom Frances describes.

Frances gave an example of how the group of girls she described as 'popular' bullied a friend of hers by calling her names. Frances says:

I've got some friends, but they're not very nice to other people. They think they're really cool ... so I don't tend to hang around with them because they bully all my other friends. I used to laugh at it and then I've just realised that I don't think it's funny anymore and now I tell them to stop.

Phase Two

Frances exercised agency here and distanced herself further from this group. Although telling the group to stop the name calling got her into 'trouble' with the popular group she was prepared to stand up to them – saying that they usually "... forget about it and become friends the next day".

It could be seen that Frances, in her role on the periphery of the popular group (part of Adler & Adler's 'middle' group) was more able to make choices about this sort of behaviour. For those 'in' the group, rejection of the group behaviour could lead to ejection from the group – there is much more at stake, much more to lose (Adler & Adler, 1998; Hey, 1997).

Frances was also keenly aware and clued into the behaviours of the group and understood that they wield power only because other children allowed them to. She herself succumbed saying with a rueful smile:

I ended up carrying Lauren's crisps and drinks around the whole day because I didn't want to get bullied by them all and for them all to hate me.

Phase Two

She understood and made a pragmatic choice – better to be a dogsbody for a day than to have to deal with a greater potential backlash. It is to Frances' credit that standing up for a friend appeared to be worth risking the very response which she is here clearly trying to avoid.

Frances appeared to be able to juggle agency and conformity. She engaged in the game – she carried the lunch box because the pragmatics dictated that this was a small price to pay for keeping things on an even keel – yet she was fully aware of why she was doing it and what was 'going on' in terms of power plays (Francis, 1998; Read *et al*, 2011). However, when the context was more personal, more serious, perhaps, and involved the well-being of others, Frances was able to reflect critically on her own behaviour. Where she initially went along with 'bullying' behaviours, following discussion with her mum, her friend and her friend's mum she decided (she 'realised' – it became real, perhaps?) that this was not 'right'. Whilst it might have cost her in terms of the consequences of resisting joining in with the 'popular kids' she made the agentic decision to stand against them. She re-authored herself, in this context, as someone who was not a bully; someone who did not, by default, support bullying behaviour and someone who was a loyal friend. Here the behaviours, her identity in practice, became highly salient to her and her sense of who she was. She understood the consequences of taking a stand but here who she was, who she saw herself to be and how she wanted significant others (her mum, her friends) to see her over-rode the need to perform in a way which supported the hierarchical status quo. Within the context of the figured world of peer relationships she was able to author herself in a conscious, considered act.

Nadine

Nadine, who we met in Chapter Four is revisited here. She took part in both Phases of the research.

In the first interview she was at Rosetown in a group with Maddy and Christopher. In the second phase she was with Christopher at Greentown and they were interviewed together.

Nadine is slight, quiet and unassuming. She has long dark hair pulled back from an elfin-like face. She doesn't volunteer much information in the Phase One interviews – instead responding in a considered way to my prompts and questions – or to the contributions of others. In Phase Two she seems much more confident and talks easily about her experiences in school – often showing some insightful awareness and appearing very tuned in to the focus of the research. She also talks with confidence about the support she is receiving in secondary school for difficulties with her health and the impact this has on her learning. She is also plainly proud of her achievements in school – and articulates her sense of success in her learning.

Nadine, like Frances, demonstrated considerable savoir faire within the world of peer relationships. Figure 5.4 shows how she is 'clued in' to the game. Like Frances she was able to articulate the difference between herself and her group of friends and the 'popular girls'. Throughout the interview she took care to present herself as someone who cared about her achievement in school, but not someone who was vilified for this. Like Frances, she appeared to be treading a careful line between popularity and nerd-dom – and seemed happy, satisfied, and confident that she had managed to achieve this. She understood the 'rules' – she was aware of the salience of hair style, looks, sport, music and other accessories in the bid for popularity. She reflected critically on the popular group's need for validation from others and the fakeness of their friendships and set store in her own group's strong friendships and the fact that they did not care what others think of them. These are the clear in-group/out-group narratives discussed in the previous chapter and they also

tune into the media stereotypes of 'mean girls' as discussed in the next – for this chapter Nadine can be seen to be engaged in the figured world narratives of popularity of friendships and of academic achievement (Figure 5.4).

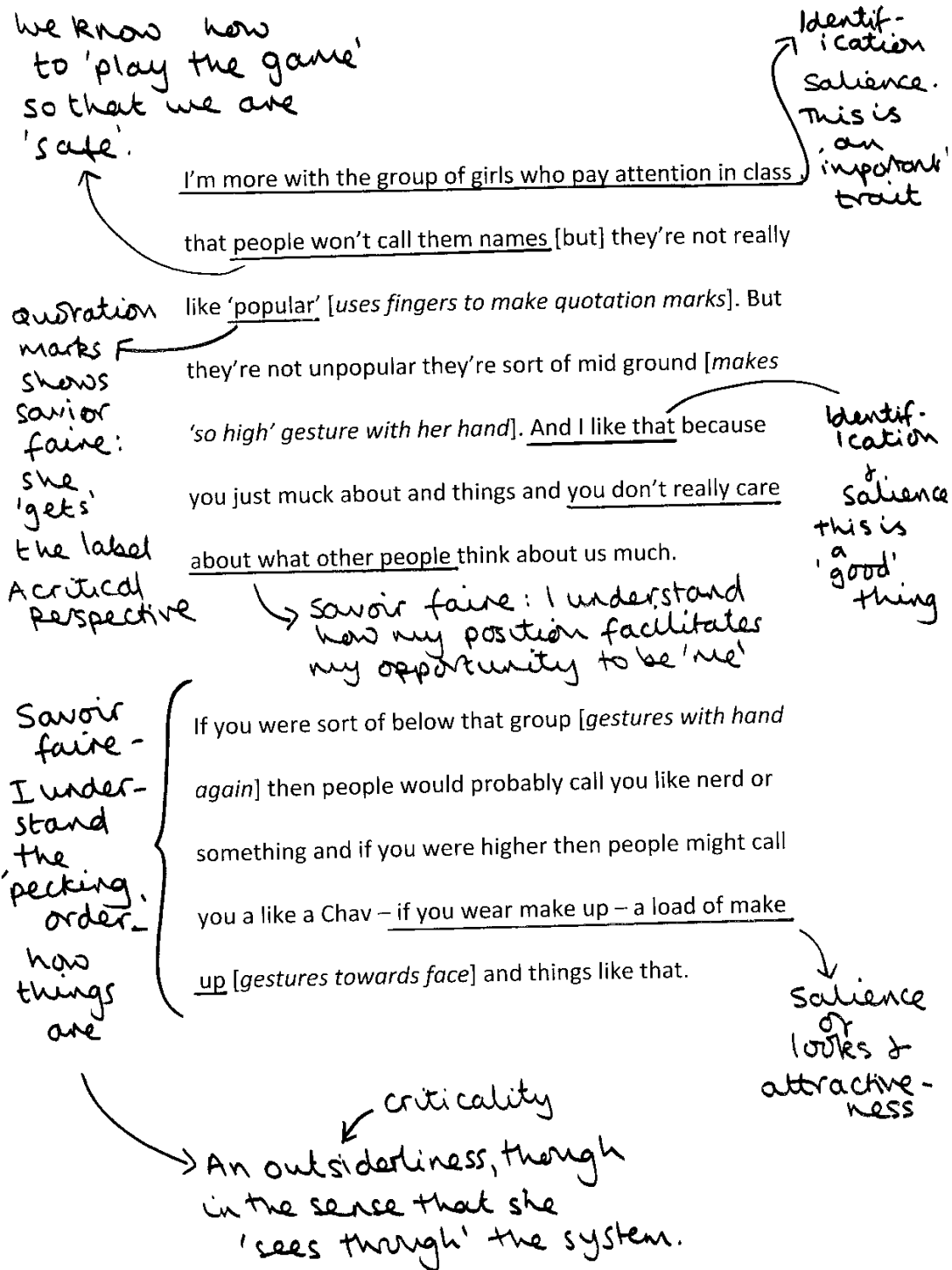


Figure 5.4 Nadine- Annotated Transcript Phase Two

She authored herself within the figured world as someone who was content with her place in the hierarchy – but also fully engaged with and ‘knowing’ about the operation of the power structures. She knew what makes you ‘popular’ and yet did not strive to do/be those things. Like Frances she did not align herself with those who ‘try to make themselves prettier’ – nor those who wear ‘a load of make-up’ and are given the somewhat derogatory label of ‘chav’. It might also be that Nadine understood her ‘place’ in the order of things. She did not ‘fit’ with the popular girls so did not try to fit she was not a ‘wannabe’, she was happy in the ‘middle group’ – much as Adler & Adler suggest. She has found her position in the social arena and acted it out. She was not oblivious to other choices available to her, but positioned herself as if she were a member of the most favourable group – the ‘best’ position to be – in line with social identity theory. Joseph, in the last chapter, was seen to have positioned himself by virtue of being ‘not too clever’ – this is different, though. For Joseph he is taking something he has and using it to indicate how that enables him to take up a particular social position; Nadine, however, described what she had which implicitly excludes her from the popular group and she reframed this narrative to assert her satisfaction with her place in the social order. “I pay attention in class” and therefore cannot be a popular girl – but I’m not a nerd, and I have good friends.

Laura

Laura, like Nadine, was discussed in Chapter Four – she, too, is revisited here to consider her identity work within the figured world of peer relationships. Laura took part in both Phases of the research. In Phase One she was at Jollytown in a group with Sean and Maddy. In Phase Two she took part in a 1:1 interview at Simtown.

Laura is a tall, pretty girl with long blond hair. She herself refers frequently to her looks – in the Phase One interview she wears a paper rose in her hair which she plays with. She talks about herself with confidence and is assertive about what she will be like in secondary school (in the Phase One interviews) and what she is like (in Phase Two). She refers frequently to her friends and her friendship groups and how they affirm who she is.

Laura was one of the popular girls. She was initially shy to admit it but then demonstrated some pride in her position and in the fact that she was ‘known’ – had a reputation. She was fully engaged in the notion that popularity was a positive attribute and was at pains to distance herself from the ‘mean girl’ stereotype. When initially asked about the narrative of ‘mean’ popular girls she deflected it – saying that it happened in other schools, but not here in her own school. She then offered a description of how popularity might change you – if you were not naturally one of the crowd, but if you get ‘called’ to popularity by virtue of the friendship of a popular girl or boy.

If you’re with them then you’d be different. You’d be completely changed. You’d probably change personality a lot and the way you dress at school. And if you had your hair up more and if you were clever in class you’d just completely change all that just to be with these people.

Phase Two

For Laura, the need to change to fit was a given. She saw that popularity carried with it certain salient requirements – that you wear your hair down and you are not too clever in class. Therefore, on elevation to popular status, you would need to adapt your behaviour to fit the role.

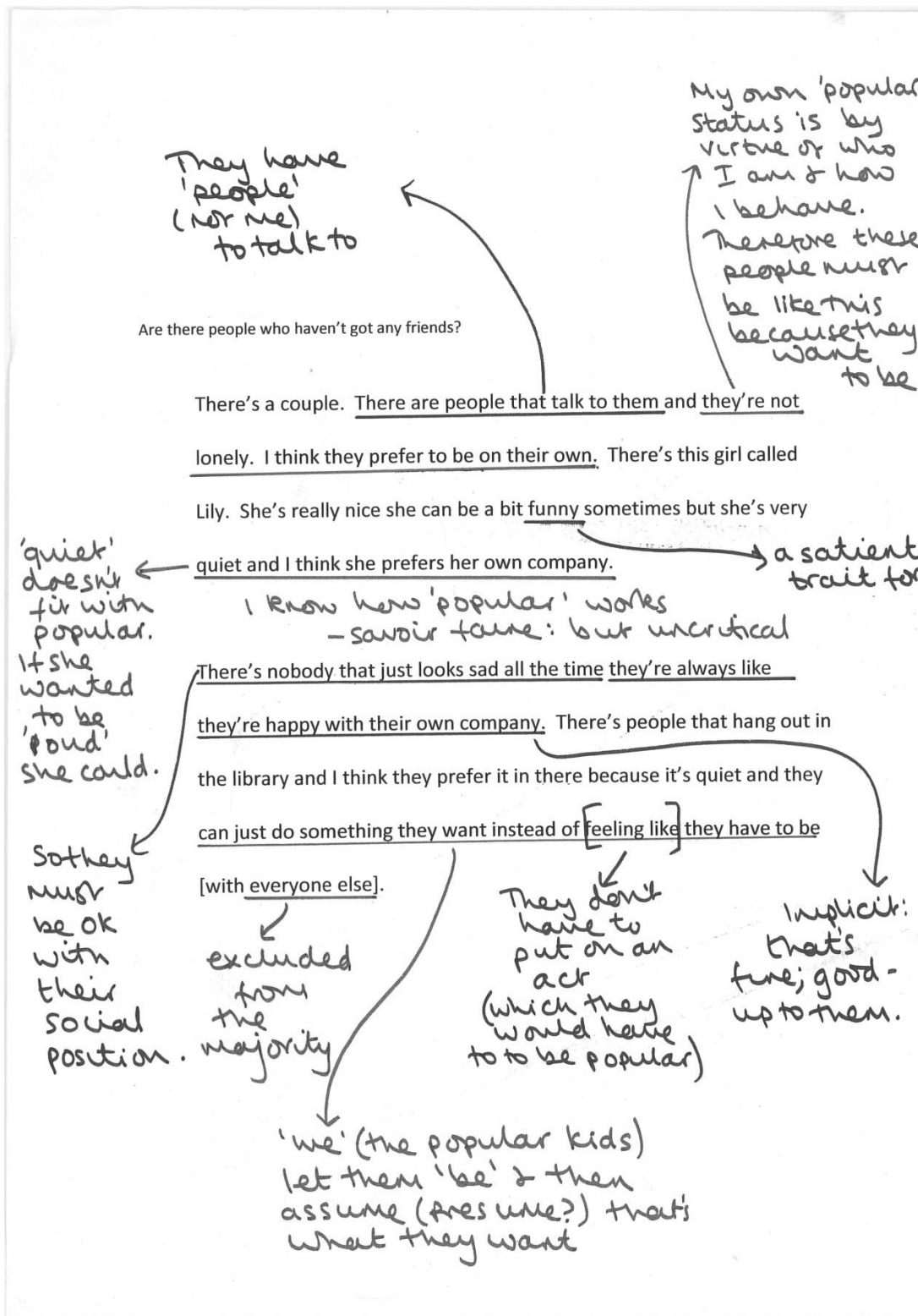


Figure 5.5 Laura – Annotated Transcript Phase Two

In Figure 5.5 we see that Laura identified strongly with the popular role; it was highly salient to her and she demonstrated considerable savoir faire regarding the expectations of popular children. She appeared to see a natural social hierarchy with attractive, funny people at the top and 'weird' kids with glasses at the bottom. She unproblematically assigned the 'loners' to their roles as if by their own choice and therefore assumed that they were happy in this role. She appeared to suggest that these 'quiet' people could fall in line with the expectations of popular kids if they so chose but at the same time she excluded them because of their looks and behaviours did not fit. There was an overwhelming sense of uncriticality in Laura and a mass of contradictions. She had 'upped her game' (as in the Phase One interviews she suggested she would have to) and was content to be in her socially superior position without appearing to reflect on the imbalance of power which it represented nor the challenges faced by those in less powerful positions.

Summary

RQ 2: How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do they perform or resist available identities?
- To what extent/how are they critically aware of the identity performances of themselves or others?

Figured worlds recruit neophytes into their ways of being and doing and through their actions and interactions within them these 'newbies' learn their roles and the roles of others. Refining and adapting their performances as they go, it is possible to gain expertise and develop competence within each figured world. However, as Holland *et al* found there are some actors who whilst playing a role are doing so without the same level of expertise as their peers. For some the salience of the figured worlds and their identification with them means that they do not reach the same levels of expertise or 'know how' within the figured world. In the stories of the children related here this can be slightly differently interpreted. Alongside notions of salience, identification and savoir faire sit the level of engagement with the figured world and the extent to which the figured world is viewed critically, as if from an outside perspective or uncritically and unproblematically accepted as 'natural' or the way things 'are'.

Laura and Robert represent two actors at different ends of the engaged spectrum yet both demonstrate an uncritical acceptance of the way in which the figured world is played out. For Laura her 'popularity' is a natural part of who she is – others might be recruited to the role and 'put on' the act – but for her this is who she is and how she is. She just 'discovered' that she was popular. She does not see this as a problem – just as she simply allocates other roles to other children within the figured world. She is fully engaged with and uncritical of, the world in which she operates at the

top of the social order. In some ways she also appears to be oblivious to the power that she is able to exert from this position.

Robert is equally uncritical. He sees the girls as, in one sense, 'silly things' – but this is just how things are. He is unaware, disengaged, from the behaviours of himself or others in the enactment of particular identities. He is removed from the social positioning plays which go on around him and he allies himself with the teachers, the adults and his friends who are like him. None of the social hierarchy issues seem relevant to him, because he is disengaged from the 'game'

Nadine and Frances offer a different perspective. Both girls are engaged with the figured world and both demonstrate considerable *savoir faire* within the game. But they demonstrate an ability to see through the 'game' and know it as a game and know their place in it. Unlike Laura, they seem to be aware of the choices they are making and, in their position 'in the middle', are confident that they do not have a popular image to maintain nor do they need to defend themselves against an unwanted 'nerd' label. They are happy where they are (Nadine perhaps more so than Frances) and able to critically engage with what is going on around them and steer their path through the challenges to enable them to maintain their comfortable social position. They understand that to be seen as popular, the popular children must enact the I-for-others (Bakhtin, 1981) – the response to how others lower down the social order see them. And in return those others enact the response to how they are perceived by the popular children. To be popular requires an act which others understand and respond to as 'popular' and in response others must perform those identities which identify them as popular.

Nadine and Frances are consciously playing their role in order to maintain the status quo. There is, also therefore, an element of cynicism evident in both their interviews – they smile ruefully at the situations they face and the 'inevitability' of some of the things required of them. But they are, in essence, critical of the ways in which children are sorted and are attempting to position themselves safely within the game.

Althusser (1971) describes how the ideological, social context 'interpellates' or hails individuals to particular subject positions to which they are unwittingly tied and the peer hierarchy here with the hegemonic 'rule' of the popular kids could be seen as a context which 'hails' individuals. The notion of suturing suggests that there is also a conscious or unconscious 'uptake' by the individual of the available roles. For Laura and Robert there is a sense that they have unconsciously taken up their roles whereas Nadine and Frances have done so consciously.

The group not seen in this research are those who are disengaged – who are not prepared to 'play' the game, yet are wholeheartedly critical – cynical even – about the ways in which the social order is played out and how power operates on the least popular, isolated children. These, perhaps, are the children who eventually end up taking extreme action to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the way things are (Forman, 2004; Stancato, 2003).

In Phase One of the research the children were not yet part of the enactment of the figured world and their talk about secondary school drew on expectations of the possibilities that secondary school might offer for them in terms of identity roles. In their talk about secondary school they were drawing on existing knowledge about secondary schools – drawn from a range of sources including stories from family and friends as well as television shows. In this way they could be seen to be 'prefiguring' their identity drawing on the possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) that they believed to be on offer. Still using the conceptual framework of figured worlds, the next chapter of this thesis examines the ways in which stereotypical media representations of peer groups might inform the enactment of identities in secondary school.

CHAPTER SIX

FIGURED WORLDS, STEREOTYPES AND THE MEDIA

RQ 3: What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do children draw on media stereotypes as cultural resources in their identity work?
- To what extent/how do they resist stereotypical narratives of peer groups and their interrelationships?

Just look at it! He's got buck teeth, glasses and a bow tie!

Jeremy Phase One Part B

Overview

Figured worlds, as described in Chapter Five, are imaginative templates for 'figuring out' identity in practice – drawing on cultural models, stereotypical understandings and a range of culturally situated resources in order to enact the social world. So whilst fictional television programmes, set within and representing realistic social contexts and characters are not figured worlds *per se* they can be seen in some ways as both a reflection of and a contributor to the imaginative construct of the figured social world with which the actors engage in identity work in daily lives. In this way, media texts constitute a cultural resource on which people draw in their theory making in relation to the social world in order to understand and enact their identities in social and cultural contexts. This chapter is concerned with the role of media stereotypes of peer groups in secondary school as a cultural resource which might be drawn on as children engage with figured worlds in school and how this might affect their identity work such as in the formation of 'possible selves' prior to transition to secondary school.

Setting the Scene

Television representations and figured worlds

Holland *et al's* work considers the neophyte in relation to figured worlds – the ways in which members are recruited to the figured worlds and the ways in which they develop expertise within them. However, we could consider that whilst they might be neophytes in *practice*, individuals engage with elements of the figured worlds from without, before they are involved with the enactment of figured worlds *in situ*. Prior to attending secondary school most, if not all, children have been exposed to and engaged imaginatively with, peer relationships in secondary school through television and other representations (and through conversations with family, with peers, with teachers and others). They have expectations, therefore, of the figured world and have already developed some 'knowings' about how secondary school life is portrayed. It would be naïve to suggest that children then use this knowledge uncritically in their identity work in school contexts, but it would seem to be similarly naïve to suggest that these representations have no influence at all on children's sense of where and how they might fit into the 'real' world of school. These media representations will be one of the resources on which children draw in the construction of 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in secondary school – projections of future selves which represent identities which are desired or feared by the individual. This in turn could be seen as part of what contributes to the 'anxieties and excitement' (Lucey & Reay, 2000) felt by children in the transition to secondary school and the ways in which they go about their identity work in school (Mares, Braun & Hernandez, 2012).

Media representations could be understood in one way as exaggerations of figured worlds – imaginative constructs realised through representational performances which concretise stereotypical characters, behaviours and stories which in life – in practice – can then be drawn on

within the sphere of the imagination as guidelines or benchmarks – ‘possible selves’ – for identity work (Anderman, 1994; Barker, 1997; Fisherkeller, 1997; Gauntlett, 2007; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

In daily life individuals must hold a sense of how things ‘are’ in order to guide action and participation in social contexts, although this might be quite loosely defined and frequently unconsciously formulated (Holland *et al*, 1998). Television and other media representations can provide a consciously formulated and overtly enacted version of a social context and proffer it as a model or demonstration of the actions and behaviours of the stereotypical characters within it, using narratives and plots which have the potential to offer diverse perspectives on socially constructed norms and knowings (Gillespie & Toynebee, 2006). In the context of this research, however, the children’s television programmes with which the participants were familiar were generally those which provided recognisable, stereotypical storylines for the characters to follow. They mainly used established, archetypal narratives (such as boy meets girl, or rags to riches) which could also be seen to reinforce rather than challenge particular social and cultural norms and values. For example few children’s television programmes aimed at early adolescence offer anything other than a heteronormative view of romantic relationships (Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler & Tolman, 2007).

Of interest for this thesis is how this concretisation – this overt presentation of an imaginary world - might affect the ways in which figured worlds are drawn on in ‘real world’ interactions, with the understanding that the figured worlds enacted in practice reciprocally inform the fictional representations in the media:

... the mimesis between life and so-called narrative is a two-way affair: that is to say, just as art imitates life ... so ... life imitates art.

Bruner 1987 p692

Television representations and their audiences

Despite apparent widespread concerns about the negative effects of children's television and film viewing, concerns which are, ironically, circulated through the media, the consensus within academic circles is that of a more nuanced and less polemic stance (Buckingham, 2000). The debate is moving away from one which either on the one hand demonises television and its influence on a naïve, unquestioning audience or on the other dismisses the potential influence that television can have in the developing social, ideological and individual lives of children (and adults) (Long & Wall, 2012).

There is general agreement that televisual texts and audiences interact in a range of complex ways which are related to individuals' pre-existing experiences and knowledge of the social and cultural world and their understanding of the ways in which texts are constructed (Long & Wall, 2012; Thornham *et al*, 2009). Thus, what audiences 'take' from media texts varies considerably from viewer to viewer. Similarly each viewer can be understood to be able to hold more than one viewer position simultaneously in the act of watching television or other media images so that watching a 'boy meets girl' love story can invoke a pleasurable reaction alongside a contestation of the heteronormative ideologies which underpin the story (Hall, 1980).

Stuart Hall's 'We are all, in our heads different audiences at once', for me marks the definitive move away from a paradigm that was organised around texts producing subjectivities.

Hermes, 1993 p1

Audiences can be seen therefore to be actively engaged in meaning making processes in the watching of television programmes and draw on their lived experiences and existing ontological perspectives in the sense they make of what they see and the ways in which they respond.

In the context of this research, the role of television in adolescent identity formation is of particular interest. As discussed in Chapter Four, during adolescence young people could be seen to engage in a process of ascertaining who and what they are like and not like through social identity theory notions of in-group and out-group behaviours. Whilst this process of identity work takes place in real world social contexts, the characters and events represented in the fictional world provide a further set of identity models on which children can draw (Anderman, 1994; Fisherkeller, 1997; Gauntlett, 2007). If children's television programmes present quite rigid stereotypical characterisations of peer groups and their hierarchical interactions, as the programmes identified by the children in this study did, this is potentially limiting for children in terms of the 'possible selves' they can envision for themselves – this is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Television texts cannot ever simply show how things 'are' they are always a conglomeration of signs and symbols which merely represent the world and in doing so play a part in its construction (Long & Wall, 2012; Hall, 1980). An encoded text needs to be decoded in order to be understood – and whilst there are certain ways in which media texts overtly and covertly present messages or ideologies – all texts are open to multiple readings and no text can force an audience to read it in a particular way. Neither is there a definitive 'truth' embedded in a text which must be 'got at' by the audience (Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006).

Stories and characters within television programmes can, however, potentially provide validation and support for children's on-going identity work in adolescence. Fisherkeller (1997) described how television programmes can function as a resource to support adolescents with individual strategies for moving towards a 'possible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) but that the 'guiding motivations' (p487) for the life trajectory and potential choices for those possible selves comes from the 'real people and situations within their culture' (p487). So that television does not necessarily set the perceived goals for identity work, but can suggest strategies by which 'life goals' can be attained. Gauntlett (2007), too, suggests that television texts and characters provide children with 'navigation

points' by which they can guide their actions and interactions in the real world. Viewers do not simply unquestioningly appropriate what they see on television but they might incorporate aspects of individual characters with whom they identify and who appear salient to them into their own on-going identity work. Green & Brock (2000, 2004), examined the extent to which viewers were lost or 'transported' into a text and suggest that this correlates with the likelihood of a subsequent change in beliefs. They further suggest that liking for a character and the realism of the presentation of the text can influence this further. Anderson (2002) looks at this in the light of the potential 'role models' for children presented on television. Whilst it is clearly very difficult to identify direct causality in terms of belief change it is interesting to consider how the extent to which children enjoy and believe the representations of the characters they watch might impact on what they believe about themselves and their own scope for identity work.

Hermes (1993) describes how the everyday is the site of the mundane, the playing out of familiar stories and actions but also a site for conflict and change – where unexpected events or a given happenstance creates the context for agency and subsequent change. This can be seen, perhaps, as somewhat in line with the notion of continuity and change that we see within the concept of figured worlds. The enactment of figured worlds supports the opportunities for agency and change when social circumstances require a response which can be collated from the range of cultural resources and social knowings which frame the figured world. Media representations of figured worlds could be seen to be more stable, less open to flexible interpretation and a means by which the familiar shared narratives (the broad, archetypal storylines) are presented and circulated within cultures. These over-arching story structures provide the raw materials for the construction of personal, 'small stories' of self as worked out through the context of figured worlds (Bamberg, 2006; Bruner 1991). They do not insist on, but rather suggest ways of being which are culturally and socially acceptable and understood.

What is clear is that each 'audience' responds as an individual to each performance with which they engage – drawing on a range of socially and culturally derived resources to make sense of what they watch. What remains a source of debate, is the extent to which the underlying ideologies and 'messages' of texts (whether propagated deliberately and cynically or naïvely and unknowingly) impact on the 'bigger picture' of the ways in which children construct and understand themselves and how these might affect their conscious or unconscious identity performances.

Television representations and stereotypes

Stereotypical understandings and characterisations of individuals and their behaviours beset social life. They are a means by which we make sense of, order and understand the world and in this way are essential for the ways in which we function in the social world (Pickering, 2001). They are a necessity as a 'shorthand' to understanding the actors with whom we interact on a daily basis, and also for understanding ourselves and how we and others could and/or should relate to one another in social contexts. The role of a stereotype is to capture the essence of a particular type in an instantly recognisable way –not just so that social groups can be understood but also so that social order and status can be reinforced (McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002).

This creates not only group cohesion in line with social identity theories but also provides the context within which groups can be 'othered' in a seemingly natural way.

Stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and 'fixes' difference.

Hall, 1980 p258

Thus, within the context of peer group relationships, understanding of the 'nerd' stereotype includes not only knowledge about the dress, behaviours and intelligence of an individual but his or her status – the lowly status afforded the nerd in relation to his antithesis the 'jock'. Stereotypes, therefore, provide a means by which complexity and nuance is subsumed into a simplified form and it is this loss of detail – the loss of the particular in the presentation of the generic – that enables

negative stereotypes to be propagated and established within hegemonic power structures because it creates an 'apparent consensus' (Dyer, 1999) that this is 'how things are'. At a smaller, more particular scale the consensus is more tenuous than the 'big picture' suggests. When asked to give 'real life' examples of stereotypes the stereotypical features are played down or adjusted to suit specific individuals – but stereotypes drive the overarching narratives which are essential in the functioning of social lives (Bruner, 1991). As Hall (*ibid*) argues stereotypes are a means, therefore, by which societal norms are upheld and those who do not fit the norms are excluded and 'othered'. In this way stereotypes are always and inevitably related to existing societal power structures.

Stereotypes express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society.

Dyer, 1999 p209

For the television programmes considered in this research, the 'nerd' is set against the 'chav'; the 'brainiac' against the 'jock'– and without one there could not be the other (Quail, 2011). The dialectic is established and the hegemonic rule of the 'popular kids' is reinforced. Stereotypes are established rapidly on screen through their dress, behaviours and relationships and interactions with others. They have a simple role: to tell the story. Where stereotypes are the main protagonists, the nerd might reinvent themselves as a cool kid; the player might realise the error of his ways and pledge his heart to the girl of his dreams – yet they perpetuate the stereotype by the very act of stepping out of it. It is only 'shocking' to the viewer that they have behaved in this way because expectations of their behaviour are deeply, socially and culturally embedded in the expectation of the 'natural' order of things. If the stereotype ran true to form, there would be no story. This is examined later in the context of *Disney's High School Musical's* apparently emancipatory yet potentially stultifying message.

Quail (*ibid*) asserts the stereotype of nerd is a means by which such masculinities can be marginalized as an undesirable 'other'. This would suggest that the power at play in the creation and sustenance of such stereotypes is related to the white, male, heterosexual, hegemonic

discourses of power. Similarly the 'brainy' girl is presented as unattractive to men and lacking femininity – further playing to a patriarchal and heteronormative structure. Those who rank high on the status ladder, as discussed in Chapter Four, fit the model of attractiveness to the opposite sex, physical prowess, high 'visibility' to others, equipped with the latest 'fashion' and having some means to influence others through physical or mental intimidation or through 'clowning' or through overt disrespect for authority. Male and female gender norms related to stereotypical 'girl' and 'boy' attributes appear to be most highly valued and these are reinforced through the media representations of high school groups seen in children's television (Götz, Hofmann, Brosius, Carter, Chan, Donald, Fisherkeller, Frenette, Kolbjørnsen, Lemish, Lustyik, McMillin, Walma van der Molen, Pecora, Prinsloo, Pestaj, Ramos, Rivero, Mereilles, Reis, Saeys, Scherr, & Zhang, 2008).

Stereotypes circulate in society but do not derive from a singular, definitive source – they are the result of complex interwoven discourses which nominate and propagate particular formulations of the essence of 'how things are' (McGarty *et al*, 2002). As such they can be seen both as a pernicious means by which unequal power relations are perpetuated and an essential means by which human sense can be made of social contexts in the moment by moment interactions in which they are formed (Dyer, 1999; Hall, 1980).

Data Analysis

In this chapter the data are once again approached in ways which enable layers in relation to both holistic and specific analysis. This section is presented in three parts. In the first section I provide an overview of *Disney's High School Musical* (2006) and *Waterloo Road* (2006) as two contrasting media representations of high school peer groups with which the children in the study were familiar. I then go on to look at a range of definitions of two specific peer group stereotypes: the 'popular kids' and the 'nerds'. To do this I draw on both popular culture sources and the data from the study – juxtaposing the two to highlight the overlapping (but also contradictory) understandings of the stereotypes which are in circulation. Finally I provide a brief examination of the ways in which children presented their understanding of the constructedness of the television programmes and their associated stereotypes –through a series of annotated quotes. The final section of this chapter then offers a discussion in relation to the themes arising from the analysis.

Approach to Analysis

In the initial stages of the research when the children at the three primary schools were first approached, I asked the children in each school to tell me the names of television programmes which they watched which were set either wholly or partly in secondary or high school contexts.

For the second part of the interviews in Phase One, photographs of the cast from the top-mentioned programmes were used as elicitation tools in the discussion of the characterisations of the school children involved. In addition, children spontaneously used language related to stereotypes of peer groups within the interviews in Phase One and Phase Two. The ways in which stereotypical understandings were expressed through the data were considered using Holland *et al's* categories of salience and identification as discussed in Chapter Five. The ways in which children modified or appeared to resist the stereotypical descriptions were also examined.

Part A:

Media Representations: *Disney's High School Musical* (2006), *Waterloo Road* (2006) and Peer Group Stereotypes

Disney's High School Musical

High School Musical is set in the fictional school of East High in the United States and follows the developing romance between the two main characters – Troy and Gabriella. The main thrust of the story line for *High School Musical* is that you don't have to be defined by your high school clique and that you can 'be who you want to be'. However, in order to define how you might perform a different identity, the film relies on clearly understood and articulated conventional peer group delineations. I have argued elsewhere (Austin, 2010) that the film serves to reinforce these peer group delineations rather than break them down – the popular jock can aspire to sing in the *High School Musical*, but the low status nerd cannot aspire to be in the basketball team. In *High School Musical* the stereotypical nerd, Martha, confesses to a love of hip hop, not just maths, and is greeted by a stunned silence, and also by ridicule. The perceived humour of the situation is reinforced by the fact that Martha is the only character who is overweight – in line with much of the stereotypical representation of nerds (Whyte, 2010). The storyline emphasises that it is only by virtue of his pre-existing popular status that Troy (the captain of the basketball team and all round cool guy) can be who he wants to be whilst the nerd has less success in an alternative performance of identity due to the pre-existing low status which they hold and therefore the lack of access to the power required to enable others to see them differently.

The cliques represented on *High School Musical* are generally caricatures of the stereotypes and in some senses are self-parodic. The cliques are extreme, sanitized versions of the peer groups found in schools – but instantly recognisable as similar to those reproduced throughout many of the television programmes produced by Disney for their tween/teen audiences. There are groups,

however, which are notable by their absence – there are no isolates, for example, and no Emos or Goths (Giroux, 2001).

In *High School Musical* one of the most powerful groups is represented by the main character, Troy Bolton, who is a 'jock' – known for his sporting prowess and good looks and one of the most popular children in the school. He is 'known' and respected and liked by his team members as well as others outside his group. The other powerful group is represented by Sharpay Evans. She is the leading member of the drama group but a typical representation of a 'mean girl'. She is beautiful, her parents are well off and indulgent, she is spoilt and as such is often bossy and 'mean' to other members of the class and group. In a less sanitized representation she would be portrayed as a bully. She has a rather ineffectual twin brother, Ryan – who is portrayed as effeminate, although never overtly referred to as gay and in one of the films sequels he forms an unlikely pairing with one of the female characters. In the interview in Phase One Sean described Ryan as 'sort of gay but not gay' which seems to suggest that he has picked up on this contradictory representation. Sharpay is 'popular' in the sense frequently described in the research in that she is well known (has a 'reputation') and is seen to be influential and wield power over others but is not necessarily well-liked – even by members of her own group (Read, 2011).

Other groups represented are the 'nerds' – or 'brainiacs'. The use of the term 'brainiacs' rather than nerds by Disney in this context is of interest. There are many negative connotations of the word nerd – including a lack of attractiveness, conservative dress and a lack of social skills (Kendall, 1999). Whilst some of these aspects are played out by the less significant members of the 'brainiacs', the key characters, in line with Disney's presentation of clean cut good looks, do not fit this stereotype. Gabriella, Troy's love interest, is portrayed as highly intelligent and is recruited to the brainiacs – yet she is also attractive and therefore her relationship with Troy is 'allowed'. A stronger message that you can go against your clique type might have been achieved by the film if Troy were to have developed a relationship with Martha – someone who clearly more closely fits the lower status nerd

stereotype label. A fourth clique type which is seen in *High School Musical* is the 'skater dudes'. Outside of Disney this group might be called the 'stoners' and their portrayal on screen is as laid back, 'druggy' types who are lacking in intelligence (the group do not know what a cello is when one their group confesses to playing one in an orchestra). Their representation is again clearly parodic and used for comedy effect throughout the film in contrast to other media representations of this clique-type as 'bad boys' who take drugs and indulge in antisocial behaviour (Giroux, 2011).

The majority of children participating in the research were familiar with and had watched *High School Musical*. A number of them could talk about the actors as well as the characters – sometimes muddling the names.

***Waterloo Road* (2006)**

Waterloo Road (2006) is a soap opera aimed at an adult audience, set in the eponymous fictional school which follows the lives of both teachers and students attending the school. It tends towards realism and is described by the *Waterloo Road* website as a gritty portrayal of 'typical' secondary school life in the UK:

There's a school like *Waterloo Road* in every town in Britain. The staff are overworked and underpaid, the budgets only ever seem to get tighter, and the kids more troublesome. It's a melting pot of class and race where the day-to-day troubles of its students spill out in dramatic ways.

Shed Media, 2013

Thus the children are presented as 'naturally' troubled and troublesome. Throughout the series the pupil characters portrayed represent the opposite extreme to those seen in *High School Musical*. In *Waterloo Road* it is the potential for harm and the negative connotations of group identification that are exaggerated rather than the potential for good when cliques work together towards a common aim. There is an emphasis on children's 'troubles' – generally linked to social factors outside of school (Blake & Edwards, 2013). Whereas character representation is idealised and sanitised in *High School Musical* it is demonised in *Waterloo Road*. *High School Musical* sets out to present the school

context through rose-tinted spectacles – *Waterloo Road* deliberately exaggerates the harsh ‘truths’ of adolescent life in a generic ‘problem’ neighbourhood. Storylines throughout the show’s seven series include bullying, underage sex and pregnancies, drug dealing, relationships between teachers and children, mental illness, suicide, homosexuality, vandalism and violence towards teachers and children.

The opening scene of the first episode of the series sets the tone:

IT'S BREAK TIME AND THE PUPILS ARE HANGING OUT IN THE PLAYGROUND – A ROWDY BUNCH OF MIXED RACES, WEARING MARKET COPIES OR KNOCKED OFF ITEMS OF THE LATEST GEAR WITH ONLY A FEW CONCESSIONS TO SCHOOL UNIFORM, SUPERVISED BY DISILLUSIONED AND SOMEWHAT SHABBILY DRESSED DEPUTY HEAD JACK RIMMER & ENGLISH DEPT ‘MR FIT’ TOM CLARKSON.

JACK SURVEYS HIS CHARGES WITH A LOOK OF DESPAIRING FRUSTRATION – A GANG OF TEENAGE GIRLS SPORT TIGHT T-SHIRTS WITH SLOGANS LIKE ‘FCUK LIKE BUNNIES’ AND ‘TOO HOT TO HANDLE’, INCLUDING A HEAVILY PREGNANT 16 YEAR OLD; A BUNCH OF BAD BOYS COVERTLY SWAP CASH FOR A STASH; SOME YOUNGER BOYS KICK A BALL AGAINST A GRAFFITI-COVERED SCHOOL WALL. AS THE BALL STRAYS TOM'S WAY HE KICKS IT BACK TO THEM WITH FLAIR, TO ADMIRING GIGGLES FROM A COUPLE OF HIS 12 YEAR-OLD GIRL FANS. TOM TAKES A BOW.

Waterloo Road Script Series 1 Episode 1 Scene 1
British Broadcasting Corporation (2014)

This opening scene establishes themes of disorder and anti-authority behaviours – explicitly in the ‘few concessions’ to the uniform and in the covert drug deals or implicitly in the ‘graffiti-covered school wall’. The children ‘hang out’ in gangs – creating a sense of the exercise of power through physical social groupings. The fact that the clothing worn is ‘knocked off’ or ‘market copies’ sets the context within a particular socio-economic group. The overtly sexualised connotations of the slogans on the T-shirts set alongside a pregnant teenager further propagate a ‘chav’-like stereotype (Jones, 2012). There is a hint of further sexualised behaviour with the 12 year old girl ‘fans’ giggling admiringly at the male teacher. There is a juxtaposition of the ‘bad boys’ with the younger boys who

are playing football – perhaps a suggestion that the transition from ‘younger boy’ to ‘bad boy’ is inevitable. The teacher is seen to be worn down and frustrated by these challenging, uncontrollable children who are his ‘charges’ and clearly in need of redemption.

Whilst this is a script for the actors and guides them towards their performance in the fictional show, as discussed earlier this is also a representation of a figured world and becomes one of the scripts available to children as they undertake the lived experience of school and schooling.

Although the programme is produced with an adult audience in mind, a significant number of the participants in this research watched it either occasionally or regularly. Only five of the children said that they had not watched it at all – although they were still familiar with it and knew the premise for the programme and some of the storylines. Three (Frances, Sean and Laura) said that it was one of their favourite programmes.

Media representation of peer group hierarchies in High School Musical and Waterloo Road

Despite their vastly different portrayals of school contexts there are themes which unite the two media representations. In both there are easily distinguishable peer hierarchies which are based around looks, sport, rebellion, popularity and academic ability (Adler & Adler, 1998; Milner, 2004, Eckert, 1989). Friendship groups are clearly delineated and in-group/out-group discourses are prevalent. There is a sense that each child character knows their place and their role in the social hierarchy – in the figured world. Storylines which take the characters away from their stereotypical performances are frequently seen as ‘redemptive’. Thus in *Waterloo Road* Donte, the ‘hard’ boy ‘comes good’ to marry Chlo and in *High School Musical* Sharpay shows a softer side once she has been ‘proved wrong’. These, then, are storylines which rely on a particular type of characterisation in order that these characterisations can be subverted to particularise – individualise – the characters and their role in the story whilst still relying on the viewers’ understanding of how such characters are ‘supposed’ to act. This can be seen as part of how stereotypes feed into the sense of

naturalness – ‘this is how things work’ – in relation to archetypal narratives (McGarty *et al*, 2002). These disparate representations also highlight the challenges inherent in ‘pinning down’ any definition of a stereotype. Within stereotypical representations there are a broad range of characteristics which are constant but there are also those which can flex. For example the nerd is always unattractive – but can be either over or underweight; scruffily dressed or neatly dressed; look down on others or be looked down on – but will always be recognisably a nerd (Cardiel, 2012). The next section uses definitions of peer group stereotypes from popular culture sources to underline the contradictory messages.

Part B:

Defining adolescent high school peer group stereotypes

As suggested above, the nature of high school peer group stereotypes as persistent exaggerated representations of social types means that definitions can remain stubbornly constant and resistant to re-definition whilst also being difficult to pin down – because stereotypes are both recognised and appropriated and recognised and contested in their role in social life (Hall, 1980).

In looking for definitions of peer group stereotypes for the purposes of this chapter I have used definitions from *Wikipedia*, *The Urban Dictionary* and *Yahoo Answers*. These are popular culture sources which are derived from contributions from a worldwide community. Definitions and entries can be added to, re-written, amended, contested and subjected to on-going challenge by any member of the public. In this way, these definitions could be seen to be ‘by the people, for the people’ and therefore representative of the ways in which these stereotypes are understood and appropriated in both the media and the social world. The use of these sources and their definitions appeared to be the best means of getting to an understanding of the definitions which are currently in circulation and the ways in which they are contradictory and contested. A difficulty with this approach is the overlap of American and UK understandings of the terms – although often similar meanings were attributed to different labels – thus the ‘jock’ in the US is essentially part of the ‘popular kids’ group in the UK (a list of the terms and definitions used in this thesis can be found in Appendix B).

The Nerds

A **nerd** (adjective: **nerdy**) is a person, typically described as being overly intellectual, obsessive, or socially impaired. They may spend inordinate amounts of time on unpopular, obscure, or non-mainstream activities, which are generally either highly technical or relating to topics of fiction or fantasy, to the exclusion of more mainstream activities. Additionally, many nerds are described as being shy, quirky, and unattractive, and may have difficulty participating in, or even following, sports

Wikipedia, 2014

People who are smart, especially in the ways of computer science and math. They are not necessary ugly, socially retarded, or unathletic, though most people believe that they are.

Chinksta, 2005

Urban Dictionary

A nerd is a bright and smart but socially inept person.

Itunuoluwa, 2011

Yahoo! Answers

Thus the definitions of 'nerd' relate to 'too much' intelligence and obsessiveness in some form alongside unattractiveness and social awkwardness. The 'voice' with which each of the definitions is written is suggestive of a particular stance. The first definition offers an evaluative perspective which emphasises an extreme apart from what appears to be offered as a 'norm'. The fact that a nerd might have difficulty 'even following' sport suggests that enjoyment of sports is expected – and can be used to other those who don't meet this expectation and to emphasise the low status of this group. The *Urban Dictionary* definition is more measured and less polemic – here the balance between 'this is what is generally thought' and 'this is real' is more clearly articulated. But on the website itself there are a wide range of definitions which respond to and challenge the different interpretations offered in the posts. As of May 2014 there were fifty three pages of definitions of 'nerd' on the *Urban Dictionary* site – I attempted to choose a definition that is somewhat representative but I recognise the inherent limitations given the scope of the entries.

In terms of characterisation, the 'nerd' is translated into the representation of the character of Philip in *Waterloo Road*:

Bumbling, awkward and radioactive when it comes to attracting girls – it's like Philip Ryan was given an anti-smooth vaccine at birth. Philip's quick, funny and endearing – in fairer universe he'd be popular, but at school he was the resident oddball, just desperate to be included.

Wikia a (no date)

Here the social ineptness is highlighted and he is set up as in opposition to the 'smooth' or 'cool' kids. The fact that he is 'quick' – a less pejorative term for intelligence than used in the previous definitions – is suggested as a positive but also identified as a reason for his exclusion from the popular circle. The voice behind this definition appears to be one that verges on the patronising. Philip's undeniable lowly status is presented as a given – but one that is unfair rather than untrue.

In the children's talk elements of the nerd stereotype were identified and drawn on through their discussions. They referred to children in 'real life' (Figure 6.1) as well as drawing on representations from television (Figure 6.2). The data is presented here in annotated form – and informs the discussion in section three.

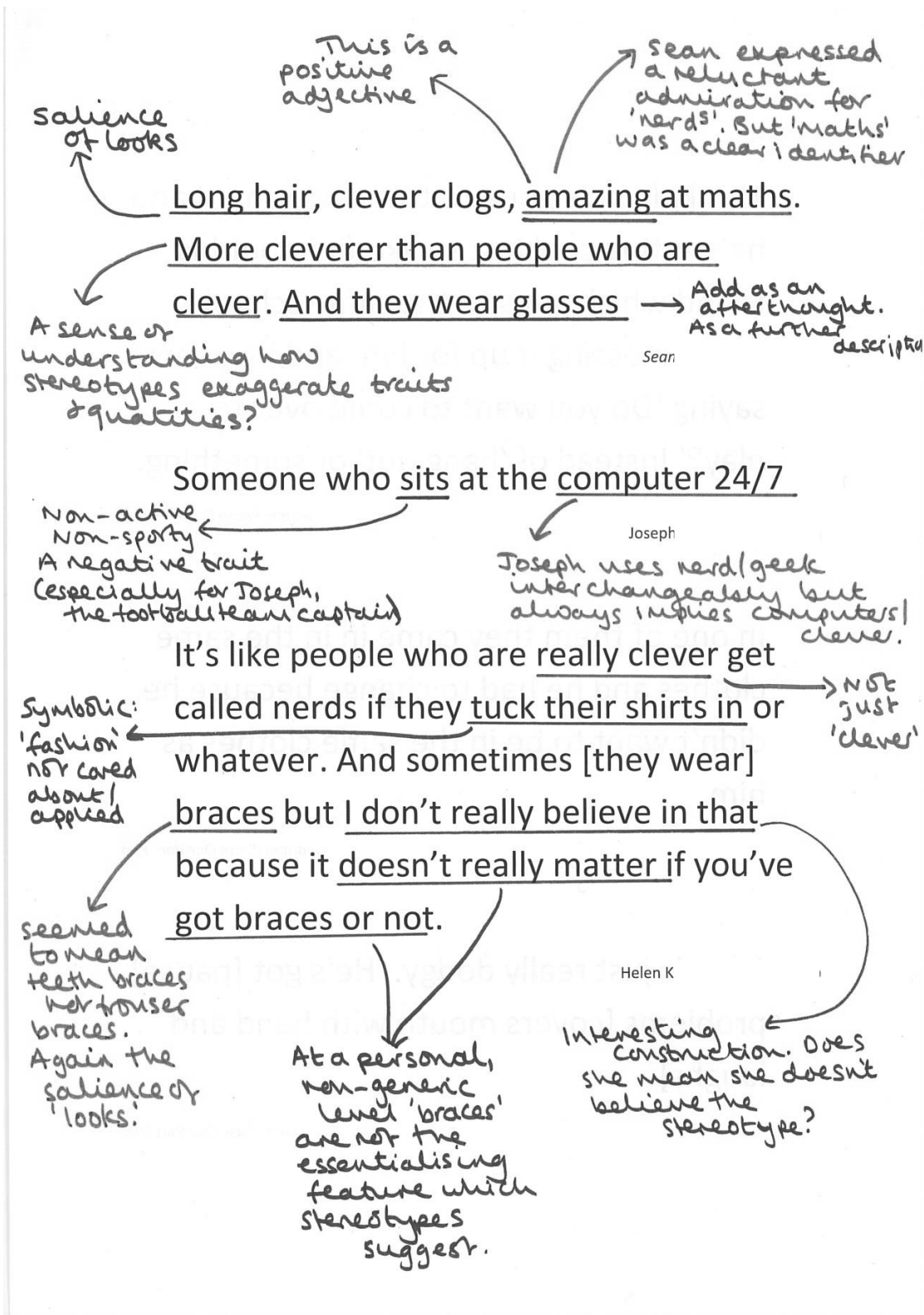


Figure 6.1 Nerds – Annotated Transcripts 1 Phase One Part B

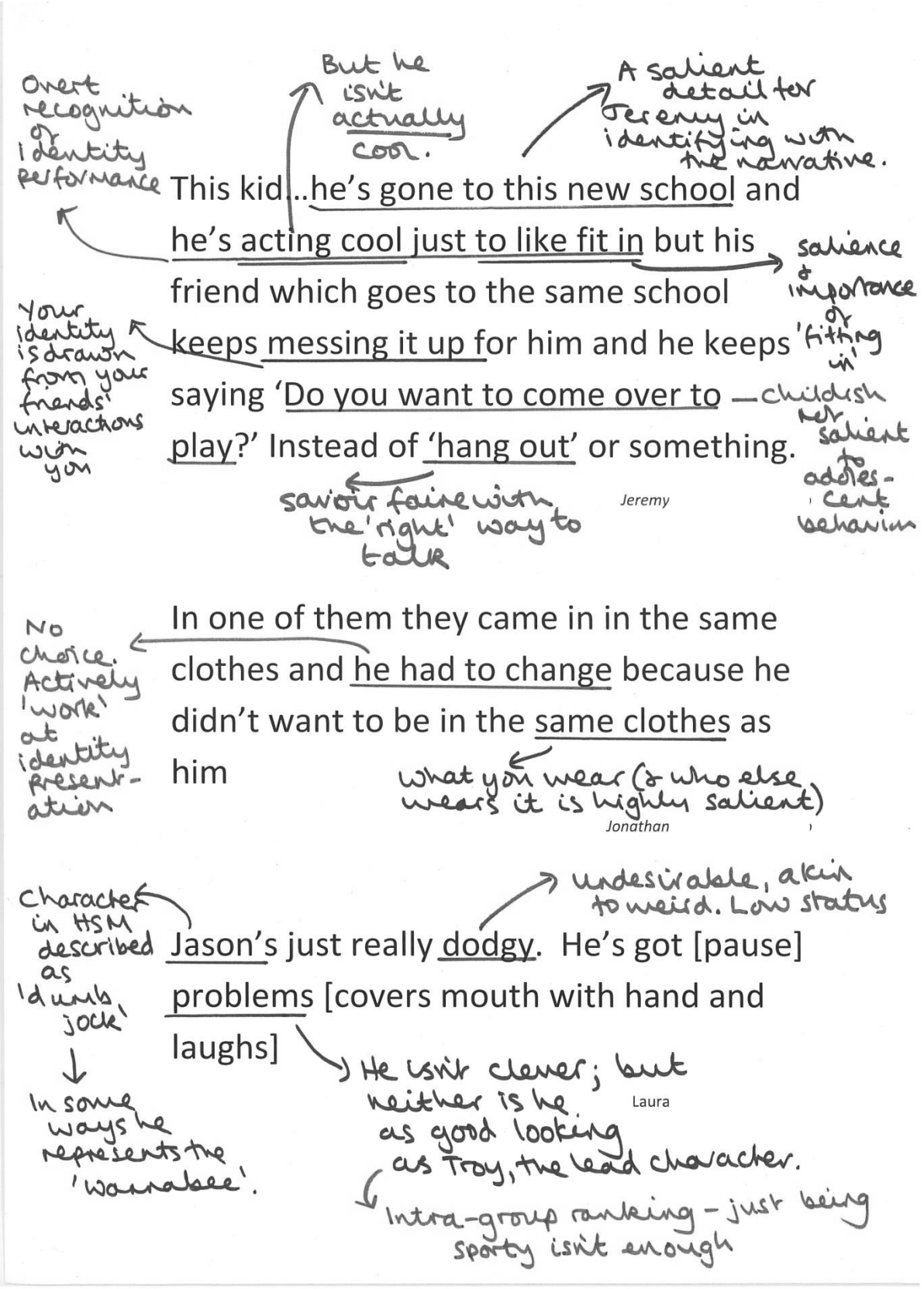


Figure 6.2 Nerds – Annotated Transcripts 2 Phase One Part B

The Popular Kids

The definitions offered here clearly demonstrate the contradictions within and between the definitions and a recognition that the context within which 'popularity' is determined has a role to play (thus the 'popular kids' in *Disney's High School Musical* are different from those in *Waterloo Road*).

Usually characterized by overall wealth, fashionable style, confidence, the "popular kids" vary from school to school. Depending on what school you go to, they can be intelligent, intelligent but dumb themselves down, or just downright idiots. They come in all shapes and sizes, from petite brunettes to towering blondes. Most of them throw/attend the best parties in town, date the hottest girls/boys in town, and wear the most envy-worthy clothes in town.

Strong, 2009

Urban Dictionary

Being popular doesn't necessarily mean a lot of people like you ... just how many people know who you are. Some popular people are popular because they're abnormally attractive or draw attention to themselves by wearing a certain type of clothing. Some have outgoing personalities that stand out. Some people are exceptionally smart. Sometimes it's a mix of the things above.

Marilollipop, 2007

Yahoo! Answers

The definitions here articulate the variability of the stereotype – set alongside the recognisability of the salient features. Thus looks are salient, but can vary – from 'petite brunettes to towering blondes' but popular kids are always attractive. Both definitions identify popular kids by their clothing – with implications for their 'overall wealth' (just as a lack of money has implications for the clothes available to the pupils in *Waterloo Road*). The inconsistency of the association of intelligence and popularity is evident – Eckert's (1989) research echoes the suggestion that achievement in school is more or less of a positive trait depending on the school you attend. The second definition

appears to offer a more cynical view of popular kids – suggesting that they aren't really liked, they are 'abnormally' attractive and that they 'draw attention to themselves' – all of which lean towards a view of the 'mean girls' rather than high achieving, sporty, 'jock'.

In their representation on screen in *High School Musical* and *Waterloo Road* the stereotypes are addressed in different ways:

Sharpay Evans is the East High co-president of the drama department with her twin brother Ryan Evans. In *High School Musical* Sharpay is known to be popular. Students seem to fear her as they provide her with room during cafeteria or on hallways.

Foolishques
Wikia a (no date)

Jessica "Jess" Fisher's cool, sarky and confident nature ensured her popularity at school and made sure she was never short of admirers.

Wikia b (no date)

Luke is an attractive student; he's always up for a laugh and is an immediate hit with both the lads and the ladies. But Luke's only interested in one girl – long-term girlfriend Siobhan. Together they make a popular, good-looking couple.

Wikia c (no date)

These descriptions again highlight the salience of looks, confidence and 'fun' as part of the popular trait. The 'mean/popular' is also highlighted in Sharpay's 'known to be popular' – a conflation of reputation and popularity and in Jessica's 'cool' and 'sarky' nature. In the case of Sharpay, the 'mean' side to her popularity is essential for the plot of the film. The fact that popular, attractive children 'go' together is also highlighted along with friendships with the opposite gender.

In the children's talk, just as with the nerds there was reference throughout to the 'popular kids' – sometimes 'cool' was used interchangeably with the notion of popularity but at other points a clear distinction was made regarding popularity. The children again referred to 'real' people (Figure 6.3)

as well as fictional characters from the TV shows they watched (Figure 6.4). Again, the annotations are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

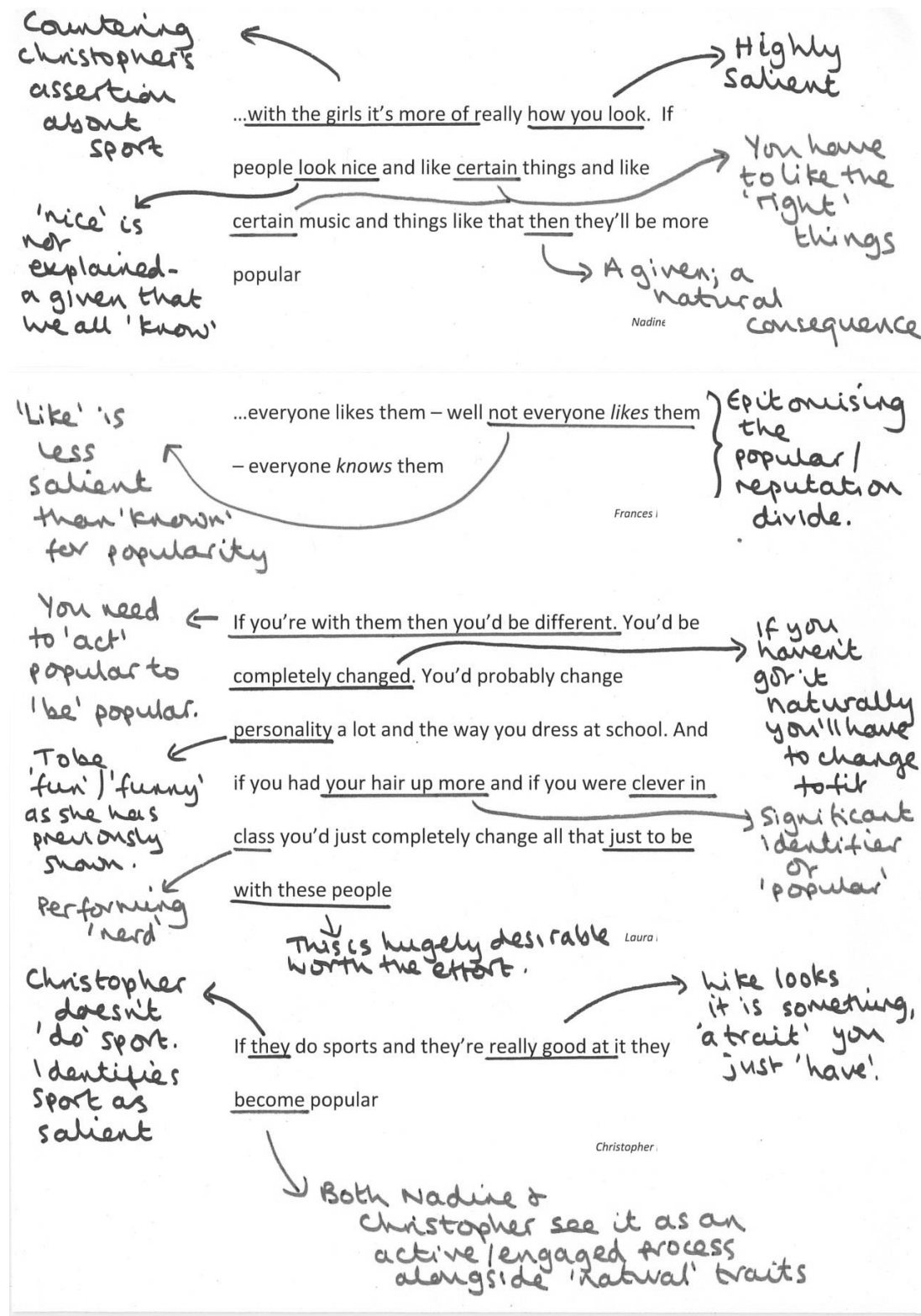


Figure 6.3 Popular Kids – Annotated Transcripts 1 – Phase Two

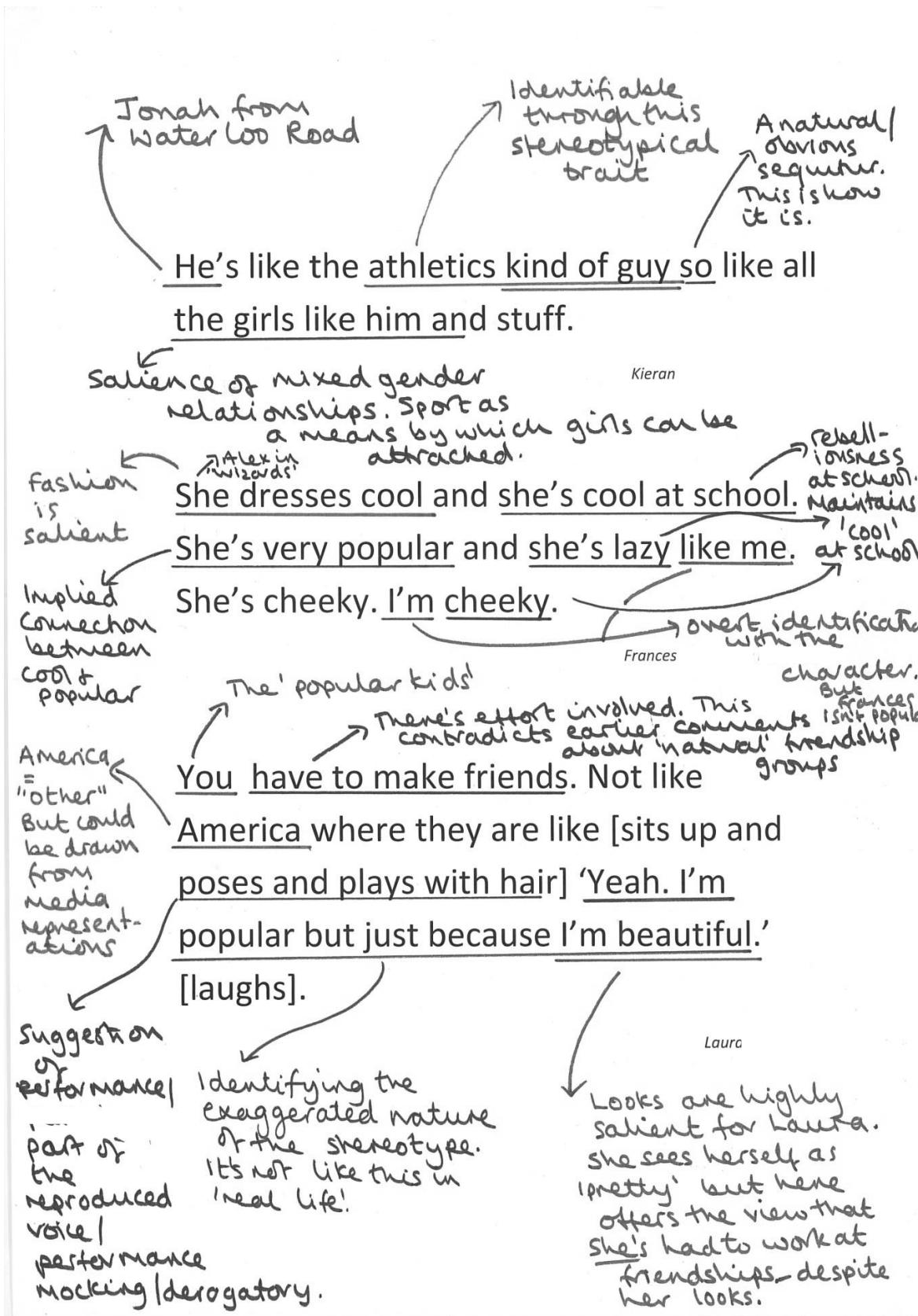


Figure 6.4 Popular Kids – Annotated Transcripts 2 Phase One Part B

Part C:

The Constructedness of Television

Throughout the discussions the children indicated their understanding of the constructedness of the television programmes with which they were engaged. They were fully aware of the actors, the plots, the audience expectations of the programmes they watched. Figures 6.5-6.7 show some of these responses.

There are elements of truth { Sometimes the schools will be like that I think but like other times it won't. It's not all the gritty way it is portrayed

Susan

not certain but there's a rational way to look at this

I don't think they'd be quite as [Christopher interjects with 'strange']. Again a sense of the characters wouldn't be 'so...' they would be more 'less' tempered

Yeah. Because with TV they probably change it so that its more dramatic. More unrealistic.

Nadine

Even within a programme presenting as 'realism' understanding of the lack of reality to the story

TV is designed, produced, presented for dramatic purposes. You're not meant to take it literally

Figure 6.5 Constructedness of TV – Annotated Transcripts 1 Phase One Part B

In some ways this phrase expresses the 'larger-than-life' idea Helen tries to express

searching for away to explain? ... than in a 'real' school

It's much more [pause] violent [pause] it's like more arguments. It's kind of sometimes you might get something like that but I don't think it would be as much as that.

It's a representation It's like the real but ...

Dubious, sceptical. Recognition of the made up / exaggeratedness Helen K.

explosive! Issues/problems all at once

The thing is that its things going off at exactly the same time [pause] everything's happening at one time. If it does happen it would be like at different times I think. If it happens all at once that's a bit much

still uncertain as to whether it really does happen at all?

considers the implausibility?

unlikely
not 'realistic'
not real life.

Helen K.

Figure 6.6 Constructedness of TV – Annotated Transcripts 2 – Phase One Part B

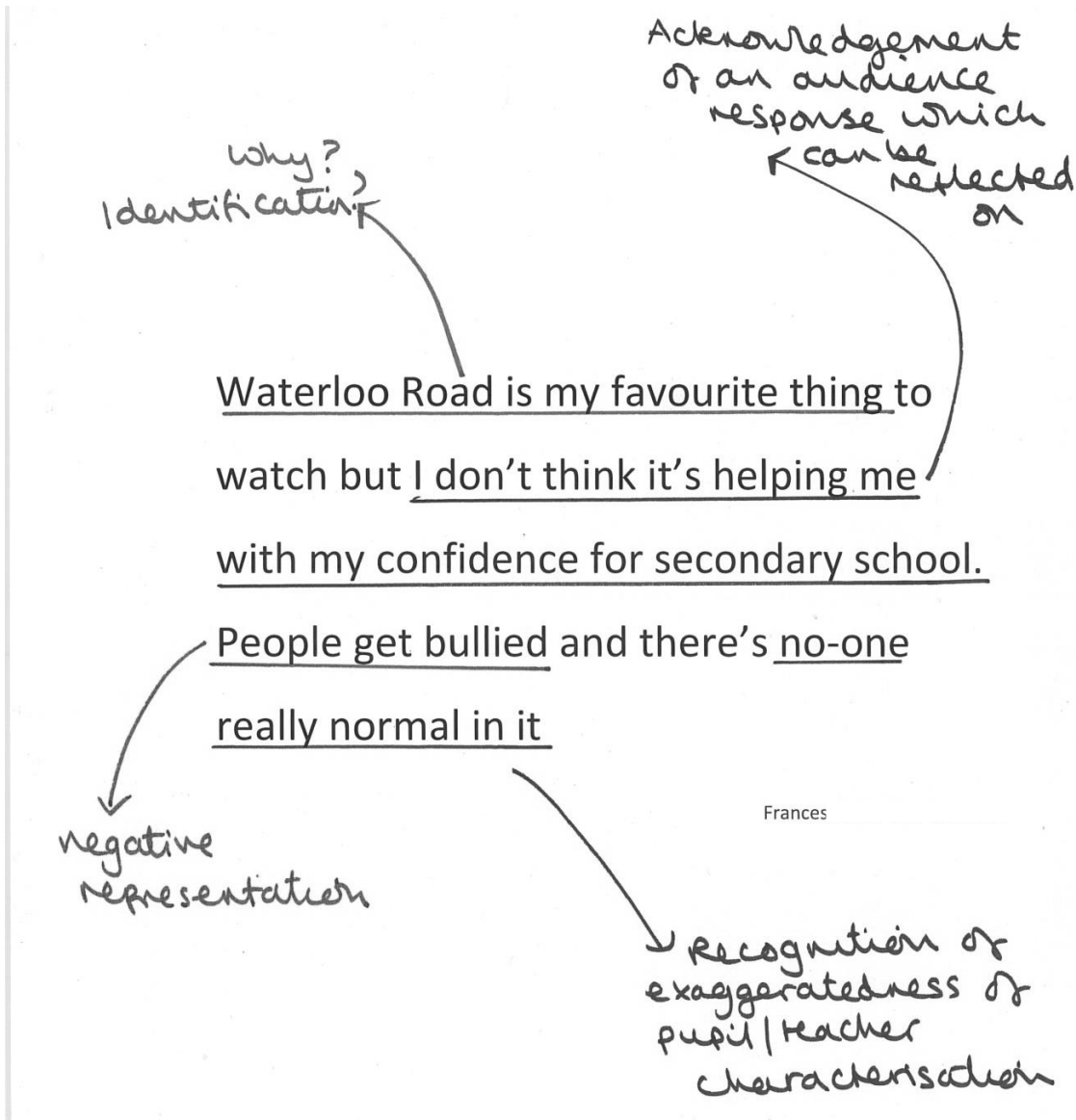


Figure 6.7 Constructedness of TV – Annotated Transcripts 3 Phase One Part B

Data – Discussion

Stereotypes as descriptions of social groups

Throughout the study the children engaged in talk such as that examined above, drawing on the ways in which stereotypes of peer groups are represented in the media and elsewhere. Most children appeared to recognise the main stereotypes from the television shows and offered explanations and descriptions which named various aspects of the expected characteristics of such stereotypes. This was evident in the talk examined in the previous chapter which set out the characteristics of the various groups with the salient features being looks, 'fashion', 'cool', academic ability, sport, engagement in mixed gender relationships and subsequent popularity. Jeremy's scathing summing up of the picture of the 'nerd' from *As the Bell Rings* which began this chapter ('He's got buck teeth, glasses and a bow tie!') captures the power of the media image to propagate stereotypical representations. Laura, too, in the last chapter told us that she wouldn't expect people with big glasses who are 'a bit funny and weird' to be popular.

And the cool, good looks of the popular kids were frequently emphasised by the children – something of this is echoed in the opening to *Waterloo Road* described earlier by attributing good looks to a popular teacher. In *High School Musical* the lead characters are good looking and well-dressed (whether they are popular or brainiacs) and it is the minor characters who are 'dressed down' in order to indicate a lower popularity status. Kelsey – the writer of the musical in the film – dresses in a quirky, non-mainstream style which is a means by which she can be 'othered' – and Ryan, Sharpay's brother dresses in a flamboyant style which means that he too cannot claim 'cool' status. And as we saw earlier Laura's depiction of Jason as 'dodgy' due to his less favourable presentation in terms of ability and looks which apparently signal his lower status within the basketball team (the rest of whom are the 'popular kids'). In *Waterloo Road*, as the opening scene describes, the clothing the children wear consists of 'market copies' or is 'knocked off' or has what is

implied to be inappropriate slogans but is still a means by which children can be identified on the 'cool' continuum which contributes to their popular status.

Some of the children in the study referred to 'chavs' (Jones, 2012) as one type of popular children who were stereotypically characterised by them as being tough; wearing lots of make up; boys who gel their hair; girls who 'puff' their hair or who are not very clever. As discussed in earlier chapters, some of the contradictions in the descriptions of popular children are due to the conflation of 'popular' with 'renowned' so that the popular status is conferred on those who wield power in different forms – sometimes because others like and want to be like them and 'in' with them but sometimes it is because they are feared. Therefore those who have a reputation as 'hard' as well as a certain level of attractiveness will also be nominally known as 'popular' (Borch, Hyde & Cillessen, 2011).

Chavs as a particular identifiable group stereotype has emerged through portrayals such as Vicky Pollard in the sketch show *Little Britain* (2003) and through circulation in a range of media sources. Jones (2012) sees the stereotypical representation of the chav as a means by which the working class have become demonised:

The term chav now encompasses any negative traits associated with working class people – violence, laziness, teenage pregnancies, racism, drunkenness and the rest.

2012 p8

Frances was particularly engaged with the ways in which she saw that chavs presented themselves in her school in her Phase Two interview:

You talked about chavs earlier can you tell me about chavs? What are chavs like?

[Nods and smiles] They're like all tracksuit bottoms, hoodies and smoke, walk round like 'swagger' [shows a strutting type of walk with shoulder movements]

Are they pretty as well?

Yeah, but in a different way? Like with their hair puffed up [gestures with hand]

OK.

Whereas like the others [pause] like there's some chavs who are in the popular people and then there's girls with straightened hair and lipstick and [pause] make up and [pause]

So does that make them a chav if they've got straightened hair and lipstick and things?

No [pause] like a chav would be probably like be first it's like eyeliner and like all puffed up [gestures round hair] and untidy [gestures round by neck [tie?]]

Ok. So sort of puffed up hair, untidy and eyeliner but not lipstick then?

No [shakes head]

So what's the difference with that kind of make up?

Lipstick and lip gloss would be classed as more like princess like [makes wavy gesture with her hand]

Ok but eyeliner's sort of harder?

Nods. Yeah. Like if you get in fights and stuff.

Ok. So you're not as 'pretty'? In that you're not as delicate maybe? A bit hard. Is a chav a bit hard?

Yeah. Like you could win fights and you can punch people and you can have the guts to do it

Ok. Girls and boys?

Yeah. Like most of the boys are chavs. [Laughs]
All the popular boys are chavs basically

Right OK. But they don't wear make-up [smiles]

No! [laughs] They wear gel on their hair, though!

Phase Two

Frances was acutely aware of the symbolism of things such as clothing, hair and make-up which identified children in different groups and drew on these as easily identifiable markers – the 'short cut' definitions and descriptions which painted the broad picture for me as the interviewer. She delineated between the 'princess' popular and the 'chav' popular in this part of the interview purely on the basis of hair and makeup. Much of the way she describes the chavs resonates with the character portrayals in *Waterloo Road* – a programme she says she loves to watch. The chav identity

is one which was salient to Frances and used by her to compare and contrast the groups with which she mixed in school.

The opening of *Waterloo Road* refers to the way in which the children had made 'few concessions' to school uniform. The children in the interviews referred to the ways in which school uniform was subverted in their schools – rolling skirts to make them shorter, holding blazers over the shoulder rather than wearing them and the way in which the school tie was tied. Helen K, Sean and Laura demonstrated for me how to wear your tie so that it was 'fashion' and so that you wouldn't get 'picked on'. The immediate, identifying, visible markers of clothes, hair, looks and make up are significantly and inevitably crucial to identification of the stereotype – and the visual media of film and television provide concrete examples through the on screen portrayals of the peer groups.

Stereotypes and in-group/out-group identification

In their descriptions of stereotypes both the popular culture sources and the children tended towards superlatives in the descriptions. Thus we have: 'overly intellectual'; 'inordinate amounts of time'; 'radioactive when it comes to attracting girls'; 'amazing at maths'; 'downright idiots'; 'abnormally attractive'. These are accompanied by use of terms such as 'very'; 'everyone'/'no-one'; 'always'/'never'. In this way a dialectic appeared to be established which facilitated the in-group/out-group process by setting up extremes against which children can judge themselves and others. Thus Helen K (Figure 6.1) could use braces and the tucking in of shirts as a starting point for identifying a 'nerd' and Kieran (Figure 6.4) identified Jonah as popular initially because he was an 'athletics kind of guy'.

When discussing *High School Musical* the children often substituted the actors' names for the character names – and shared information about their 'real lives' as well as the characters they played. This was not at all evident in the discussions about *Waterloo Road* where none of the actors' names were used at all. This is, perhaps, in part to do with the way that the Disney 'stable' operates

– reusing and promoting actors in a range of roles so that they become household names. However it could also be a reflection on the more obviously ‘made-up-ness’ of *High School Musical* – the caricatured representations (and the fact that the cast frequently burst into song) in comparison with the realism portrayed in *Waterloo Road* – where the characters are purported to represent ‘real’ people. Jeremy’s view was that *High School Musical* characters were ‘made up because each of them has a special talent’ – and he saw this as a contrast to the *Waterloo Road* characters which he termed as ‘more real’. Frances’ comment in Figure 6.7 about her feelings that perhaps watching *Waterloo Road* wasn’t ‘helping’ her in her thinking about secondary school is reflected by research by Mares, *et al* (2012) which suggests where children see ‘conflict’ in media representations of peer groups this can result in greater anxieties about school transfer.

Throughout the data when children referred to the stereotypical groups they used them as a further means by which they could align themselves with or outside of the groups. They usually drew on the positive aspects of the stereotype when they wanted to identify with them and the more negative aspects of the stereotype to ‘other’ or distance themselves from them. This is in line with the oscillation between groups as described in social identity theories in Chapter Four. Thus Laura, who sees herself as popular describes the popular girls as ‘nice’ and ‘funny’ whereas Nadine and Frances, as we have seen previously, emphasise the negative traits such as bullying, or not engaging in class. Even so, Laura distances herself from the ‘American’ popular girls – and proffers a different stereotype much in line with many of the programmes listed by the children.

Possible Selves

As the children engaged with and talked about the stereotypes they were also articulating some of the ways in which perceived negative stereotyping could be avoided – sometimes drawing on strategies seen on screen. Thus Jonathan explains how wearing the same clothes as a nerd has implications for the way you are perceived and Jeremy suggests that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of speaking as befits young, ‘cool’, adolescence. These are examples of the ways

in which Fisher-Keller (2002) describes that television programmes can offer children 'strategies' as they consider their behaviours in everyday life. As the children approach the transition to secondary school contexts where they will be engaging in the figured worlds of peer relationships, these strategies suggested by the media can form part of the repertoire available to them as they navigate the possible selves on offer to them. That is, that they learn how 'nerds' behave and are received and can adopt strategies which distance themselves from that identity role – but also suggest how they can distance themselves from others who demonstrate 'nerd' behaviours.

Previous chapters have demonstrated, however, the sense of 'givenness' associated with whether a child is perceived as popular or not. Joseph's confident assertions about his popularity status, his friends, his sporting ability and his girlfriend (which potentially hints at his attractiveness) are in contrast to Lee's resignation to his place as a 'half and half' and Robert's apparent lack of engagement with popular/nerd discourses. For each of these children whilst there are 'possible selves' available to them – represented on screen – they are not all equally available to all children. Where popularity status relies on looks and the right amount of intelligence those who sit outside those parameters will find it difficult, if not impossible, to perform a 'popular' identity (Read, 2011). For these children the range of identities offered through media stereotyping in the programmes they watch are limited to nerds, chavs or 'others'. However for the 'in between' children such as Frances and Nadine there is a far less stereotypical characterisation on screen. Such children, who play a significant role in the social life of the school, play a far less significant role in story telling – they are less rigidly or narrowly defined. The identity work which these girls undertook appeared to successfully navigate a comfortable line between extremes using strategies which kept them 'in' with the popular group whilst distant from the lower status groups. In this way they became the content 'middle group' as described by Adler & Adler (1998).

Generic to Particular

Without fail the children tempered the stereotypical characterisations when they were describing actual children they knew or when they picked up on a flaw or inconsistency in the stereotype. Thus Helen K talked initially about nerds wearing braces but appeared to catch herself as she thought through the logic – perhaps that she knows ‘nerds’ who don’t wear braces or children who wear braces who are not nerds. Perhaps, too, she was slightly uncomfortable with this way of labelling children and wanted to offer a more inclusive view. Throughout the discussions children would refer to groups of children using stereotypical identifying traits and then go on to say how they and others didn’t fit the stereotype. Thus Laura was a popular girl – but not like the stereotypical ‘American’ popular girl. And in their discussions they demonstrated a clear understanding that even the more realistically presented *Waterloo Road* was not offering a ‘real’ representation of the world. They knew that the characters and the storylines were exaggerated, dramatic and ‘not like real life’. Throughout the data, there were numerous occasions where the children expressed their understanding of the imprecision of stereotypical representations. Whilst applying the characteristics to generic groups of children, when they referred to individuals the stereotypical traits were softened or rejected – exposing the inexact and blurred ways in which stereotypes both reflect and defy social life.

Summary

RQ 3: What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do children draw on media stereotypes as cultural resources in their identity work?
- To what extent/how do they resist stereotypical narratives of peer groups and their interrelationships?

The stereotypes that children drew on in their talk about peer group relationships in school seemed to be related to the range of stereotypes seen in children's film and television programming.

The use of stereotypes to define social groups was a way in which children could align themselves with certain groups and distance themselves from others. Positive stereotypical traits were used where in-group status was being claimed and negative traits were highlighted when identifying out-group status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the interviews before school transfer the children articulated the 'rules' of stereotypical peer group behaviours with strongly negative views expressed about the lower status peer groups such as nerds. In this way the children could be seen to be using the peer group typifications as a means to identify 'possible selves' within the High School context and strategies by which they could reject or enact them. For some this was highly salient – Laura rejected the nerd identity associated with a grammar school and strongly identified with the popular girl discourses; both Tony and Lee felt that popular status was out of reach for them by virtue of their perceived academic and social deficits which were more salient in the identity work which would be required of them in secondary school.

The children appeared to draw on media stereotypes to offer the big picture, a generic view of the social world of peer group relations and their hierarchies. They appeared to be aware, however, of the failure of stereotypes at a personal level to capture individual and unique identity work. It is this intrinsic paradox of stereotypes that seems to make them so powerful and yet so inadequate – at one level they appeared to help the children explain or understand the social world but seemed to be limiting in their attempts to explain or understand the personal.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COHERENT SELF

The Coherent Self

RQ 4: How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between Primary and Secondary school contexts?

Sub questions:

- How/does children's talk about themselves and others demonstrate continuity in their identity work in transition between Primary and Secondary school contexts?
- What role might the reproduced voices of others and self through reported speech play in the development of a sense of a coherent self?

I think I'm more myself now. I think I've grown up a bit.

I've found that I'm happier

Laura, Phase Two.

Overview

This chapter moves away from a focus on instantiations of identity in practice within figured worlds and examines instead children's identity work in school transition set alongside the maintenance of a coherent self. This chapter uses an understanding of narrative identity (Bruner, 1987; Ricœur, 1984) as described in Chapter Two to consider how individuals, while they might understand themselves as multiple selves performing and being assigned identities across disparate contexts, might also see and understand themselves as a whole, coherent, essential 'self'.

It is the notion of 'self-sameness' (Ezzy, 1998) which is of particular interest in this chapter. Here I focus on one child, Laura, and how she connected her past, present and future selves through the use of stories of life events which demonstrate illustration (this is the kind of person I am) and dismissal (this shows that this is not really what I am like) following categories from work by Pasupathi & Weeks (2011).

Bakhtin's (1981) notions of revoicing and, in particular, reproduced voices through the use of direct speech, are used to further develop an understanding of the ways in which Laura drew on past constructions of self in the present in order to present the self in coherent ways and account for change. With reference to the work of Maybin (2006, 2008), I look at the ways in which she reproduced the voices of others and herself through the use of direct speech (or in some cases reproduced thoughts). The role of such reproduced voices in the reinforcement and reiteration of self is examined and the revoicing of self through revisiting what and how something was said in a past context is seen as particularly significant in the discussion of 'self-sameness' and the construction of the coherent self (Bamberg, 2011).

The mathematical concept of fractals is considered in line with identity work. In fractals recurring self-similarities (self-sameness) result in a chaotic yet coherent patterning and a way of looking at identity is proposed in which elements such as the reproduction of one's own voice – the reiteration

of 'who I am'/'who I am not' can be seen as examples of recurrent self-similarities which are reproduced through children's narrative identity work to produce a chaotic yet coherent 'self'.

Setting the Scene

Narrative construction of identity in adolescence

This section builds on the discussion of narrative identity in Chapter Two – with a focus of the role of narrative in identity work in the transition to adolescence and in school transfer. Constructing a story of self links the reconstruction of past selves with present understanding of self, alongside the anticipation of possible future selves (Bruner, 1987, 1991; Ricœur, 1984; Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this way, individuals can be understood to hold together threads of past and present selves but also have an element of self-direction for the future: a coherent self which draws on and exists through and within the multiple performed and ascribed identities across time and contexts.

Narrative identity constructs a sense of self-sameness, continuity and character in the plot of the story a person tells about himself.

Ezzy, 1998 p245

There is a broad consensus that the construction of narrative identities begin to emerge more consciously during adolescence (McAdams, 1999; Hermans, 1996). As children transition from 'childhood' to 'adulthood' they look to narrative as a means by which they can tell the story of their emerging sense of self in a coherent way. Children, during adolescence, in the process of working out who they are in the different social contexts in which they are required to 'be', use stories of themselves, others and their world. Not only to make sense of moment-by-moment interactions, but in order to understand self as a coherent whole – drawing together the threads of disparate selves at a time of 'identity confusion' (Erikson, 1968) within a consistent narrative framework. Warin (2010) refers to this as the 'urge for integration' of selves which a narrative approach can fulfil and Gergen & Gergen (1988) describe the role of self narrative as establishing a 'coherent connection between life events' (p19). In this way narrative can be seen as an attempt to reconcile multiple identities through the ways in which life events are retold and reframed to the self and others. In the development of a sense of an enduring 'self', a story of self can reconcile seemingly

contradictory identity performances from different contexts and from past events and behaviours. In fact, it might be in the explanation of those performances which contradict the essence of who we believe ourselves to be that we work out who we are or who we want to be. This can be described as a process of 'self-verification':

Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) assumes that stable self-views provide people with a crucial source of coherence, an invaluable means of defining their existence, organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding social interaction.

Swann, Rentfrow and Guinn, 2003 p369

This suggests that we look to others to verify our own perception of ourselves and align ourselves with those attributes we feel to be most 'like' us – distancing ourselves from those we perceive to be unlike us – a process not dissimilar to the in-group/out-group behaviours associated with social identity theory. Thus 'that was just not like me' is as essential in the construction of a storied self as those stories that we feel represent who we actually are. In addition, the stories told in anticipation of a future self indicate the ways in which children are constructing 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) which are either those to which they aspire, or those they fear. Past selves can be revisited and re-told in the present or even projected into the future as part of the ongoing process of the creation of a coherent story of self.

Narrative Construction of Identity in School Transition

As discussed previously, school transfer can be understood as a 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991) in the development of self – a point at which identity work has to be undertaken because the change of social context requires that self-understandings are re-examined (Pratt & George, 2005; Weller, 2007; Warin & Muldoon, 2009; Warin 2010). The change of environment, which could also be understood as the differently configured figured worlds of primary and secondary school, requires, to a greater or lesser extent (depending on the individuals and schools), different self knowings, different ways of being and doing and different ways of understanding others and being understood

by them. But at the same time each individual will strive for 'self-sameness', continuity and coherence in the stories of self they tell (Ezzy, 1998; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007).

In transition between the primary and secondary phases of schooling children might construct narratives which work to reconcile the perceived immaturity of the primary school identity with the perception of an increasingly mature secondary school identity (Eckert, 1989). The discussion in Chapter Four saw how the children in this study did this, typically drawing on themes such as age and physical size, 'hard' work, and interest in the opposite gender.

Warin & Muldoon's (2009) research found that children responded differently to the change in context brought about by school transition – they highlight the 'identity dissonance' experienced by children when they feel that they have been 'misrecognised' in the new context of secondary school or when there are apparent discontinuities between their present and past selves. The children in their study expressed the desire to be 'known' as the person they recognise themselves to be (as in self-verification above). The construction of a narrative of self is a means by which this can be resolved so that new possibilities are considered in the context of an overall coherent narrative that can encompass change. The importance of a narrative that can envision and account for change is seen to be significant for children – who might otherwise feel unable to move beyond their established understandings of who they are:

People prefer to be 'known', to be 'recognised', to bolster their sense of who they are, rather than construct a new self. However, whilst this provides security, it may be of more benefit to these children, in terms of helping them cope with transition, to produce an expanded story of self rather than entrench an existing story.

Warin & Muldoon, 2006 p299

This links to the notion of self-verification discussed earlier – the seeking out of those who affirm to us that we are who we believe ourselves to be can be linked to the associated discomfort of the challenge of events or perceptions that might signal that we are different from the person that we (and/or others) thought we were.

Hall's (2008) work found that the identities of teenage boys in transition to secondary school were limited by the variety of identity roles on offer within the figured worlds. In order to tell a story of self you need access to range of stories which can be told – the previous chapter examined how peer group stereotypes drive the narratives of media representations of schools and schooling – also offering a limited range of stories within which certain identity 'types' can be performed. Kinney's (1993) research, however, examined how children labelled 'nerds' in middle school contexts were able to reauthor themselves as 'normal' in high school through engaging in activities and friendship groups which agentively allowed them to move towards a different role assignation. It might be that some identities allow for more flexibility, or that some children are more able to undertake the identity work required in order to facilitate change.

Anecdotes in Narratives of Identity

In the production of 'stories of selves' both children and adults offer illustrative snapshots of their lives through the use of anecdotes. These provide the vehicle through which they can present themselves and others in a particular kind of way that is recognisable to others. Through the choice of anecdotes and the way in which they tell them they are able to undertake identity work which supports the construction of a coherent self – as if through a series of episodes which develop at a micro level that which can be incorporated into the 'macro' life story. Pasupathi & Weeks (2011) refer to such anecdotes in the construction of 'life-event relations' and suggest that these snapshot life stories are used to serve different functions in the creation of a coherent overall life story:

People may maintain identity by linking experiences to the kind of person they believe themselves to be, either in a causal or illustrative way. Further, people also engage in constructing relations that dismiss challenges to their existing sense of self. However people also tell stories that articulate the ways in which they have changed, either because events have changed them, or because an experience illuminated previously unrecognised qualities. Note that both stability and change engendering relations create continuity in the self by linking past, present, and sometimes future to one agent.

Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011 p35

Thus these stories serve an invaluable purpose in developing the 'sense of self' – a way of explaining how different experiences draw together to create a coherent, understandable, 'I'. Warin's (2010) longitudinal research which tracked children's *'Stories of Self'* over more than a ten year period identified significant advantages in terms of emotional well-being for children who were able to use such retellings of events to articulate abstract ideas about a personal self and construct a personal identity and thus develop 'identity capital' (Côté, 1996, 2002). She argues not that children need a 'strong' sense of self (suggesting that this might inhibit children's openness to change and to learning) but that support for children in school should be aimed at

...strengthening a person's capacity to create self, their capacity to expand and differentiate identity into a sophisticated, nuanced story....that can encompass disparate self elements, synthesise identity dissonance and incorporate sub-plots.

Warin, 2010 p178

In order to do this effectively, as discussed above, children also need access to a range of possible ways of telling such 'stories of self' through the shared narratives of their cultural context.

Reproduced Voices in Children's Talk

In the construction of our stories of self we draw not only on those shared, historically, socially and culturally situated narratives (Bruner, 1987, Ricœur, 1984) but also on the voices of those around us. The Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia is that of '... a diversity of social speech types ... and a diversity of individual voices...' (1986 p262) within individual narratives or speech acts.

As individuals construct their self-narratives, they create such heteroglossic texts by embedding specific ways of saying – 'speech genres' - and drawing on the words of others to create their own narratives. The words of others are those reincorporated through the re-use of words which draw on all the previous uses of the word. A dialogic conceptualisation of talk sees authors appropriating words, voices and ways of talking from others and re-presenting them from their own perspective in 'expectation of a response' (Bakhtin, 1981). Such reproduced voices when through direct reported

speech can be used to present the self in a particular way in relation to the way in which the voices of others are represented. This artistic representation of self can be seen to be a means by which identity in relationship to others is articulated through the appropriation of words in the telling of 'small stories' of self (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bamberg, 2006) which contribute to an overall sense of a coherent self.

Maybin (2006), used children's reproduced or reported voices to analyse their talk in and out of the classroom – seeing it as a means by which children could '... invoke and comment on people, their behaviour, their relationships, emotions and values within the context of recreated events and scenarios' (p76). Drawing on the work of Volosinov (1973), Maybin (2006) saw how:

Through their representation and evaluation of other voices, children can express their own position and perspective in powerful ways. Thus while the talk of people of all ages is full of other voices, the ways in which children represent the voices of significant others are a particularly important part of their ongoing active engagement in their own socialisation, and in the dialogical construction of their sense of self.

p77

The evaluative function of the reproduction of the words of others (and the self) is therefore a means by which children can position themselves in relation to others and in so doing can say something about themselves. In this chapter I have looked in particular at the way in which one child reproduced her own voice in her talk.

Data Analysis

In this chapter, whilst drawing on data from the other children, I focus predominantly on Laura. I look at the ways in which Laura used talk and anecdotes as part of the process of dis/identification with others and past selves. In her use of anecdotes I have particularly looked for the ways in which she illustrates, or reinforces a particular aspect of her identity and where she has used an anecdote to distance herself from or dismiss something about herself. This draws on the categories from Pasupathi & Weeks (2011) discussed above and offers a link to the embracement and distancing categories examined in Chapter Four.

In previous chapters I have examined some of what Laura talked about through the interviews. She clearly articulated her understanding of herself within her social sphere, her sameness and difference to others, her place in the social ranks and she demonstrated how the generic narratives represented by stereotypes were used to proffer more particularised, stories of individuals. In this chapter I have focused on the reproduction of direct speech in Laura's talk – and in particular the reproduction of her own past voice in the present. Of all the children interviewed, Laura was the one who most frequently reproduced her own voice in her conversations with me, and Laura also appeared to be the child who was most significantly invested in and consciously engaged in a performance of self. Whilst the two might not be connected, the presence of both overt identity work in the talk and reproduction of the words in this way can usefully be set alongside each other in the process of analysing the data.

The next section of this chapter presents Laura's drawings from both phases of the data along with a series of annotated transcripts. In this initial presentation the data are presented in 'raw' form to offer a broad picture and then the discussion in the following section draws out the threads from the analysis of this data alongside data from other children. As in previous chapters, this offers a layered approach to the analysis.

Laura

Once again, Laura is a focus for discussion - her overt identity work offered rich data for each of the research questions.

Laura is a tall, pretty girl with long blond hair. She refers frequently to her looks – in the Phase One interview she wears a paper rose in her hair which she plays with as she talks. She talks about herself with confidence and is assertive about what she will be like in secondary school (in the Phase One interviews) and what she is like (in Phase Two). She refers frequently to her friends and her friendship groups and how they affirm who she is.



Figure 7.1 Laura – Drawing Phase One



Figure 7.2 Laura – Drawing Phase Two

The following annotated transcripts represent two different conversations in the interviews. Figures 7.3 and 7.4 constitute one conversation and Figures 7.5-7.7 another.

You got a bit upset at one point [in the Phase One interviews] because the others were teasing you a bit and saying that you were going to be a nerd and you were going to wear glasses because you were going to Simtown. Do you remember that?

Clearly indicating the 'past'. Not anymore

Shift to present tense. I still find it annoying now?

But in interview was upset. Retransforming in the retelling dismissing?

Yeah. They all used to do it. It's a bit annoying because there

Part of an in group But in Phase One distanced herself from them

was a lot of girls that was going to a grammar school and a lot

of boys that was going to grammar schools and I just thought

'Picking on me because I'm the only one going to that school.'

Revoicing thoughts "this is where I was" An implied authenticity Allow audience access to 'private' thoughts?

And it was really annoying and I didn't want to be in one of

those schools.

Back to past tense

Double voicing allows her to chastise her friends' behaviour without overly condoning them. It is ostensibly about her but by default about them.

she has re-framed the narrative. Re-remembered? In Phase One it was the 'nerdiness' that was being 'picked on'!

grammar schools & the possible self I thought they offered

My past self didn't want to. But I'm ok with it now.

Figure 7.3 Laura – Annotated Transcript 1a Phase Two

Did you think they were right and that's that what would happen? Were you worried about that?

At the time. Then. The old me.

Revoicing / double voicing thoughts. Representing / distancing from younger self. Reduces the author (now) refers to the author (then)

I thought they were right. I thought 'I'm going to be in this school with a load of people I don't want to be with. I'm going to be with people that are annoying and boring.' I thought if you're at a grammar school you're going to have a load of stuck up snobby kids. I've always thought it. I dunno why. I used to live in Essex and my cousin got into a grammar school in Year 4 I think. I was thinking 'Oh my god. [voice goes quiet] Snobby little brat' I used to think that about my cousin just because they're going to a grammar school. I didn't know what it was when I was in year 4 and she told me and I was like 'Not my type of thing.' But now that I'm here I'm actually glad that I'm here because the people that I've talked to it's like 'What do you do in lessons?' And they're like [puts on 'stupid' voice] 'I dunno I don't listen.' [shakes head] That's not the point is it? You can't just do that even though it is boring that's not the point.

Who aren't like me.

Internal dialogue

Why did I think that?

Implies I was foolish dismisses this younger self

Reinforces her position as 'sensible'

I have moved on. I was wrong but now see more clearly

Parody adds to the double voicing: Points to the authorial intent in re-using the words

Signals some anti schoolness. Distance from 'nerd' again.

Caricature strong language

Justifying Explaining 'It's the way it was'

Enacting shows her (past) contempt but again distances her from the thought

But I was wrong to think this.

Reproducing an adult voice? - reinforces maturity / moved on / grown up. Reconciling.

Figure 7.4 Laura – Annotated Transcript 1b Phase Two

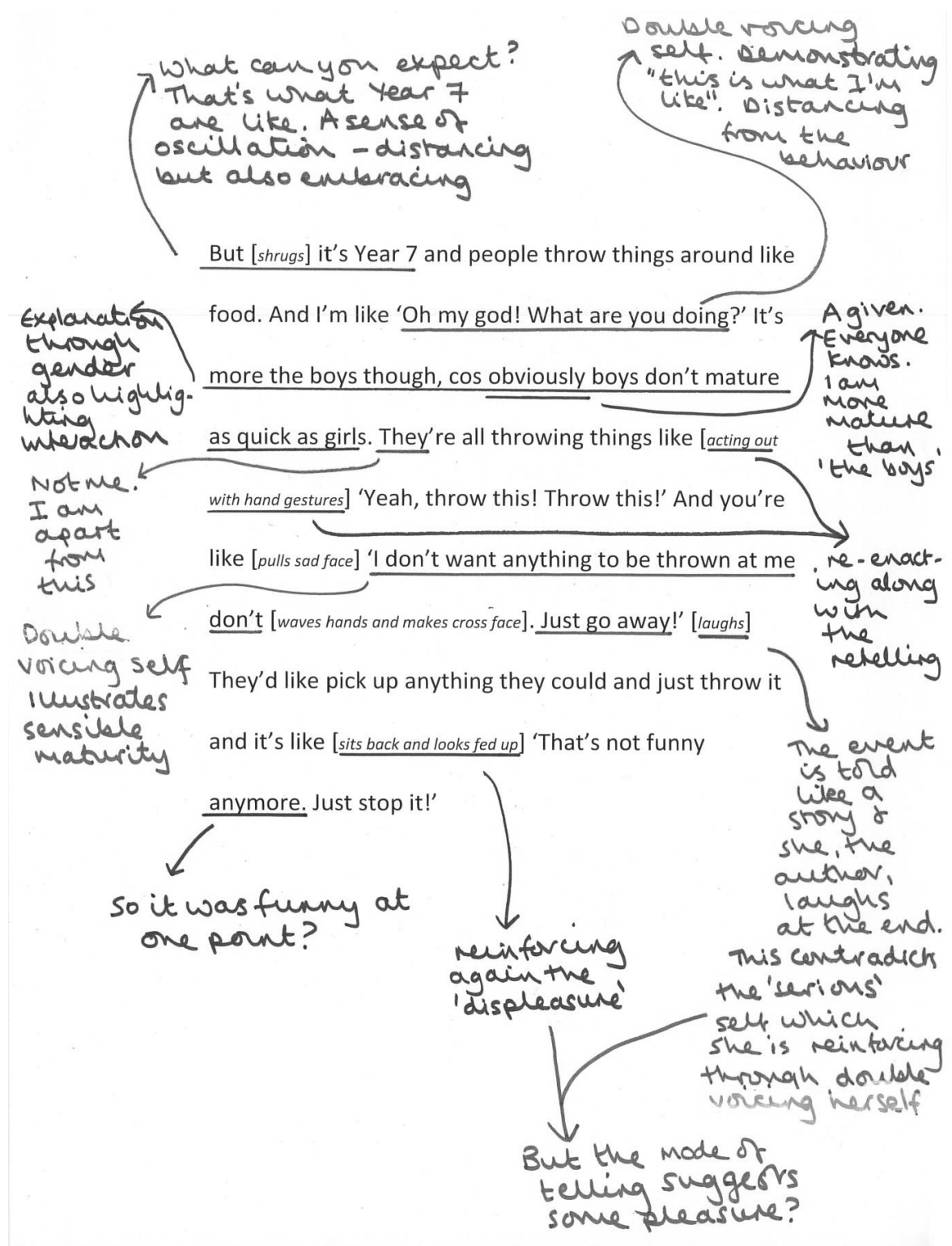


Figure 7.5 Laura – Annotated Transcript 2a Phase Two

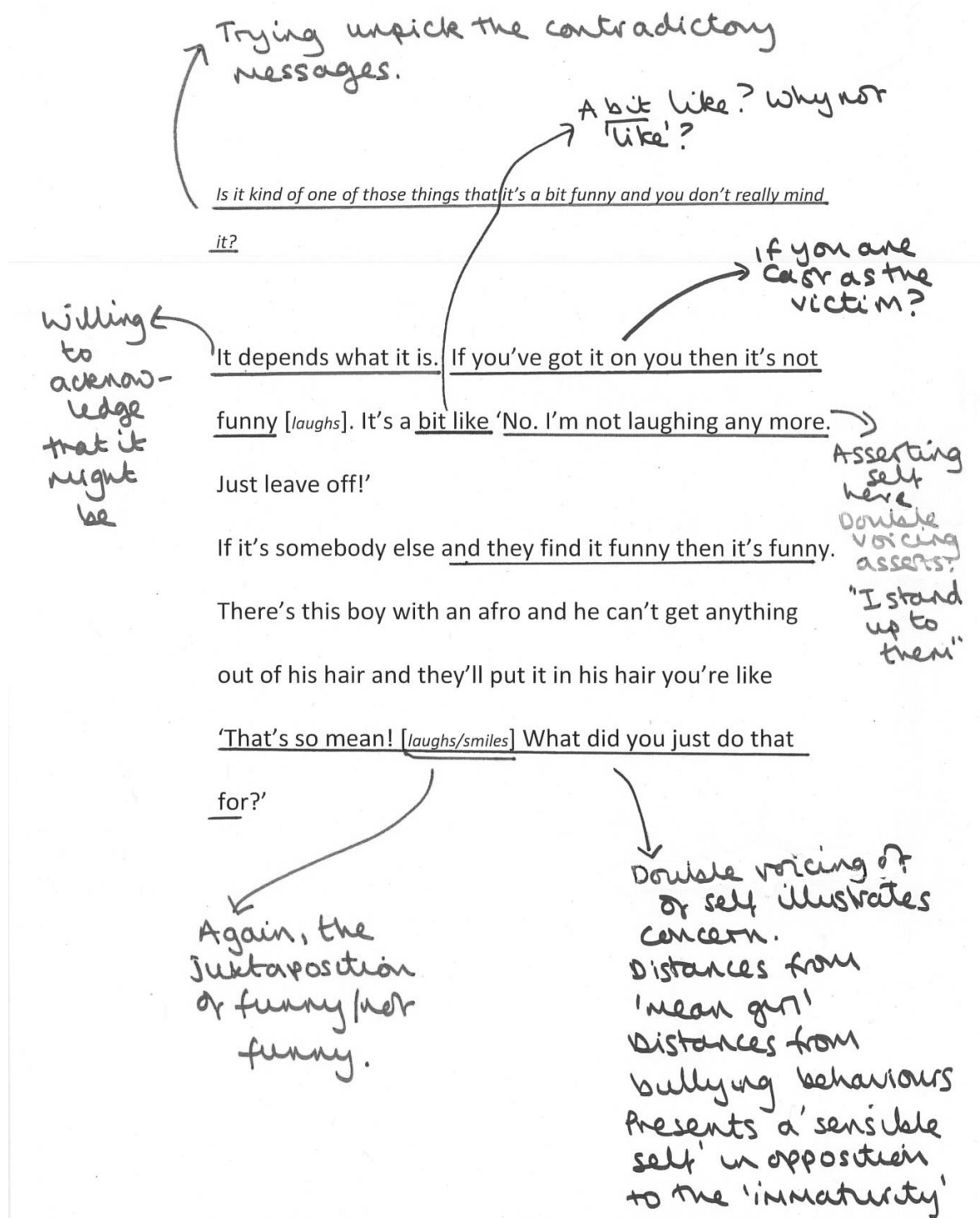


Figure 7.6 Laura – Annotated Transcript 2b Phase Two

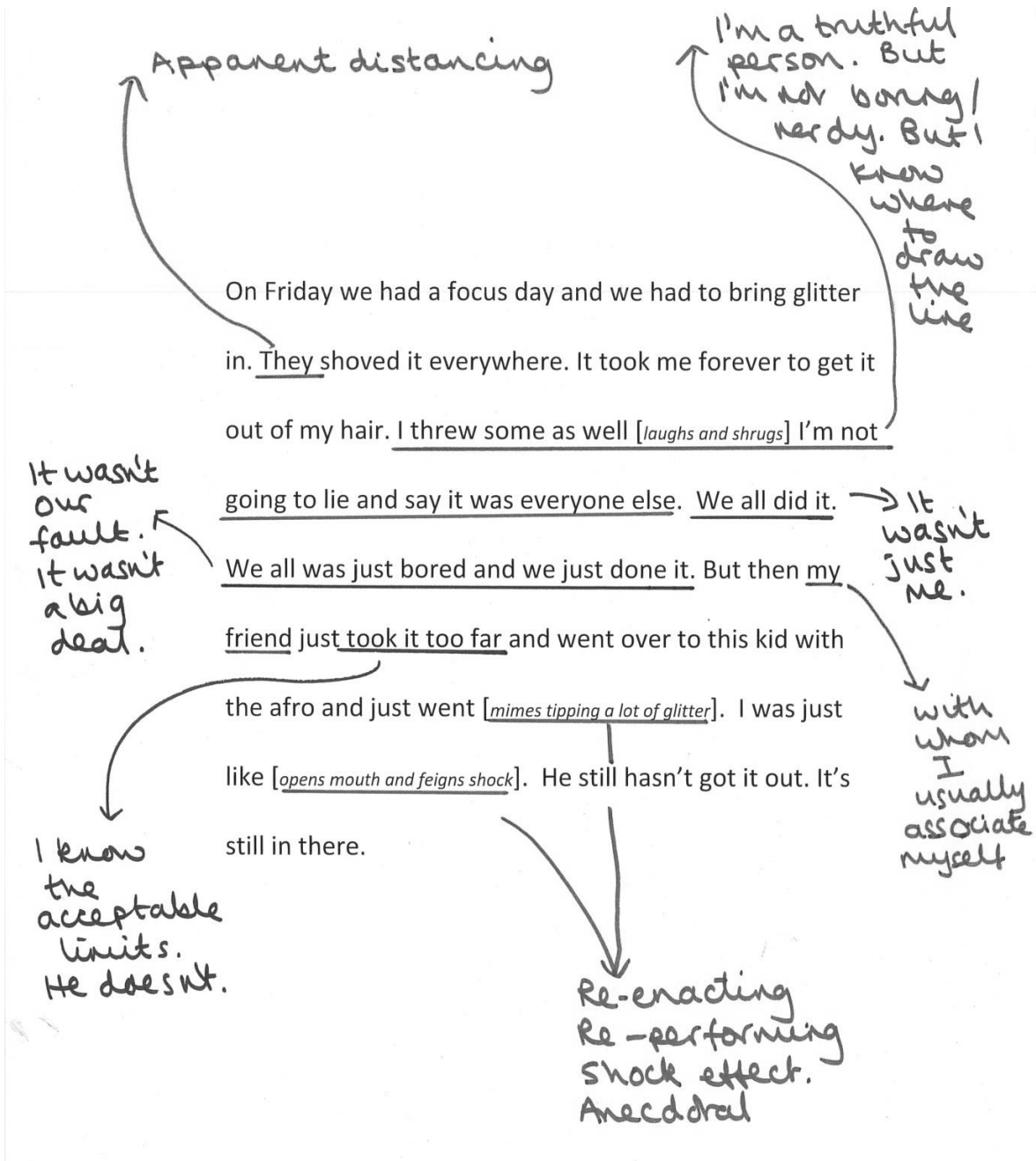


Figure 7.7 Laura Annotated Transcript 2c Phase Two

Discussion

In Chapter Four the themes of academic ability; attractiveness and 'fashion'; friendships, popularity and reputation were examined for the ways in which children used these in the establishment of peer group hierarchies. This chapter describes how the children marked continuities in their perception of self in their transition between school contexts. Thus the term 'continuities' refers to the ways in which they establish themselves as a continuous, coherent self rather than simply those things that they saw as the same across school contexts. Here I focus on the theme of 'growing up' as one means by which children were able to explain changes in identity performances (by themselves and others) in transition to the secondary school context.

Growing Up

Tony's drawing of his walk to the beach with his friends, discussed in Chapter Four, was typical of the ideas of growing up which the children talked about. Many of the children referred to the journey to school – having to get a bus or walking by themselves – and even walking around the larger campus of the secondary school between lessons as elements of the different expectations of them now they were in secondary school. Whilst for Tony there was the promise of increased adult support in the context of a special school – others commented on the decreased attention from adults which they saw as appropriate for their increased maturity. Frances weaves together her personal change and the decreased support in school in order to rationalise a newly 'sensible' self:

Do you think there's any part of you that's changed over the past year?

I was a bit like strange – no, not strange, like not very sensible [smiles]

OK! Tell me more about that

Like I was kind of naughty [laughs]

Ahh!

And rude. But I've become a bit more sensible

Why do you think that's happened then?

Because I've been put in a situation where I'm on my own now and I don't have help all the time so I've got used to it.

Ok. So you had help from a grown up when you were at Browntown – and you think that made you be naughty?

I just like relied on everyone else.

Frances Phase Two

So Frances is able to explain herself as responding to the new context – dismissing earlier dependent behaviour and reconstructing an independent, capable self who has developed a more ‘mature’ attitude to school.

Nadine tells a similar story – making it clear how the higher expectations of secondary school have facilitated her new-found independence. Her change is explained through the ways in which she is treated and her reciprocal, dialogic, response:

You have to pay attention more, because in primary school they repeat an instruction if you don’t hear it and they’d keep repeating all the steps of how to do this thing and there’d be helpers around the room and they’d help you if you forgot but now you have to – like in catering class they do one, they make it – sometimes they don’t even make it, they just tell you what to do and then they send you off and you have to do it by yourself and they don’t really help you.

Nadine Phase Two

She adds:

I think in High School they push you more and they know that you can do better so they push you more.

Nadine Phase Two

She is taking on the school discourse of high achievement and confidently asserts that the school ‘know you can do better’ – and she appears to be claiming this for herself: I know that I can do better too. Thus again, it is the school context that has enabled her to create a narrative of higher achievement and greater independence – with increasing maturity comes the responsibility to respond to the increasing demands made on her. She has adopted the schooled notion of ‘maturity’ and revoiced it in her own talk.

The quote from Laura which began this chapter shows how she firmly articulates her ‘grown-up-ness’ – in contrast to the boys’ immaturity whose shenanigans with the glitter she described in Figure 7.7. Unlike Frances and Nadine, Laura appears to attribute her increased maturity in part to

her friendships (we have already seen that Laura sees her friendships as highly salient in her life in secondary school). She sees the school context as providing the right sort of friendships for her to enable her to enact an 'appropriate' self:

I don't think I'd be happier anywhere else. I don't think if I went anywhere like Kingstown school I'd be that happy just because I know people there¹¹. If I went to Churchtown School I wouldn't be happy because I'd be with a load of girls¹². If I was at Seatown¹³ I'd be a bit like 'Oh this is stupid! What are we doing?' There's people there doing things I wouldn't imagine doing until I was twenty!

Laura Phase Two

Here, Laura asserts the role of her friends in the context of Simtown – othering the possibilities offered by other schools and distancing herself firmly from the perceived misbehaviour of those at Seatown. Interestingly her dismissal of the 'load of girls' at Churchtown reinforces the salience she applied to having mixed gender friendships at her school and her perception that having boys as friends was an important factor in the narrative of growing up. It is also interesting to note that whilst she is happy to consider that she is growing up she puts firm limits on what is 'appropriate'. The 'things that I wouldn't imagine doing until I was twenty' are established as 'too grown up'. This is again illustrative of the finely balanced work of identity in which adolescents engage. As discussed in Chapter Four, adolescents are required to understand what behaviours in terms of being grown up are acceptable and expected and which are unacceptable and the very ability to be able to distinguish between the two is seen as an integral part of the process of growing up. (Fine, 2004)

Laura appears to wrestle with this further as she tries to explain difference, sameness and change:

¹¹ In Chapter Four we saw that Laura was particularly concerned in Phase One that she was the only one from her school going to Simtown. Other friends of hers were going to Kingstown school – a mixed gender Grammar School like Simtown.

¹² Churchtown school is a single sex girls' Grammar School

¹³ Seatown is a High School, perceived locally as being a 'challenging' school in a deprived area with many children with behavioural difficulties. This reputation is not unlike the stereotype represented by the school in *Waterloo Road*.

You don't feel young any more when you're in senior school – you feel like the youngest but you don't feel young. It's just like: "Eleven." [shrugs] It's more like "Oh yeah! I'm eleven!" You feel older and it's different.

Laura Phase Two

Laura's drawing in Phase One (Figure 7.1) foregrounded difference rather than sameness. In Phase One, when she drew this picture, she demonstrated some concerns about the move to secondary school and the strict teachers, the homework demands and the potentially limited friendship circle in the new school were the focus for the drawing. Her drawing in Phase Two was quite different (Figure 7.2). Here she has drawn herself sitting 'out the back' with her friends. There are a large group with distinguishable male and female friends evident. She is sitting – almost 'holding court' whilst the others look to her and are interacting with her (worthy of note is that her hair in Phase One is in a pony tail – but in Phase Two it is 'down' in line with the 'cool' way of doing her hair described in Chapter Four). Laura's drawings demonstrate a change from her projected idea of school to the actual experience of school which she explains through the narrative of friendships, once again highlighting the salience of this for Laura.

Illustration and Dismissal

In her talk in previous chapters we have seen how Laura positioned herself firmly with the other 'popular' children who were 'like her' – but also how she distanced herself from the 'others' who might be less friendly and welcoming or from the American version of popularity which she saw to be conflating looks and popularity. Here a similar process can be seen as she undertakes the same kind of in-group/out-group behaviours except here the 'other' with whom she is comparing herself is a past self.

In the telling of the events which are orientated towards presenting a particular self to the listener there is a need to ensure that an anecdote from the past is reframed and re-told in a way which presents the speaker in the way in which she wants to be seen. Hence in Figure 7.3 we see that

Laura re-frames being 'upset' as being 'annoyed' and she veers away from the use of the 'nerd' terminology by saying she was being picked on because she was the only one going to that particular [grammar] school rather than because she would be 'nerdy'. In Figure 7.4 she specifies her age ('Year 4, I think') as an indicator that although that was what she thought then, she was young, immature and therefore didn't know any better – and by the end of the telling has firmly orientated herself towards a 'mature' attitude which embraces the need to conform to school expectations 'even though it's boring'. This is typical of Laura's almost masterful identity work – where she smoothly manages the double orientation of her performance (to me, perhaps) as a 'good' girl who sees the benefit and purpose of school learning, whilst simultaneously indicating that schoolwork is 'boring' thus dismissing the possibility of the assignation of those 'others' who actively enjoy school.

This heteroglossic nature of her talk is seen again where she presents the anecdote relayed in Figures 7.5-7.7. She overtly proffers the 'mature' identity which disapproves of the boys' 'mucking around' – using it to illustrate 'this is how I am' – but she also ensures that she can be seen to be one of the group – not a goody two shoes because she joins in too. The laugh, the shrug and the 'I'm not going to lie' in Figure 7.7 along with her assertion that her friend 'just took it too far', enable her at once to present a 'fun' self, an honest self and a 'more mature than the others' self in one performance.

Reproduced Voices

In Laura's conversation with me in Phase Two she drew frequently on her own words from the past in the form of reported direct speech in the retelling of events and anecdotes. In this analysis I draw on Maybin's (2006) descriptions of the different kinds of voice reproduction in children's talk:

Reporting: "...speakers report something close (or not so close) to what a speaker said in a way which fits in with their current conversational purposes" (p143). So where Laura reports herself she could be seen to be doing so in a way which fits her 'current conversational purpose' – and therefore saying something about how she wants to present both a past and present self.

Appropriation: "...where the speaker does not simply repeat someone else but takes on the given words and makes them their own, to suit their own communicative goals" (p144). Again, in the context of the re-use of her own words, in this chapter I consider how Laura takes the words of a previous self in order to construct a present, yet continuous self.

Stylisation: "A voice is reproduced as if it were one's own but with 'a slight shadow of objectification' (Bakhtin, 1984, p189)" (p144). This includes mimicking or parodying a voice in its reporting or reproduction so that the speaker's own perspective is evident. In the reproduction of her own voice, Laura can present a present perspective in the light of the past.

Laura replayed her own words to me using her own (present) voice (thereby 'double voicing'- this term is used in this chapter in the particular context of the direct quotation of utterances) in the context of her performance of self to me. In this way she was able to communicate implied and implicit messages about herself, the past self whose voice was being reproduced and her perceived relationship with them.

In the examination of the ways in which Laura (and the other children) used direct speech, appropriation and stylisation in their talk it became apparent that this is an extremely valuable, yet often quite subtle means by which children can present more than one perspective in a single utterance – often using it advantageously to present themselves more positively in contrast to 'others' or in contrast to a previous self.

The storytelling performance

As Laura was talking to me she was engaged in performance as a storyteller. The use of double voicing through direct speech enabled her to re-enact the scenario she was describing. When using the words of others, as well as offering a particular performance of the way in which the words were spoken, Laura almost always also included hand gestures, facial expressions and body language to further reinforce the words. Thus she engaged in a performance of a performance which was reproduced in such a way to enable her to make a comment on the behaviour of those whom she performed – including herself. In Figure 7.5 when she performs the boys saying ‘Throw this! Throw this!’ – her tone is almost imperceptibly parodic – a stylised reproduction – and therefore the implication of their immaturity is conveyed to reinforce her position as the more mature other. This performance with gestures and intonation supports the storytelling process – it enables an injection of humour and engages the audience. But it also facilitates an approach which can encapsulate the moment – the use of the voices of others in retelling anecdotes enables the story to be condensed and told in something like shorthand: he said, she said – and providing the foundation for the evaluative presentation of self and others.

The veneer of authenticity

What is of particular interest is the veneer of authenticity that is represented by double voicing while it can sound authentic because the words of others are apparently being reproduced verbatim; it actually creates a space for saying again and saying *differently*. Maybin (2006) using the work of Leech and Short (1981), suggests that direct reporting of speech means that the ‘character’s voice and perspective are more prominent’ (p77). Whilst this might be true and the author’s voice in the retelling appears to be more distant, the stylisation of the retelling means that emphasis and nuance and an evaluative perspective can be added which were not evident in the original context. Thus double voicing gives the appearance of greater distance from the one who is revoicing –

offering the words of others ostensibly in their own words is a means by which the original speaker's voice can appear to be brought to the fore. It is, however, also in this way that an implicit evaluative statement can be made. In Figure 7.3 Laura relates her thoughts about the children who teased her about going to a grammar school: "Picking on me because I'm the only one going to that school". The tone and manner in which she voiced this thought proffered an implied disappointment in her friends and disapproval of their behaviour, without the need to overtly state this. The implication is 'they shouldn't have done that' but she does not have to overtly state that she thought they were unkind – she can stay with the euphemistic use of the word 'annoying'.

Additionally, whilst in some cases it might be that the words of others or self are faithfully reproduced in the reporting of direct speech, it seems unlikely that this will always be the case. In many cases, as discussed above, it seemed possible that the words themselves weren't actually articulated in the 'first' performance – and this is certainly the case when thoughts are double-voiced as these were never overtly articulated in the original context (the reproduced voice of thoughts is discussed later in this section). The presentation of direct speech could be seen to be more persuasive to the listener in terms of authenticity. Actions, words and thoughts from the past can be brought into the present and re-worked for a different audience – telling the same but telling differently – whilst apparently representing a 'truth'.

When transcribing the interview with Laura, I had considered removing the word 'like' as merely a verbal tick as it appeared so frequently within the data. On closer examination, however, it became clear that the word 'like' prefaced almost every instance of double voicing with: "It was like..." On reflection I felt that this demonstrated something of the representational nature of her double voicing – Laura wasn't saying: "This is exactly how it happened"; but rather "this is a likeness, a representation of how it happened" – signalling to her audience that this is a performance of the past (Romaine & Lange, 1991).

Reinforcing the self

The majority of Laura's double voicings were actually a double voicing of herself- either in the reproduction of words or of thoughts and this seemed to serve a further function in her talk.

The double voicing of self could be used to create a distance from past selves and therefore 'other' herself and interrogate and re-present aspects of her past self in order to facilitate their dismissive or illustrative function. She could be seen as entering into a debate with her past self – summoning the past into the present and offering a different way of looking so that the past self can be subsumed into the ongoing story of self. The me of the past can be re-written, re-performed, re-understood in the present so that an overall sense of a coherent self can be established.

Holland *et al* (1998) describe how we enter into dialogue with ourselves in the form of an 'internal interlocutor' which "...invidiously compares you to the ideal and to whose charges you formulate answers and defences" (p179). This double voicing of self could be seen to be part of the process of answering and defending the self in the oscillation between past and present self-beliefs and behaviours. The double voicing of thoughts is also interesting – there is something revelatory, personal and immediate about being allowed access to the thinking of others – Maybin (2006) suggests that children might use the reproduction of thoughts to relay a particularly intense and emotional memory. It serves, yet again, an evaluative function, because it enables an implicit judgement or action from the past to be explicitly explained or justified or re-presented and reconfigured – with the semblance of authenticity and openness.

In addition it could be understood that the double voicing of self is a means by which certain traits, behaviours and beliefs can be re-emphasised through the direct replaying of particular actions. Therefore when Laura double voices herself saying to the boys: "That's not funny anymore. Just stop it!" in Figure 7.5, she is revisiting and re-emphasising her maturity in the face of the boys' behaviour. The double voicing of this allows us insight into her performance then and allows her to re-perform it in the present. In the context of the research I have no way of knowing whether

Laura faithfully reproduced the intonation, the force, the 'will' behind the initial performance of those words – but in the re-performance she presented herself as forthright, on the side of good and as having some authority over, or ability to influence the behaviour of the boys. All attributes which support a strong story of self.

Fractal Identity – A Way of Looking?

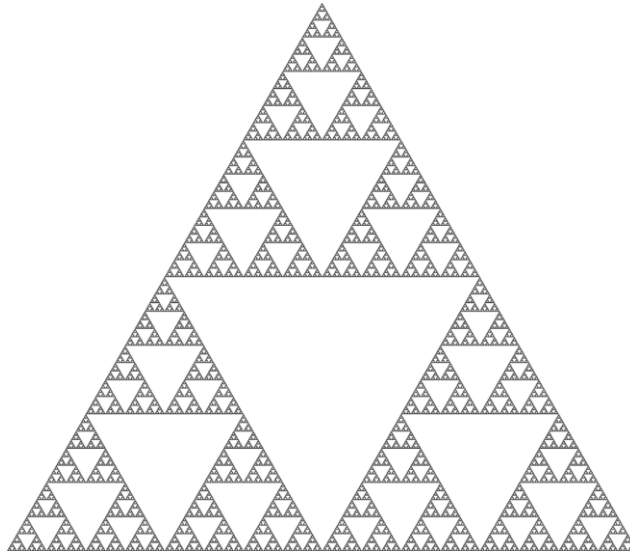
In this final section of this chapter I would like to examine the idea of Fractal Identity as a way of looking at identity which might help us to understand something about coherence and change in the identities we inhabit, perform, ascribe and are ascribed. For many involved in discussions about identity the issue of what or whether there is an essential, core of 'self' which endures and which is evident throughout lifetimes and contexts is of interest and importance as set against the extent to which we inhabit a range of malleable identities – shifting from context to context and moment by moment and performing different identities sometimes simultaneously. How we can reconcile these two different aspects of identity matters if we are trying to make a kind of sense of how we understand who we are in the living out of our lives.

In setting the mathematical concept of fractals alongside the concept of identity we can see the possibility of looking at identity as complex, chaotic and inchoate but imbued with the constant of 'self-sameness' that enables us to view ourselves and be viewed by others as having an overall coherence that endures across time and context.

Fractals

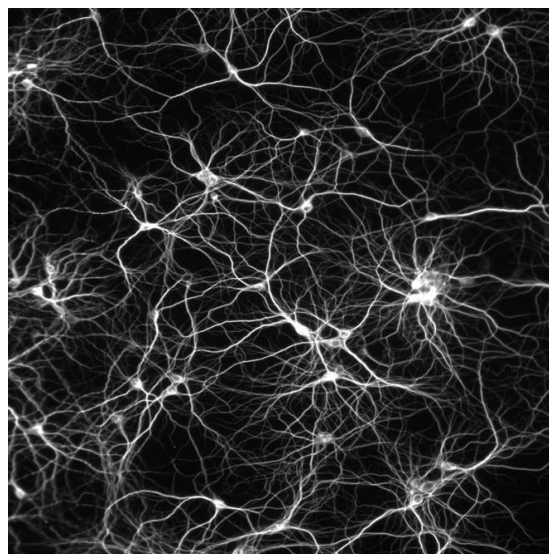
In mathematical terms, fractals are patterns which look the same at every level of magnification – because they exhibit recursive self-similarity. In nature, the most obvious example is a tree – the branching pattern of the trunk and its branches is repeated with each branch being made up of smaller branches and so on – even the veins in the leaves consist of the same branching pattern.

Where the self-similarities are identical, fractal patterns appear regular and ordered:



Credit: FractalFoundation, 2009 p 3

Where the self-similarities show random elements within them – such as length of line – the patterns generated, whilst still coherent as a whole become complex and chaotic. It is these approximate self-similarities that are seen throughout fractal systems in nature: seashells, vegetables, lightning bolts, blood vessels, neurons in the brain and river networks (Mandelbrot, 1983).



Credit: FractalFoundation, 2009 p4

Using the example of a tree from earlier we can see how changes in rainfall, weather, soil quality and temperature all affect the growth of a tree. Therefore, rather than regularly repeated identical self-similarities we see approximate self-similarities which retain the pattern and thus coherence overall, but the resulting whole is complex and chaotically generated. There is no way to predict how a tree will look as it grows; which branch or twig or leaf will be the next to grow and in exactly what form or position, but an oak tree will grow with certain recognisable repeated patterning and a beech tree with differently recognisable but similarly repeated patterns. But each oak tree, each beech tree, is different and unique.

Fractal Identity

To apply this to the context of identity would be to say that we might consider that there are certain recognisable 'self-similarities' that make up the 'self'. That these self-similarities are approximate, irregular – varying according to and affected by context or other external influence – but the re-iterations of these self-similarities go towards the creation of a unique individual. Such individuals are recognisably unique across different contexts – just as the oak tree in the local park is recognisably an oak tree but uniquely identifiable as that particular tree in that particular context, with that particular history of 'being'.

Henning & Cilliers (2012) who use the concept of fractals differently in their discussion of a 'psychodynamic wellness model' refer to the 'paradox of "sameness-in-change"' (p1) – the fact that whilst we are constantly changing we need to somehow feel the same. If we consider the concept of 'fractal identity' we might try to identify what those 'self-similarities' could be. Which bits of us resurface and repeat –define us both as a whole and our parts? In revoicing others we are saying something of ourselves, of our relationship to others and to ourselves but in double voicing ourselves we are offering a moment of obvious repetition of a pattern – we are repeating, emphasising, reinforcing something of us that we want to solidify and reuse in our life story. If the

double voicing of self is one example of self-similarity we can see how this contributes to both coherence and change. We keep ourselves together, yet we keep ourselves constantly in flux.

Thus when we take the 'long view' and observe the person as a whole we recognise the patterning of being which makes that person coherent so that we recognise them from context to context as particular kind of people (nerds, perhaps, or 'popular kids'). For ourselves we recognise and hold ourselves together through this patterning which runs through us and our 'history in person' and the ways in which we think about ourselves as social beings. The changes to self-similar recursive patterns might result from imposed, external stimuli (such as school transfer) or from a deliberate desire to change and do differently (for example in enacting a 'popular' identity). Thus, each of us, although connected to others like us, remains unique – resistant to a uniform, homogenising, essentialising pattern and able to agentively adjust the pattern to perform individual, personal identities.

To conceptualise identity as a form of fractal patterning enables us to consider:

- sameness with others – social identities, categories or 'types'
- difference from others – personal, unique, identities
- continuity – the coherent self
- change – multiple identities across time and contexts
- coherence – self-sameness
- chaos, complexity and inchoateness

The idea of applying the concept of fractals to identity emerged from the synthesis of ideas from a range of reading and from the analysis of the data. The idea crystallised through an episode of *The*

Code (2011) part of which focused on fractals. Marcus du Sautoy, mathematician and host of the programme asserted: “Fractals – how nature builds the world” (2011). He offered the argument that fractals are a ‘natural’ way in which complex systems originate, grow and develop – including even the way that neural patterning in the brain develops. It seemed, therefore, possible that this could be a useful way of thinking about identity development as a process of change and interaction and reaction.

Summary

RQ 4: How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between Primary and Secondary school contexts?

- How/does children's talk about themselves and others demonstrate continuity in their identity work in transition between Primary and Secondary school contexts?
- What role might the reproduced voices of others and self through reported speech play in the development of a sense of a coherent self?

... transitions have the potential to...disrupt[ing] existing conceptions of ourselves [and] creating a need to develop our story of self. This occurs because we are confronted with a new set of people who we know will be forming judgements about us. Alterations in our support networks often accompany these changes, perhaps leaving us more sensitive about our 'place' in the new setting. Children may wish to see themselves and be seen differently, yet it appears to be increasingly difficult to recreate 'self' as they move through the education system.

Warin & Muldoon, 2006 p298/99

Throughout the data the children drew on events from their lives to tell me things about themselves and their relationship with their peers within the social world which they inhabited. Some of these they fashioned into stories and in the Phase One interviews where the events were common to them, as other research has reported, they shared the telling of the story with their friends (Maybin, 2006).

The use of the words of others, positions both self and other as a particular kind of person and facilitates '... a kind of inner dialogue with the voice they are reporting and expressing varying degrees of commitment to or distancing from, the evaluative perspective it represents' p186. The voices of others are being used to develop the 'ongoing story of self' (Giddens, 1991) as children position and reposition, present and re-present themselves and others to create a coherent life story through which they make sense of themselves and their personal and social identities.

Furthermore, when children reproduce their own voice or thoughts within the context of their talk it could be seen as of increased significance: they are entering into a dialogue with self, evaluating self-positions and engaging in a process of self-verification (Swann *et al*, 2003) reinforcing aspects of their identity which they particularly want to highlight and playing down those aspects that they are less comfortable with or feel the need to explain or dismiss.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

To study demands discipline.

*To study is not easy because to study is to create
and re-create and not to repeat what others say.*

To study is a revolutionary duty!

Freire & Macedo, 1987 p 43

Preamble

I love to study.

I enjoy the whole process – from the wild woolly ideas at the beginning, through the roughly sculpted shape to the final polished product. I claim, also, to love the moments when it all seems so muddled and confused that to the lily-livered it might appear that there is no clarity to be found. I have learned, I think, to trust. To trust that the process of thinking; of working things out; of seeing how things fit and hold together *will* happen. And that it will happen through the steady, careful, thoughtful process of following where the threads run and intertwine and painstakingly unknitting them so that they can be retied in ways which look a little different and make a different kind of sense.

In the process of doing this, over a period of four years, I filled notebooks. I made notes about what I had read, about what I had thought and notes about how things seemed to be connected to each other and to my data. I found that where the complexity seemed too difficult for words, diagrams helped to affirm where my ideas were going and gave them a kind of shape (Figures 8.1- 8.4). And reading through my notes became a comforting, reinforcing and yet challenging activity in itself. My journey was convoluted – notes barely considered from years ago would suddenly make a new kind of sense in the light of something read yesterday and more connections emerged just as others receded.

Slowly, with delays, detours, false turns and the occasional short cut I began to work out where I was going.

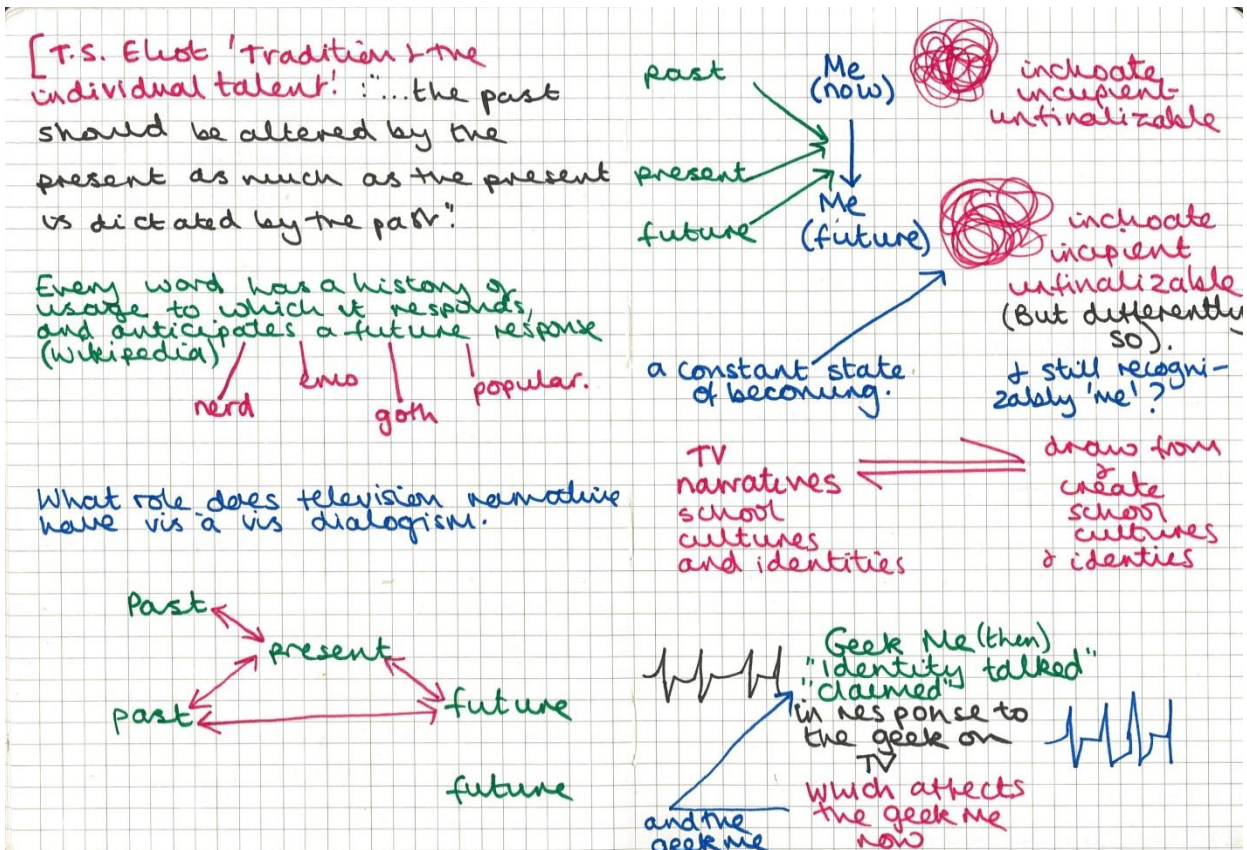


Figure 8.1 Notebook 1

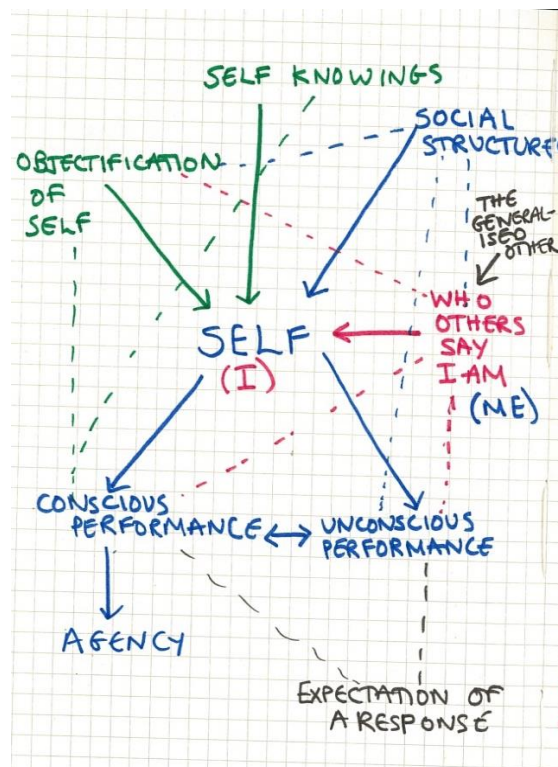


Figure 8.2 Notebook 2

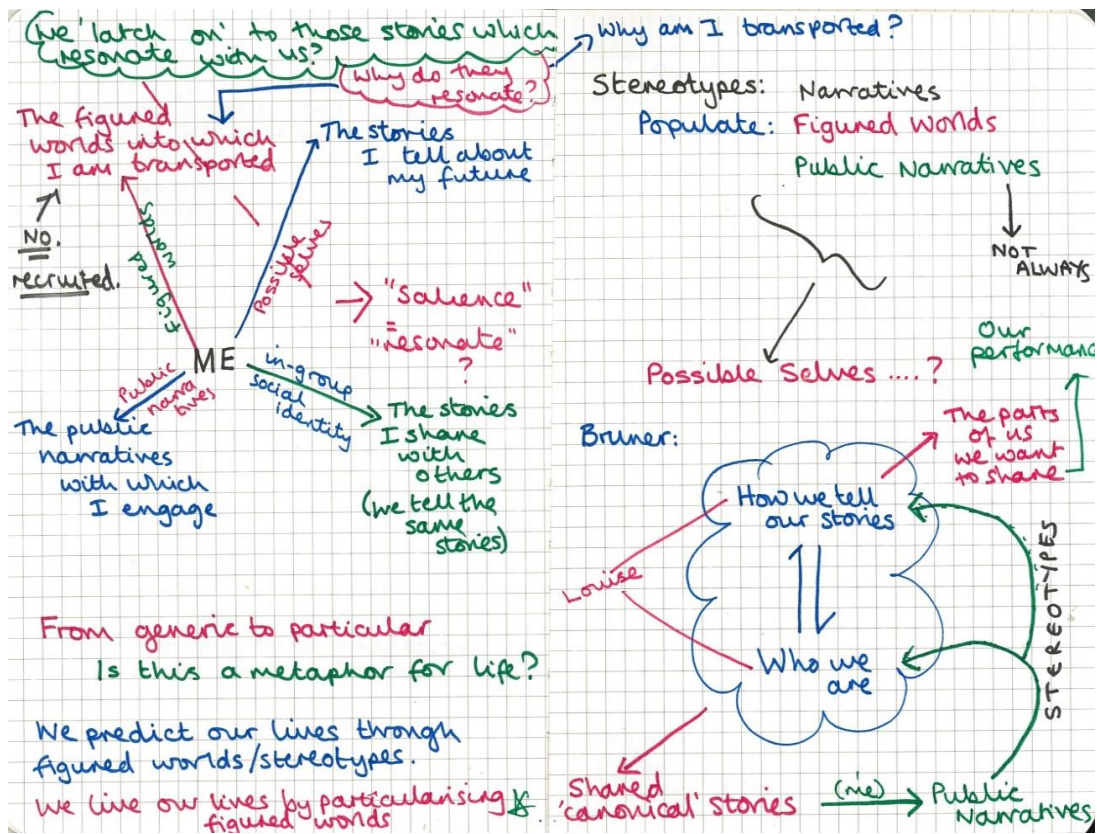


Figure 8.3 Notebook 3

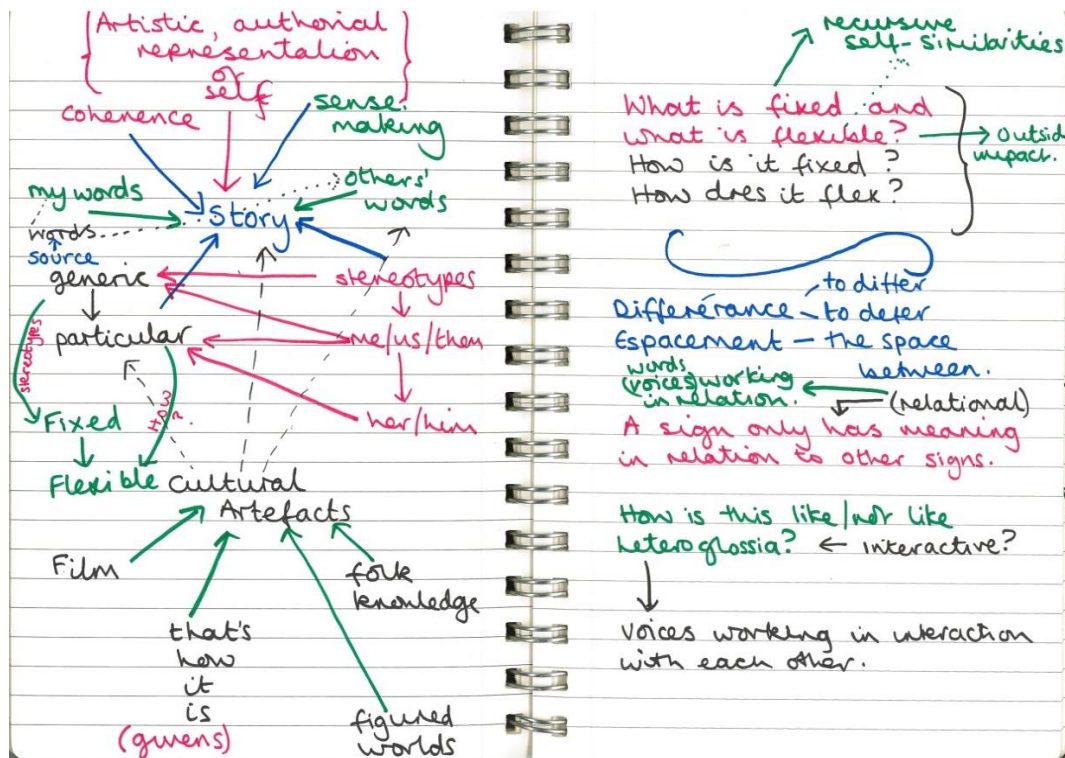


Figure 8.4 Notebook 4

But it wasn't until I felt I had a sense of the whole – of what this 'thing' might look like when completed that I began to write in earnest. The focus for this was two whole weeks of precious study leave which was spent putting together the overview of the themes and ideas for each of the data chapters – a version of which appeared in Chapter Three. This was the end of the sorting, sifting and structuring process that provided the focus that I needed to write

And once I began to write the thesis, I could fashion its substance with confidence knowing what shape it needed to be for it to make the best kind of sense. The writing was a reflection of the process I had already been through as much as a process in itself – and perhaps this is why the thesis has emerged in a more unconventional structure and form. It emerged in response to the story I knew I wanted to tell.

That is not, of course, to say that the writing process has been easy. Knowing what you want to say is not the same as knowing how to say it and the connections in my head weren't always as easy to articulate as I had anticipated. The diagrams and half-thoughts and jottings did not always translate into direct coherent thinking and so many of the words I needed to say what I wanted to say were so loaded and laden with the 'taste of their previous use' that it seemed impossible to appropriate them without some part of it being said wrong. This was exacerbated by the extraordinary realisation that the field within which I was writing was so enormously dense, so well-trodden, so widely interpreted and so full of complex philosophising that I doubted my ability to understand what was already out there, let alone how (or even if) my research would fit.

Now, at the end of my journey, I have come back to my notebooks and diagrams and offer here some thoughts on what this thesis might contribute to scholarly activity about identity in secondary school peer group relations.

Key findings

In this section I re-articulate the key findings in relation to each of the Research Questions – I then go on to look at the overarching themes which unite them.

Identity, Adolescence and Peer Groups

RQ1: How do peer group hierarchies operate in school contexts?

Sub questions:

- Does the school context contribute to the creation and sustenance of social hierarchies?
- What is the significance of adolescence as the time frame in which this identity work takes place?
- What is the significance of school transfer in identity work?
- Does children's talk about themselves and their peers show how they identify with and position themselves within peer group hierarchies in the school context?

This research question was the focus for Chapter Four. The data showed children engaged in a process of in-group/out-group identification with their peers in line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Their talk, associated in particular with attractiveness, popularity and academic achievement, demonstrated how they ranked and positioned themselves and their peer groups in terms of social standing (from 'popular' to 'nerd') through a process of distancing from or embracement of the behaviour, traits and attributes of others (Snow & Anderson, 1987). School was seen to set up certain identity roles which were available to children, particularly in relation to academic achievement, which had a subsequent impact on children's position within peer groups in terms of social ranking.

School transfer provided a context within which some of the children engaged more overtly in identity work – particularly in relation to friendship groups, as they considered the possible identities available to them in a new school and peer group context. For others, they appeared to be either unaware of the roles into which they were cast, or might have felt constrained by the limited range of roles available to them. As adolescents they were also negotiating the complex and contradictory messages of what is required of them as they transition towards adulthood.

Figured Worlds of Secondary School Peer Relationships

RQ 2: How do children respond to and engage with the figured worlds of secondary school peer relationships?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do they perform or resist available identities?
- To what extent/how are they critically aware of the identity performances of themselves or others?

In Chapter Five peer relationships in school were examined from the perspective of figured worlds (Holland *et al*, 1998). The children's talk was analysed for the ways in which they demonstrated the salience of, their identification with and savoir faire within the figured world of peer group relationships. The identity performances of four children were examined in detail and their critical engagement with the figured world was identified as a means by which different identity performances within secondary school could be described. An uncritical yet engaged performance could be seen in Laura, a self-confessed popular girl; an uncritical disengaged performance was evident by Robert – who appeared oblivious to much of the 'game' which was going on around him and finally, critically engaged performances were seen by two of the girls who were able to maintain their comfortable 'middle group' identity by keeping 'in' with the popular girls but maintaining a distance from the lower status groups such as 'nerds'.

Figured Worlds, Stereotypes and the Media

RQ3: What role might media stereotypes of adolescent groups in school play in children's identity work?

Sub questions:

- To what extent/how do children draw on media stereotypes as cultural resources in their identity work?
- To what extent/how do they resist stereotypical narratives of peer groups and their interrelationships?

Chapter Six stayed with the concept of Figured Worlds in the examination of the role of media stereotypes as a cultural resource on which the children drew in their identity work. The children in this research were seen to be aware of the stereotypical ways in which children in secondary schools were described in children's film and television. They used terminology related to stereotypes in their descriptions of schools and children in general terms – at a more specific level, however, when describing individuals the children tempered the stereotypes and adjusted them to offer more particularised understandings.

The Coherent Self

RQ 4: How/do children maintain a coherent sense of self in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?

Sub questions:

- How/does children's talk about themselves and others demonstrate continuity in their identity work in transition between primary and secondary school contexts?
- What role might the reproduced voices of others and self through reported speech play in the development of a sense of a coherent self?

The final data chapter used a narrative identity lens (Bruner, 1987; Ricoeur, 1984) to consider how (or whether) the children maintained a coherent sense of who they were when their social context changed. The children's talk demonstrated the ways in which they talked about themselves to reinforce or illustrate a particular aspect of self or to dismiss behaviours which they felt were not like them (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011). In this way their sense of coherence could be seen in how they explained changed attitudes, behaviours and traits as part of the process of growing up.

In addition, one child's use of double voicing (Bakhtin, 1981; Maybin, 2006) was seen to be a particular way in which the 'self' could be reinforced and represented – particularly in the double voicing of self. This led to the suggestion of a way in which identity might be looked at through the mathematical concept of fractals. The notion of 'fractal identity' where self-similarities are reproduced in chaotic yet coherent patterning is a means by which the notion of self-sameness and change in identity can be understood whilst still accounting for complexity.

Key Themes

Throughout the research, in my ponderings about what it all meant, I came back to three key themes which were threaded through each of the chapters:

- Oscillation
- Macro versus Micro
- Fixedness and Flexibility

Each of these themes is discussed here.

Oscillation

What struck me throughout the data was the idea of a constant back and forth between different self-understandings and different ways of presenting the self to others. Something I tried to represent in the way the data was presented. The children talked about themselves as individuals but also as part of a social context fulfilling a function – as a pupil, a ‘popular kid’, the captain of the football team, a child with ADHD – all in interaction with others. They moved between how they were then and how they are now; how they are on the playground, how they are in the classroom; how they are with their mates, how they are with teachers; how they are at school, how they are at home. Sometimes this was in the presentation of a different self (or different aspect of self) but at other times it was overtly dialectic – the in-group/out-group embracement of and distancing from the behaviour of others (Snow & Anderson, 1987) or the illustrative or dismissive function of the stories of self they told (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2011). The process of laying claim to or rejecting the possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) available to them set up the ‘this is me’/‘this isn’t me’ opposition in the development of self-understandings and explanations which appeared to be central to the construction of coherent continuous self. Even Robert, whilst disengaged, perhaps,

from the social sorting process through peer hierarchies, presented himself as non-sporty and good at computers – juxtaposing the two traits in a process of like/not like.

There wasn't, however, a sense of finalisation. It wasn't as if the children compared themselves with others merely to find an answer to where they fit. Because of the flexibility of the categories, the nebulous nature of the group identities with which they compared themselves, the process of oscillation was a permanent state – inchoate, never fully formed (Bakhtin, 1981). Laura was permanently moving between her conception of the popular 'mean' girl; the popular 'nice' girl and the nerds and outcasts. Her identity was not fixed, permanent and definable but constantly being made and remade in the relationship of herself to others in the contexts in which she found herself. The process of double voicing (Bakhtin, 1981) provided a means by which the contradictions – the oscillations – could be contained. In one single utterance, Laura could be both self and other and perform multiple identities simultaneously to different audiences in the past and present.

Stereotypical stories and characters set against real world experiences provided a further context for the back and forth of identity work. Whilst obviously not a direct reflection of 'real' schools and schooling, stories and characters appeared to offer further models for the in-group/out-group identification process. The lure, the fallacy, of the 'real' of stereotypes appeared to be tempered by the challenge of their application to the real world, real people, real selves –oscillating between the overarching broad stereotypes and the personalisation of the individuals with whom they interacted.

Macro versus Micro

The macro/micro dialectic was also seen throughout the data. In particular in the ways in which the children used the generic stories of the figured worlds and the media in relation to 'popular kids' and 'nerds' in the ways in which generic schools and generic others were talked about. But when they came to talk about their own school, their own friends and themselves they particularised and

adapted the generic stories to make sense of individual circumstances. The overarching narratives appeared to be seen as the framework within which the 'small stories' of individuals emerged (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006). These small stories challenged, to a greater or lesser extent, the givens of the overarching narratives. Thus nerds wear glasses and are clever – but they may or may not wear braces – and not all nerds are socially inept.

In trying to understand the data I could see how it might be that the 'long view' of the children and the roles they played in school established them within certain categories, as certain types of children, but how the close-up view identified the ways in which their actions, their behaviours and their thoughts distinguished them as individual and unique.

Fixedness and Flexibility

This research arose from my puzzlement about how my son and I were respectively recruited to and excluded from identity positions. There seemed to be a sense of fixedness – of inevitability in the way we both looked at who we were (or who we were going to be) in the world of secondary school. This fixedness appeared to be reflected in my data here. Tony and Joseph appeared to articulate a fixedness in who they were and who they would be – the stories of popularity, friendships and academic achievement setting out for each of them a different path ahead. Robert, disengaged from the 'game' appeared by very virtue of that fact, to be taking up a particular position – given a particular way to be, a part to play, in the story of peer group relationships in school.

Nadine and Frances in their careful positioning and delicate game playing could, in one way, be seen to be the most agentive and the most in control of the identities they created for themselves. Yet even so they were still playing the game – they had, perhaps, more choice over where they might position themselves within the nerd/popular kid dialectic but they were still somewhere between – still in the game, still playing by the rules of the game and still recognised as particular kinds of people in the ways that they related to the identities enacted by others.

Applying the notion of fractals across the data allowed me a way of looking at this to see that whilst the fixedness might be within the bigger picture, the flexibility lay within the particularisation of children as individuals, in a constant state of becoming responding agentively or passively to the contexts in which they found themselves – changing constantly yet remaining the same.

The mis-told story

In Chapter Three, the methodology chapter, I outlined my position as the teller of just a part of a whole story. Reflecting on the process here I am aware of the things which could have been said, but weren't and how things might have been done or said differently.

Throughout the data there were references to identity which could easily have been viewed through lenses of gender and class. I felt that it was not possible to do justice to these themes within the context of this thesis without shifting the focus away from the areas I had set out to examine. I have referred tangentially to both these aspects but have remained focused on the aspects of identity which resonated most to me with the research questions I was asking and the ways in which I was looking.

The admissions and selection procedures followed in the particular part of Kent in which this research was undertaken creates a further layer to the transition process. The types of schools which children attend – 'selective' or 'non-selective' – clearly have a role to play in the children's identity work but this has not been pursued in depth here. Nor did I look closely at the potential influence of single and mixed gender school types. This is something that would have been interesting to consider.

I was also interested in the role of parents and families in children's identity work. Some of the aspects which were highly salient in peer group interactions were things which could have been influenced by parents. For example access to accessories, particular types of clothing, phones, bags and so on – and even, perhaps, to some extent children's haircuts or use of make-up. What I did not

pursue in this research is the extent to which parents facilitated and/or controlled children's identity work in school. If a 'cool' accessory is the latest iPhone then children require others who will provide such an accessory for them – and as such access to particular identities is further controlled by those who may or may not be as invested in a particular identity performance as the child. Thus a different set of power relations might be seen to be at work in addition to those explored here.

I am also aware that in using the children's talk about who they were and how they behaved in the school context with their peers; I am tapping in to just one aspect of their identity performance. Had I been able to undertake an ethnographic study, for example, I might have seen, in the context of the classroom and playground, very different performances of identity from that which they expressed to me. This would have enabled a further layer to the analysis – which was beyond the scope of this research.

Mis-Analysis

I have tried to do something different in the way in which I have analysed the data I collected. I have tried to offer multiple ways of reading the data to provide layers to the analysis and a kind of transparency through the use of the annotated transcripts. These diagrams also, I think, offer the reader glimpses of other things that might have been pursued within the thesis. Therefore whilst the subsequent traditional narrative analysis supported a more focused, closed down, approach to analysis, the annotated transcripts allowed for some residual openness.

I have pondered whether this approach is born of a researcher-anxiety with respect to what can reasonably and definitively be said about what the data shows, but I present it in this thesis as a genuine attempt to resist the lure of closure. Additionally, I see it as a way to illustrate the complex, non-linear process of analysis as valuable in and of itself in terms of what can be 'said' about the data. Perhaps seeing the 'analysis in progress' is a more honest representation of the process of research than to simply offer a more tidy end product?

Mis-Writing

I have not structured or written this thesis in a conventional way. I know this, despite having resisted the temptation to read anyone else's thesis in the process of writing my own. I have written with an overtly personal voice – switching between academic distance and personal intimacy in an attempt to say particular things in a particular ways, drawing on different voices to create a heteroglossic text. Whilst I have respect for the conventions of academic writing I also have a healthy scepticism about the potential for inertia if those conventions are not challenged – particularly in the context of the messiness of social science research. I have tried to tell a 'small story' which might push a little at the boundaries of the over-arching stories of research into the social world. I believe that the way I have presented my research facilitates a coherent and scholarly reading of the context and findings for my study – not diminished by being differently presented in form and style.

Further Research

There is much to be explored in the field of identity within peer relationships in secondary schools. Aspects identified above such as the implications of the selective process and school hierarchies and the significance of the parental role in facilitating or inhibiting children's identity work are aspects which could be taken as a focus. A more explicit examination of the ways in which stereotypical representations in television programmes are drawn on in identity work would also be worthwhile. In addition, as identity work is embedded in performances in context, it would be of great value to engage groups of children as participant-researchers to support a process of critical reflection on the roles and identities which are available to them and how they enact them in practice.

The Contribution

This thesis offers contributions to the field from two perspectives. The way in which the thesis is structured, written and presented – including the use of the annotated transcripts offers a challenge to more traditional approaches. The transcription of the research process has been designed so that it offers not only a particular way of looking, but also a particular way of telling. It has allowed for a layered approach through the use of ‘big picture’ analysis of the children as individuals as well as ‘small picture’ analysis of short sections of transcripts. But it has also allowed for sideways layers – the use of different lenses through which the same data is analysed provides the opportunities to think divergently about the data. Taken together this could be described as a kind of three-dimensional approach to the research – one which allows for the data to be viewed from multiple positions.

The use of fractals as a means by which identity might be theorised offers a further contribution to the field. There is a need to develop this theory – particularly in consideration of how the ‘recursive self-similarities’ might be identified – but it is a way in which the paradox of self-sameness and constant flux in identity work can be helpfully understood.

Final Thoughts

There is an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987) called *Darmok* (1991). The crew of the *Enterprise* encounter a member of a race of aliens who communicate only in metaphor by using allusion to stories and folk lore in order to convey meaning. This means that the universal translator can translate the words but the crew are at a loss as to how to interpret the meaning behind the words. One phrase used by the alien is "Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra" as he proffers Picard, the captain, a knife. Picard wrongly believes that this is an invitation to a duel, but when the two are required to join together to fight a common enemy, Picard realises that Darmok and Jalad were two warriors who met on an island called Tanagra and had to cooperate in the defeat of a dangerous beast, thus forging a bond of friendship. Without the shared knowledge of this canonical story Picard could not understand, make sense of, the communication between them, nor understand the role he was required to play.

This episode has always fascinated me. For me it is about how we, too, understand our place in the world – how we know what is expected of us and how we make sense of our interactions with others. It is about identity and the stories which shape our lives and by which we, as individuals, are shaped.

The children who I met and got to know through this research were drawing on the stories which are threaded through their lives in the development of their sense of who they are and the role they are required to play. They drew on stories of school, stories of teenagers, stories of bullies, stories of academic achievement and failure and stories of friendships. But those stories haven't arisen by accident – those are stories that have been formed by and form the cultural contexts in which they enact their lives – they are stories which delineate how things 'are', how things should be – the natural order of the world – the 'grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) of existence. Yet they are flawed stories, they are stories which create and perpetuate inequality, stories which appear so natural, so

obvious and so reasonable that they resist challenge and change. The complexity of social life, however, refuses to be tied down to stories which only articulate the big picture. To understand the world at a personal level we need to tell the smaller stories of ourselves – our individuality – and in so doing we can temper and counter the narratives that presume to shape the bigger picture of our lives. And those small stories, told to others and to ourselves, might become the means by which the bigger stories change.

Children have very little access to real power. They are funnelled into particular roles and experiences and are faced with particular expectations of how they should be. In school, especially, they are faced with adult expectations for their ways of being and doing which are at odds with the ways in which their peers decide where they will fall in the social pecking order.

But how do children work this out? How do they know what possibilities are on offer for how to behave and be? How do they work out how to navigate the competing demands on them within the multiple contexts in which they are faced?

For the children in this study in the context of the transfer to secondary school their looks, their sporting ability, their academic ability along with any number of other attributes over which they had little or no control appeared to be highly salient for the identities, the roles, that were available to them within the context of their friendship groups. They seemed to be required to play a complicated game where there were different rules at different times and there were different expectations of the players in different contexts. And on top of that no-one told them how to play – they appeared to be required to work it out for themselves, in context, as they embarked on the game – drawing on what they knew, what they had heard about what it is *supposed* to be like from the stories that circulate within their culture.

For some of the children the roles to which they were recruited in secondary school were those with which they appeared to feel comfortable – they were comfortably placed in a high ranking position.

Joseph seemed to accept it as a given, Laura suggested she was popular because of her looks, her personality – but still felt she had to work at it to some degree. And for those children it might be that you could choose to be apart from that group – you could choose to defer the highest status rank to others. You had to enact popular to be popular but you could, conceivably, choose *not* to do this. Then there were those like Nadine and Frances who appeared to see through the game and understand where they fitted. They appeared to have found a way to fit securely into a ‘safe’ place between the extremes of the social ranks, content with their place in the middle. For Robert the choice was made for him – he was positioned by his manner, his traits, his looks, his lack of sporting prowess, nearer the bottom of the social ranking – but he is somehow apart from and unaffected by the world of the game around him – oblivious to the rules by which he is judged. Nevertheless, it would seem he still cannot access the kind of social power wielded by those above him in the ranks – he could not, therefore, make a choice to enact popular. Lee and Tony were among those for whom the game appears to be much less fun. They are bound to the discourses which set them apart as lower down the scale. Whilst Lee could turn to a kind of pride in his status and his desire to be seen to be on the periphery of the popular kids, Tony was left almost as if defenceless against the circumstances which, in school at least, appeared to him to dictate who he was and how others see him.

It is not an even playing field and for some children there appeared to be obstacles which were out of their control to deal with in the world of peer relationships. The over-arching stories of peer relationships in school control the ways in which all the children are allowed access to the power which enables them to tell a different story of self – Laura and Joseph might be in some ways as tied to their roles as Tony and Lewis are to theirs and Frances and Nadine can only tell their story in relation to the story of the others around them.

My son, David, with whom this thesis began, found a way in secondary school to flex – to be different. He stopped wearing his glasses, changed how he did his hair and found that in the

grammar school context he wasn't as clever as he thought he was after all. He is still, however, good at maths and he will never be the captain of the football team. He managed to steer away from the possible self to which he did not want to subscribe or be hailed to (Althusser, 1971) and used his knowledge of the 'game' to find a different path

But nerds and popular kids still exist in David's world. It is just that he has avoided the label he thought he would be given. Finding ways to make the rules work for you still leave the rules open to be applied to others. It will surely be the blurring of the social status which is applied to categories which will signal real change. Individual stories of self, which push agentively at the boundaries of what is seen as given, natural, the way things are, are the stories which will, in turn, inform the bigger stories on offer to children in the context of peer relationships in school.



David, aged 12, Year 7

Credit: R. Austin private collection

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1

Ethics Form

**University of Sheffield School of Education
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM**

Complete this form if you are planning to carry out research in the School of Education which will not involve the NHS but which will involve people participating in research either directly (e.g. interviews, questionnaires) and/or indirectly (e.g. people permitting access to data).

Documents to enclose with this form, where appropriate:
This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by an Information Sheet/Covering Letter/Written Script which informs the prospective participants about the a proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form.

Guidance on how to complete this form is at:
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/11/43/27/Application%20Guide.pdf>

Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate email it to the:

Either

Ethics Administrator if you are a member of staff.

Or

Secretary for your programme/course if you are a student.

NOTE

- Staff and Post Graduate Research (EdD/PhD) requires 3 reviewers
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 1 reviewer - low risk
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 2 reviewers - high risk

I am a member of staff and consider this research to be (according to University definitions) : low risk

high risk

I am a student and consider this research to be (according to University definitions):

high risk

*Note: For the purposes of Ethical Review the University Research Ethics Committee considers all research with 'vulnerable people' to be 'high risk' (eg children under 18 years of age).

University of Sheffield School of Education
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

COVER SHEET

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (eg 'Information Sheet'/'Covering Letter'/'Pre-Written Script'?: | |
| Is relevant | Is not relevant |
| ✓ | |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Consent Form': | |
| Is relevant | Is not relevant |
| ✓ | |

| | |
|--|----|
| Is this a 'generic "en bloc" application (ie does it cover more than one project that is sufficiently similar) | |
| Yes | No |
| | ✓ |

I am a member of staff

I am a PhD/EdD student

I am a Master's student

I am an Undergraduate student

I am a PGCE student

The submission of this ethics application has been agreed by my supervisor

Supervisor's signature/name and date of agreement

Jessie Davies

27th April 2011

I have enclosed a signed copy of Part B

University of Sheffield School of Education
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

PART A

A1. Title of Research Project

Children's identity in transition to high school and the resonances with stereotypical media representations of high school cliques.

A2. Applicant (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised research projects):

Title: Mrs First Name/Initials: RJ
Last Name: Austin
Post: EdD Student Department: Education
Email: edp08rja@sheffield.ac.uk
Telephone: 07817649124

A.2.1. Is this a student project? Yes

Supervisor: Dr Julia Davies University of Sheffield

A2.2. Other key investigators/co-applicants (within/outside University), where applicable:

N/A

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

| Title | Full Name | Post | Responsibility in project | Organisation | Department |
|-------|-----------|------|---------------------------|--------------|------------|
| | | | | | |

A3. Proposed Project Duration:

Start date: September 2010 End date: September 2012

A4. Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:

| | |
|---|--|
| X | Involves children or young people aged under 18 years |
| | Involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants |
| | Involves only anonymised or aggregated data |
| | Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (eg young offenders) |
| | Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness |
| X | Has the primary aim of being educational (eg student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, MA, PhD or EdD) |

University of Sheffield School of Education
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

A5. Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?

The project aims to examine children's identity in transition from Primary School to secondary education and to consider the resonances with stereotypical representations of high school cliques in the media.

The research will be undertaken as a qualitative research project and data will be gathered in two stages.

The first stage will be as group interviews using children's drawings of themselves both as data in themselves but also as elicitation devices to guide the interview process and thus gain further information. As part of this initial group interview, stills from children's film and television programmes will be used to elicit children's views about the representation of high school children in the media.

For the second stage children will be visited in Year 7 in their secondary school and asked to reflect on the data gathered from them in Year 6 - again as group interviews. All interviews will be video and audio recorded.

A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?

As with any research there is the potential of some harm.

However, in this instance, as the researcher, I will ensure that the children, their parents and their teacher are happy with the project and no undue concerns about the transfer to secondary school are raised without being appropriately addressed.

A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project and, if yes, explain how these issues will be managed? (Especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises.)

No because the research will be taking place within the children's usual primary school context. I have enhanced CRB clearance to enable me to work alone with the children.

A8. How will the potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?

(i) In my role as a lecturer in Primary Education I have contacts with local head teachers who will be approached to ask permission to contact children in Year 6 in the school to ask them for their voluntary participation in the project.

(ii) Following agreement from the Head Teacher children will be visited in school; the research project will be explained and they will be invited to take part

(iii) All volunteers will be accepted onto the project as long as parental consent is also obtained

(iv) Parents and children will be asked if they are willing to be contacted again in Year 7 to take part in follow up interviews.

(v) Updated consent forms will be signed by parent and child at this point.

A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?

Yes

No

If informed consent is not to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/policy-notes/consent> Only under exceptional circumstances are studies without informed consent permitted. Students should consult their tutors.

A.9.1 How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):

1. Children approached, informed about the project and asked to participate through a visit to their school and through provision of an information form
2. Children who would like to take part will take a letter (information form) home to their parents to sign to provide their consent for their child to participate
3. At the beginning of the interview children will complete a consent form with the researcher.
4. Children and parents will be asked if they are willing to be contacted again for the follow up interviews
5. Updated consent forms will be completed by parent and child
6. Informed consent from the Head Teacher

A.10 How will you ensure appropriate protection and well-being of participants?

All contact with children will take place within the school context with which they are familiar.

A.11 What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

All data will be kept securely and anonymously. Children will not be identified by their real name nor by the school which they attend.

A.12 Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided.)

Yes

No

A.13 Will the research involve the production of recorded or photographic media such as audio and/or video recordings or photographs?

Yes

No

A.13.1 This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded or visual media:
How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media or photographs may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?

This will be part of the consent process and is clearly indicated on the consent form.

PART B - THE SIGNED DECLARATION

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's '*Financial Regulations*', '*Good research Practice Standards*' and the '*Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue*' (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In signing this research ethics application I am confirming that:

1. The above-named project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/index.html>
2. The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/general-principles/homepage.html>
3. The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
5. Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
6. I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my supervisor or the Ethics Administrator as appropriate
7. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).
8. I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
9. I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (eg the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers/supervisors) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

10. If this is an application for a 'generic'/'en block' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
11. I will inform the Chair of Ethics Review Panel if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

Signature of student (student application):

Rebecca Aust

Signature of staff (staff application):

Date: 27th April 2011

Email the completed application form to the course/programme secretary

For staff projects contact the Ethics Secretary, Colleen Woodward

Email: c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk for details of how to submit

Appendix A2

Ethical Approval



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

The
School
Of Education.

Rebecca Austin

Head of School
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies
The Education Building
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JA

18 May 2011

Telephone: +44 (0114) 222 8096
Fax: +44 (0114) 2228105
Email: jacquie.gillott@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Rebecca

Re: Children's Identity in Transition to High School and the Resonances with Sterotypical Representations of High School Cliques

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project. The reviewers have now considered this and have agreed that your application be approved with the following optional amendments.

(Please see below reviewers' comments)

| |
|---|
| 7. Approved with the following suggested, optional amendments (i.e. it is left to the discretion of the applicant whether or not to accept the amendments and, if accepted, the ethics reviewers do not need to see the amendments): |
|---|

| |
|---|
| Yes, but should the letter to the parent and the child say that the head teacher has approved the presence of the researcher in the school (this has implications for the sequence of approvals, with the head teacher first followed by the child and the parent?) |
|---|

Yours sincerely

**Mrs Jacquie Gillott
Programme Secretary**

Appendix B

Peer group categories

Throughout the thesis particular terminology is used in association with the different peer groups seen in secondary school contexts. As highlighted in the thesis, these terms are used flexibly and resist singular definition. There are a wide range of terms in circulation, this appendix, therefore, clarifies the ways in which I have applied the terms in this thesis.

Popular kids

These are children who have a high status within the peer group hierarchy and are deferred to by others. They are often children who have a wide friendship circle but the use of the term 'popular kids' is often related to how 'well-known' they are within the school context. Popular kids might be popular by virtue of looks, sporting achievement, 'fun-ness' or social confidence but they might also be designated this label through a reputation for being 'hard' or rebellious within the school context.

They might also be referred to as the '**cool kids**' – the children who have the latest accessories; who follow the latest fashions; who have the 'right' taste in music and who are able to balance their performance to teachers (as engaged learners) with their performance to peers (as a desirable role model and friend).

Other similar terms more commonly associated with the United States are 'jock', 'cheerleader', 'preppie'.

Nerds

The term 'nerd' is used to identify someone who is academically able but socially awkward. They are often identified as unattractive and obsessed with hobbies such as fantasy and sci fi or computers. The term is therefore used in opposition to those who are 'cool'. A nerd would be near the bottom of the peer hierarchy.

Other similar terms include 'boffin', 'dork', 'techie', brainiacs

Emos

Emos are a group of children who dress and act in a morose or 'depressed' way – they tend to wear black clothing and dark make up. They favour music which reflects a moodiness or darkness and may have suicide ideation tendencies.

Other similar terms include 'goth'.

Chavs

Chavs are understood, in the context of the thesis, to represent a working class stereotype which is both looked down on and lauded. So that chavs by nature of their 'hard' attitude might occupy high status in the context of peer group hierarchies whilst simultaneously being derided for being promiscuous, violent, morally suspect, 'common' in appearance (faux designer clothing, heavy use of

make-up) and talk. Chavs may be described as 'cool' by virtue of their rebellious, anti-authority stance.

Geeks

These are those who have a particular interest in something that might be seen as 'nerdy' such as sci-fi or computers, but who have embraced this identity as a positive affirmation. Geeks are likely to refer to themselves as geeks and take pride in their knowledge and expertise within their own particular niche.

Appendix C

Script – Phase One Part A Interviews

You are all going to be changing schools soon and I am interested in finding out about how you think that might affect who you are and what you are like.

I want you to think ahead to secondary school and imagine yourself in a few months' time after you have been there a little while and have settled in. I want you to draw a picture of yourself as you think you might be.

You can do it however you want. I'm not interested in whether your drawing's any good but I want to understand what's in your head! You can add labels and arrows and thought bubbles if you want. You can add a background and other people if you want or it could just be you. Whatever you want to do is fine!

I'm also going to ask you about your pictures as you draw them.

Sample questions:

- Tell me about your picture
- Was there anything you wanted to add but didn't know how?
- Is there anything that's in your head that the picture doesn't show?