Making classed sexualities: investigating gender, power and violence in middle-class teenagers' relationship cultures

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Abstract

This thesis investigates gendered power relations, including violence, control and coercion, within teenage heterosexual relationships, and broader relationship cultures. It focusses on upper-middle class 14-16 year olds, whose sexualities – unlike those of working-class teenagers – are seldom seen as a social problem. It explores the interactions of romantic and sexual experiences with classed identities and social contexts, based on data generated within a large, high-performing state comprehensive in an affluent, ethnically homogenous (white) area of south-east England. The research, conducted in and outside school, used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating in-depth individual and paired interviews, and self-completion questionnaires. It draws on insights from feminist post-structural approaches to gender and sexualities, and is situated in relation to work that explores the negotiation of gender in "post-feminist" neoliberal societies.

Despite (in some ways, because of) their privileged class positioning, these young people faced conflicting regulatory discourses. Heteronormative discourses, and gendered double standards, still shaped their (sexual) subjectivities. Sexuality was very public and visible, forming a claustrophobic regulatory framework restricting movements and choices, particularly girls'. But inequalities and violences were often obscured by powerful classed discourses of compulsory individuality, with young people compelled to perform an autonomous self even as they negotiated inescapably social networks of sexuality. These discourses could exacerbate inequalities, as participants denigrated others for vulnerability. A significant proportion of participants reported controlling, coercive or violent relationship experiences, but girls especially downplayed their importance. Girls shouldered the burden of emotion work, taking on responsibility for both their own and partners' emotions. Sexual harassment and violence from peers were often regarded with resignation, and sometimes led to further victimisation from partners or peers. Policing of sexuality was bound up with classed prejudices and assumptions; participants' performances of identity often rested on dissociation from the working class. Young middle-class people's heterosexual subjectivities sat uneasily with educationally successful, future-oriented subjectivities; sexuality was an ever-lurking threat to becoming an educational and therefore classed success.

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Introduction

Teenage kicks, so hard to beat…

– The Undertones, *Teenage Kicks*

Like, we have our own little rules, we don't go that far.

– Rachel, age 15

Foreword: three teenage moments

I will begin with three glimpses of fourteen-year-old girls.

2000: I meet up with a girl from the internet, and shred my paper napkin as we talk. It's the first time I've spoken in the flesh to anybody who knows I like girls; frightening but exhilarating. But when she tells me that she doesn't drink much any more, that she's over that phase of life, I feel a familiar pang of inadequacy and feeble deception as I mumble agreement, because I dream about drinking with friends, like other teenagers do. I've never been drunk. I've never been kissed. I couldn't imagine turning that sentence around, taking it out of the passive voice.

2003: [1] I have just gone to university. It's wonderful, to a clichéd degree: escaping from school, finally making good friends. My younger sister comes to visit for the weekend. She meets all my friends and they love her. I'm a tiny bit envious of her social abilities, but mostly I am thrilled and proud. She spends the weekend fielding phone calls from her boyfriend, retreating into corners to talk quietly, trying to convince him she isn't with other boys. Later, when I buy her emergency contraception because she's too young to buy it herself (my parents find out; there is rage and there are tears), I think the sex was consensual. He drinks too much. He gets angry. He says he'll kill himself, if she leaves him. I don't know all of this. I stand up for her, and defend him, to our parents.

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[1] My sister has given consent for my inclusion of her story.

2010: I sit in a blisteringly hot, tiny room, talking to a girl named Christina about her boyfriend. She smiles and laughs, and I laugh with her. I like her. It's one of my first interviews, and as she tells me about conflicts and arguments, I feel simultaneously sympathetic and relieved, torn between the instincts of researcher and compassionate listener. I am impressed by her fluency and her articulacy; I feel clumsy in comparison, fumbling for words as I ask follow-up questions. I am thrilled and privileged to glimpse into her life; I feel that I know her and her secrets, that I'm a confidante. But then she mentions self-harming in the past, and says – "but I don't any more, and don't let my parents know and don't tell Mrs White!" – and I remember who I am, I remember who she is, and I realise how much of her life I can't know.

These three moments could be episodes in many stories. The story that is most familiar to me is my own: my development as a researcher of young sexuality, inextricably intertwined with my own past and preoccupations. This thesis is not my story: it tells the stories of young women, like Christina, and young men, but like all the stories above, it is inevitably partial and partisan, and is shaped by my own concerns. These moments hint at themes that recur throughout the next 250 pages. There is secrecy and revelation: in my own hidden sexuality, in my sister's fights, in Christina's fear of her parents and Mrs White. There is pain, anxiety and distress: in Christina's self-harm, in my sister's fear of and tense negotiation with her boyfriend. There are difficult navigations of age and maturity: my sister unable to control her own reproduction because of her age, Christina worried I will share her personal information with her school or parents, me feeling too young, too inexperienced, to negotiate this interaction.

Narrating these themes and others throughout my thesis, I will become more detached, more considered, more academic, yet I try to keep in mind the young women and men whose lives are represented and interpreted in my words.

Young sexualities: fear and fascination

Teenage sexuality is fraught with tension, a source of anxiety – as well as fascination – for adults as well as teenagers themselves. Caught in a liminal space between the "innocence" of childhood and the "experience" of adulthood, young people negotiate a web of conflicting and contradictory discourses. Their sexuality is all too often considered out of (their) control, to be suppressed for as long as possible. This thesis aims to critically examine teen heterosexuality and relationships from the perspectives of middle-class young people in England. It is interested not so much in the ways that adults shape young sexualities (though adults and their views and regulations are often inescapable), but in the negotiations of gender and relationships and flows of power between teenagers. I try to see problems within teen relationships, as opposed to seeing teen relationships as problems.

The research presented in this thesis focusses on young men and women – or, as they and others might varyingly see them, boys and girls – between the ages of 14 and 16, in year 10, the penultimate year of compulsory education in the UK (and following some into year 11). For the most part, then, my participants were under the sexual age of consent of 16. As such, they were not legally allowed to have sexual intercourse, nor, in theory, engage in any other form of sexual interaction. So any sexual interaction was by its nature illicit, even if in reality accepted (to some extent). This creates an environment hostile in some ways to research, but also to exploring and addressing nuances, problems, conflicts, uncertainties and inequalities within teenagers' own negotiations of their sexualities. It is difficult, for instance, to explore details, breaches or strategies of sexual consent with people who are constructed as inherently unable to consent. So the undercurrents and subtexts of teenage relationships may go unnoticed, but it is those undercurrents and subtexts, and what they say about teenagers relating to each other in gendered ways, that I aim to explore.

Gender and power in teen heterosexuality

Forty years after the "second wave" of feminism, the UK – in a globalised western world – is a society where women and men share, for the most part, equal legal

rights in education and the workplace. Over the same time period, and in combination with these changes in work, there have been great changes in sexuality and family relations. Sexuality has become more detached from reproduction than ever in the past, with improvements in contraception and (some) changing attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Girls are now expected to "aspire to" work and careers just as boys are. Sexual imagery has become more widespread and easily accessible in society, and arguably this has led to an increase in acceptance of female sexual expression and greater freedom in desire (McNair 2002; Attwood 2006). Yet, at the same time, women are still under-represented in politics and leadership in almost all fields, and paid 14.9% less on average than men (Office for National Statistics 2011). Women are still responsible for the vast majority of childcare and housework, even in two-adult households where both partners work full-time (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010; Treas and Drobnic 2010). Childhood is still starkly divided by gender through marketing and parenting (arguably more so than it was twenty years ago) (Fine 2010). What is widely referred to as "sexual imagery" and advertising is still almost entirely confined to images of women's bodies (Gill 2009b). And all of these changes have taken place in a world where, male or female, opportunities, paths, lives and gendered experiences are still shaped to a huge extent by class (and ethnic) background.

In these contexts, then, it is vital to look at the ways young people are negotiating gender as part of a new generation, to see how they are rewriting, or reinscribing, ways of doing gender and (hetero)sexuality. This thesis explores these issues, both within the space of young people's intimate relationships, and in relation to their heterosexual subjectivities situated within their wider everyday lives. I explore the ways that young people's masculinities and femininities are shaped by class and performed in interaction with each other. I investigate the subtle (and not-so-subtle) nuances of gendered power, within intimate relationships and broader relationship cultures – that is, the sexual encounters, friendships, enmities and acquaintances that young people participate in, which are always at some level shaped by gender and heterosexuality.

As a key part of this investigation of gendered power relations in heterosexuality, I look at violence, control and coercion within teen sexual and intimate relationships. This has emerged as a policy issue to a greater extent in recent years, with a Home Office campaign ("This is abuse") focussing on teenage relationship violence developed and first run in 2009 and repeated since then. Teenage relationship violence has also, sometimes in problematic ways, been linked to ideas of "sexualisation" of children and young people in government policy (Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011). While I take issue with some of the simplifications, gendered assumptions and protectionist discourses in these government reports (as I discuss in chapter two), the idea that relationship violence is linked to wider gendered discourses is one that holds true for teenagers just as it does for adults (Jackson et al. 2000; 2001; Barter 2009; Barter et al. 2009; McCarry 2009; 2010). And while some research (such as that above, discussed in more detail in chapter two) has looked at the ways violent relationships are shaped by gendered discourses of heterosexuality, this thesis aims to situate the discussion of violence within a broader exploration of relationships and heterosexuality.

Most research into teen relationship violence, though, has been carried out in relation to disadvantaged teenagers. It has rarely engaged closely with class – and, indeed, this is often true of research into gendered and sexual violence among adults (Phipps 2009). My research aims to explore the ways in which class shapes experiences of and reactions to gendered and sexual violence. Specifically, I am interested in how middle-class young people, who are seldom conceptualised as vulnerable in relation to sexuality, negotiate these territories.

Researching the middle classes

While (white) middle-class young people are often implicitly central to policy, practice and research as the normative default, the specifics of their classed subjectivities are less often placed under examination. This is particularly so in relation to sexualities; the problematically sexual teenager is often assumed to be working class (although, as I shall discuss in chapter two, the "risk" of sexual corruption causes most anxiety in relation to an imagined middle-class figure of

girlhood). Recently a number of authors have carried out research specifically focussing on upper middle-class girls' sexual subjectivities, in the UK in relation to primary school education (Allan 2006; 2009; 2010) and secondary school education (2010b; Maxwell and Aggleton 2010a; 2012a) and Australia in relation to secondary education (Charles 2010a; 2010b). This work, however, focusses on girls in "elite", private education: what Maxwell and Aggleton refer to as "the bubble of privilege" (2010b). As such, girls often were aware of existing in a particularly affluent, privileged environment, separated in many ways from wider society. In addition, Allan and Charles' work focusses on single-sex schools, and the particular manifestations of heterosexuality that are navigated when half of the heterosexual imaginary is absent. My work, in comparison, investigates the sexual subjectivities of both young women and young men, and takes place in a less explicitly privileged setting. My participants attended a large, high-achieving but non-selective comprehensive school, in an affluent town in the south-east of England. While the majority of students were, then, materially advantaged, there was not the same self-consciousness around social class and advantage (although, as we shall see throughout, they were aware of their own positions and differences from others).

It is precisely *because* young middle-class people are not often seen as sexually "at risk" (and this, in policy and practice terms, is often the primary issue in relation to teen sexuality) that I chose to focus the spotlight on them. It is important on the one hand to uncover and highlight problems they may encounter, highlighting the constraints and restrictions influencing their lives and subjectivities. It is necessary to look at how gender performances and inequalities work among the materially privileged as well as among the materially disadvantaged. But it is also important to understand other ways in which middle-class young people might be advantaged in relation to gender, sexuality and relationships, and how these young people remake classed privilege as other groups of young people may not.

Questions and aims

My research explored gendered power relations, including violence, control and coercion, within teenage heterosexual relationships, and broader relationship cultures. It focussed particularly on upper-middle class 14-16 year olds. It looks at the ways in which their romantic and sexual experiences interacted with their classed and gendered identities and social contexts. Through the project, I asked the following research questions:

1. How are young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships?

2. How are middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts?

3. How are power dynamics experienced, enacted and gendered in middle-class teenage sexual and intimate relationships?

4. In what ways, and to what extent, do young middle-class people experience violent, controlling and coercive behaviour in their relationships, and how do they understand these experiences? How are these located in relation to normative discourses of heterosexual relationship cultures more widely?

I will return to these throughout the thesis, and bring them together in the concluding chapter.

Outline of the thesis

After this introductory chapter, in which I set out the backgrounds and boundaries for the thesis, I go onto outline the theoretical and research framework for my own study, asking how age, class, gender and sexuality come together in young people's experiences. The questions asked in chapter two set up chapter three, in which I outline my methodology. My four empirical chapters begin with an exploration of

the social cultures of middle-class teen heterosexuality. The following two chapters look in closer detail at young people's sexual subjectivities and experiences: chapter five at everyday practices of heterosexuality in intimate relationships, and chapter six at gendered and sexual violence, control and coercion. Chapter seven explores young people's negotiation of heterosexualities in relation to classed and aged discourses.

Chapter two: Girls and boys: gender, sexuality, class, and teenage relations(hips)

This chapter sets out the theoretical and research framework for my own study. It puts forward ideas of gender, sexuality and class as socially constructed and performative. I argue that these "differences that make a difference" (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p. 4) are constantly intertwined and implicated in the making of the subject, and shaped by other social factors. In particular, I look at the ways in which age (or, rather, youth) shapes and is shaped by sexuality and class, and the prevalent discourses around childhood, teenagers and sexuality, particularly as they circulate within the school context. The chapter then presents research literature on young people's sexuality and relationships, and the ways in which heterosexuality is shaped by gendered power and regulated in social contexts. I look at feminist literature on gendered violence, arguing that it is necessary to situate gendered and sexual violence within the context of wider heteronormative discourses, and in relation to class.

Chapter three: "What the f***'s it got to do with you?" Researching middle-class teenagers' sex and relationships

In this chapter, I introduce the research setting in more detail, exploring my own investment and the ways the middle-class school context shaped interactions in the research context. I then set out the interview and survey methodology used in the research, which worked together to build up a picture of the extent of particular experiences, and understandings of the broader context. I argue that in-depth interviews – with individuals and in pairs – worked as spaces for participants to navigate and construct their heterosexual subjectivities, and to make themselves as classed subjects. I set out my political and epistemological strategies, considering the

ethical and practical dilemmas of carrying out sensitive research with young people and the ways in which I resolved and negotiated them. My analysis of interviews sought to illuminate the discourses that shaped young people's subjectivities, to investigate their collaborative self-constructions in the interview context, and to explore the tensions and complications in young people's lives.

Chapter four: Public displays of affection: the social contexts and cultures of teen sexuality

The first empirical chapter sets the scene for the investigation of teen sexuality and relationships, exploring the social contexts and cultures within which intimate relationships take place. It argues that the school social environment produces a particularly heightened form of peer surveillance which shapes and constrains the way that young people experience and enact their own sexual identities. Sexuality was often not private, but was, rather, highly visible and talked about, with gossip about (rumoured) sexual encounters and practices a key part of life. In this context, sexual behaviour was rigorously policed (and self-policed), with strict lines drawn around "acceptable" forms of sexuality, shaped by normative discourses of gender and class, and young women endured a particularly heavy burden. Young people felt keenly the sense of claustrophobia engendered by this social surveillance, and developed strategies for withdrawing and escaping the gaze of their peers. The intense social regulation and surveillance formed an inescapable backdrop for negotiation of intimate relationships with partners.

Chapter five: All you need is love? Negotiating power, emotion and heterosexuality within partner relationships

My second empirical chapter investigates young people's negotiation of heterosexual subjectivities and emotions within the setting of partner relationships, that is, as boyfriends or girlfriends. Through two case studies of fairly long-term and stable relationships, I explore in depth the ways that relationships were navigated in context, and how relationships were shaped by (and shaped) their wider social identities. I illustrate the complications and ambivalences of sustaining a close intimate relationship as middle-class teenagers, while juggling this relationship with

other aspects of their lives, both educational and social. Through these case studies and the broader themes that I go on to discuss, I highlight the persistence of gendered narratives, in particular the burden of emotion work, whereby the girls tended to take on more responsibility within the relationship for both their own and their partners' emotions, and downplay and alter their own desires, in order to maintain the relationship smoothly. I suggest that boyfriend/girlfriend relationships often bring participants significant pleasure, and can provide a welcome escape from the claustrophobic social surveillance detailed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, even within these positive relationships, there exist tensions and inequalities.

Chapter six: Love hurts? Conflict, coercion, control and violence in teen heterosexual relations(hips)

The third empirical chapter investigates the darker side of relationships and sexuality in middle-class teen relationship cultures. It situates experiences and understandings of what might be called abuse or violence, or might not, within the context of a middle-class teen subjectivity. I explore the uncertainties, ambivalences and confusions of sexual violence, sexuality, pleasure and danger. The chapter builds upon and expands themes from the two previous chapters, exploring violences in relation to both 'public' and 'private' sides of sexuality. I highlight the extent to which experiences and understandings are not divorced or separate from the other ways in which relationships are negotiated. I argue that the gendered heteronormative discourses prevalent in wider relationships can create conditions of possibility for relationship and sexual violence, and that the foregrounding of individual agency and responsibilisation as central to the middle-class subject reinforces these conditions, particularly in relation to responses and aftermaths of violence.

Chapter seven: Making the middle-class teen: the intersections of class, age, gender and (hetero)sexuality

The final empirical chapter draws the focus back from the intricacies of negotiating heterosexual relationships, and looks at sexuality as it interacts with class, age and gender in becoming and being a subject. It explores how young people deploy

classed and aged masculinities and femininities to make themselves, and the tensions that inhere between, and within, different aspects of the subject. It looks at how negotiations of heterosexuality and relationships work (or don't) as part of the reproduction of classed privilege, as the not-yet-fixed subject moves into, and anticipates, the fixity and security of a coherently gendered and successfully middle-class adulthood. Young people drew on discourses of age, maturity, and responsibility in creating and presenting themselves as classed heterosexual subjects. I argue that young people's performances of their own identities rested on dissociation from and abjection of the working class. I also explore the negotiation of subtle intra-class fractions within the middle class, in particular the tensions of negotiating subtle class differences within intimate relationships. Finally, I present the contradictions of balancing the being/becoming of a heterosexually successful subject with the being/becoming of an educationally successful subject. I argue that being a middle-class teen requires a complicated investment in non-investment in heterosexuality and relationships.

Chapter eight: Successful sexualities? Conclusions and futures

In the concluding chapter, I weave together the threads of middle-class teenagers' heterosexual lives that we have seen through the preceding four chapters, and consider implications and avenues for further research. I argue that, despite (and in many ways, because of) their privileged class positioning, these young people faced a multitude of conflicting regulatory discourses. Despite advances and progressions in gender equality in western society, heteronormative gendered discourses still shaped their (sexual) subjectivities. They were guided by discourses of compulsory individuality, compelled to perform an autonomous, individual self even as they negotiated the inescapably social networks of sexuality. These worked not only to occlude inequalities of class and gender, but also to exacerbate them, as young people blamed others for vulnerability, for failing to be a successful risk-balancing individual.

Chapter two
Girls and boys: gender, sexuality, class, and teenage relations(hips)

Girls who want boys, who like boys to be girls, who do boys like they're girls, who do girls like they're boys… always should be someone you really love

– Blur, *Girls and Boys*

Blur's depiction of "love in the nineties" speaks of a world where gender binaries are blurred and uncertain, and sexuality is unchained from gender. Eighteen years on, such a world might be seen as a utopian vision by some, and just as surely as a dystopian nightmare by others – one that may lurk just around the corner if a decadent society doesn't change its ways. Behind the lines – necessary in order to react to their meaning – lie a wealth of assumptions about what gender and sexuality have been, can be, and arguably should be (that is, we know what boys and girls *are*; and part of that knowledge is knowing that boys want girls, and vice versa). Gender as a fundamental category of division exerts a powerful influence over ways of being in the world, and of thinking about human interaction. Yet the latter decades of the twentieth century brought about great changes in the way western society sees the place of men and women. At the start of the twenty-first century, young people in the UK grow up in a society where legal rights for men and women are for the most part equal, and equality of opportunity is generally portrayed as a good thing. But have these changes in reality and representation changed what young men and women are, or what they could be? What has it done to the way in which teen girls and boys relate to each other, in social and sexual relationships? And how are these relationships intertwined with other inequalities?

This chapter will explore research and theory on gender, sexuality and class, building a framework for my own research on young middle-class men's and women's relationships with each other. It is a long chapter, which I have split into two broad sections. The first part sets out the theoretical underpinnings that frame my work.

The second looks in more specific detail at previous research into young people's sexualities.

I open the first section of this chapter by setting out some key theoretical concepts and the broadly post-structuralist feminist framework within which I situate my work, looking at power, discourse, subjectivity and identity. I go on to consider theorisations of gender as socially constructed and historically contingent. Feminist and queer theorising have opened up ways of thinking about gender and sexuality that challenge the "natural" order, respectively deconstructing the idea of gender as entirely natural, and destabilising fixed gender and sexual identities/categories. I will discuss theories of gender as performance, constantly redone and reworked in (inter)actions. I look at ways in which gender performances are constrained by, inscribed on, performed with, but ultimately not determined by the body and its biological sex, and how these performances are enabled and restricted by other factors, such as social class and age. I then look more closely at expressions and negotiations of gender through masculinities and femininities, and their interactions, and the ways that these negotiations are shaped by the contexts in which teenagers live their day-to-day lives.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the intertwining and interdependence of sexuality (particularly heterosexuality) and gender. The discussion then moves on to the significance of class, the ways in which it is experienced and embodied, how these relate to gender and sexuality. I look at how young people negotiate class in the particular settings of school. From here, I set out the contradictions and complications of sexuality within school and within childhood, and the anxieties that coalesce around teenage sexuality. Finally, I look at the negotiation of gender and power in young (hetero)sexual relationships, and how heteronormative constructions of gender relate to sexual and gendered violence.

Throughout the chapter I focus on ways in which gender and sexuality are regulated in social contexts, while simultaneously questioning possibilities for resistance to norms, asking whether, in what circumstances and to whom this resistance might be

available, and how desirable such resistance might be. The chapter will set the scene for the broad question that my research aims to go some way to answering. In a twenty-first century context of persistent gendered performances, and gendered power, constructed through a vast range of social practices (including sexuality), how are middle-class young people remaking, revising, reinscribing and/or rethinking gendered power in their relationships with each other?

PART ONE: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

How we are who we are: power, discourse, subjectivities and identities

Before I begin to explore young people's constructions of gender and relationships, I want to set out some of the key theoretical ideas that shape this research, and define certain terms as I will employ them. At the centre of this thesis is the (hetero)sexual self: the way that young people feel, understand, think of, and present themselves to the world as gendered and sexual beings. But, of course, the notion of the self is complex and contested. Post-structural theorists argue that the self is not an essential, unified, coherent entity. Rather, it is shifting, multiple and fragmentary (Weedon 1997). Within this framework, our sense of selves is not determined, but constructed through language; through discourse. The concept of discourse is closely bound up with power, and in the form I use has its roots in the work of Michel Foucault.

Foucault theorised power as something that is not possessed (by a particular individual or organisation), but as something exercised. Nor is it wholly negative, or merely repression: rather, it exists in all social relations and is a productive force, producing a multiplicity of complex effects, which can be both positive and negative. Importantly, too, it is not determined by the intention (or lack of intention) of an actor to use power as an instrument of coercion. But, as a process, power works *through* individuals, and its multiple effects can be observed and analysed at the level of the human body, the "most specific point at which the microstrategies of power can be observed" (McNay 1994, p. 91). Thus, the question is not who, or what, *has* power, but rather, how power functions within a particular set of

relationships. Power, moreover, is never absolute, but always accompanied by resistances, which, according to Foucault, "are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (Foucault 1980, p. 142).

These conceptualisations of power and discourse have been extremely influential, although not without criticism, in the study of sexuality. Foucault's investigation of the history of discourses around sexuality challenged the idea that sexuality is a natural force or instinct that is repressed by society (Foucault 1978[1976]; 1985[1984]; 1986[1984]). Rather, sexuality is produced through discourse. It is this anti-essentialist notion of sexuality and the sexual body that has been particularly influential on post-structuralist feminist scholarship (see Ramazanoglu 1993; McNay 1994; 2000 for discussions), opening up space for theorisation of gender and sexuality that is not tied to biological sex. In particular, Judith Butler's theorisation of gender as performance, which draws significantly on Foucault, has been useful in analysing gender as a process (Butler 1990). I will return in more detail later to Butler's concept of the "heterosexual matrix" as structuring gender.

Unlike other conceptions of power, such as those within Marxist traditions, power is not viewed as an external force that presses upon individuals. Instead, the very strength and persistence of power rests in the ways its discourses are taken up by subjects. As Foucault asserts in *The History of Sexuality*: "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault 1978[1976], p. 86). Recognising these obscuring tendencies is very important in understanding and analysing power relations within society, particularly in spheres outside of legislation and state power such as family and intimate relationships, as becomes evident throughout my own analysis. The ways that people – or subjects – relate to discourse brings us both to some of the difficulties with Foucauldian analysis, and to a closer look at the "inside" of the gendered subject.

Critics of Foucault often focus on the ways in which his theories can seem overly deterministic. Although his central theory of power aims to rethink traditional unidirectional ideas of power, his analysis sometimes slips back into more conventional notions of domination (McNay 1994). This is, as Anthony Giddens points out (1984), particularly problematic when Foucault applies his analyses of disciplinary power within particular institutions (such as the prison) more widely to other sectors of society. Although Foucault asserts that power engenders resistance, in much of his work (and work which draws heavily on it), discourse can appear all-encompassing, shaping actions and minds. Although multiple, contradictory discourses circulate within society, and discourses may produce counter-discourses, there is no clear explanation for why, or how, certain people should take up or reject certain discourses to differing degrees. As such, social change in particular is difficult to explain. These criticisms are, to a certain extent, mitigated by his later work on governmentality, which looks more closely at "technologies of the self". Here, power is conceived of as both an "objectivising" and a "subjectivising" force, and Foucault explicitly sets out to investigate "the way a human being turns him – or herself – into a subject" (Foucault 1982, p. 208). This opens up potential for understanding how people internally negotiate discourses.

A subject, then, sees the world from a particular position; or rather, positions, which are produced by a multiplicity of discourses and negotiated within. These positions are what I refer to as "subjectivities": the feelings and experiences of being a person in the world. I find the following definition, by Lisa Blackman, John Cromby, Derek Hook, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Valerie Walkerdine in their opening editorial for the journal *Subjectivity*, particularly helpful:

> Subjectivity... is the experience of the lived multiplicity of positionings. It is historically contingent and is produced through the plays of power/knowledge and is sometimes held together by desire. (Blackman et al. 2008, p. 6).

This definition hints at the multiple and potentially contradictory nature of subjectivity, and how it is constructed. It also speaks to the importance of desire, and the role of unconscious thoughts and emotions in producing subjectivity. People –

subjects – are not entirely rational, coherent actors, making purely conscious choices and decisions (although, of course, many of their choices may be rational). The emotional and unconscious aspects of subjectivity have been explored by critical psychologists working within "psychosocial" approaches, drawing on psychoanalysis (in particular, the work of Jacques Lacan) to conceptualise subjects' positionings in discourse (Henriques et al. 1998; Hollway 2001; Walkerdine et al. 2001). Although I do not draw directly on psychoanalytic approaches in my work, I do use insights from within the psychosocial tradition to illuminate the inner aspects of young people's selves. In particular, I use the concept of "investment" in particular discourses and subject positions to think about how young people become and remain attached to particular ways of thinking and acting (Hollway and Jefferson 2005; Thomson 2009).

"Subjectivity" has, in certain work, been used in preference to, or as a synonym for, "identity". Chris Weedon, for instance, chooses to use the term "subjectivity", defining this as: "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). She eschews the term "identity" because of its implications of a coherent, fixed identity. Following in this tradition, I employ "subjectivity" in this way throughout my own work. Alexandra Allan, while accepting the importance of the aspects of the individual highlighted in Weedon's definition, chooses instead to use "identities", considering this term to refer less to the personal aspects of the self, and more to the social nature of its construction, which is the focus of her work with privately educated girls (Allan 2006). In my own work, bearing these points in minds, I have continued to employ the term "identity" (or "identities") at certain points, when considering young people's presentations of self in the world. In essence, I use "subjectivity" to refer to the feelings and understandings of being a (particular kind of) person in society, and I use "identity" to refer to the outward presentation of being a (particular kind of) person in society.

These distinctions, of course, often become slippery and difficult to uphold. This is, in part, methodological: I cannot see inside participants to "uncover" their

subjectivities. I have access to them only through a particular construction of self as created through interaction in data generation. In addition, the way that others see us shapes the way we see ourselves, and vice versa. There circulate in current British society (perhaps even more so among young people) prevalent discourses of authenticity, whereby to "be yourself" is viewed as morally superior. Throughout the thesis, I will develop this idea as it plays out within young middle-class people's social cultures and judgements of themselves and others. These discourses, then, shape the way that young people think of themselves and the way they represent themselves, such that they may be reluctant to speak of, or to believe in, disjunctions between their outward and inward ideas of themselves. This is not a simple undertaking: as we will see, it often involves complex negotiations and balancing of contradictory ideas.

Although it may not in practice be possible to maintain these dividing lines, I think it is important to maintain a distinction in theory, and to recognise that (in the ways I use the terms) both subjectivity and identity are worthy of sociological investigation. "Identity", too, is a concept that can extend beyond self-construction and include construction by others, as Steph Lawler points out in her discussion of class, culture and identity. She emphasises the need to "consider identity not just as something felt or experienced (what we might see as self-identification, or subjectivity) but as something conferred – something imposed on us irrespective of how we feel about ourselves" (2005b, p. 802). Discovering how young people confer gendered and classed identities on others is not to reify those identities or to imply that they are valid, but to explore how these conferrals function within social cultures to create or break down distinctions, as well as how young people use others to build their own identities and subjectivities. In the next sections, I consider specifically the concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, looking at how they are intertwined, and how they make the subject.

Constructions of sex and gender

Gender is taken for granted in popular discourse, largely viewed as natural and unproblematic, yet simultaneously the subject of fascination: many newspaper column inches and popular books are taken up by 'discovering' the 'essential' differences between men and women, and speculating on these differences (see Fine 2010 for critique). But the question of what gender is remains a non-issue: one *is* (considered to be) either a man or a woman. This essence follows from and is dependent upon biological sex, which is determined at or before birth, and places you into one of two categories. Yet theorists of gender over the past decades have taken issue with these common-sense views, developing concepts of gender as socially constructed; not as something inherent to the self, pre-existing society, but as something that is constantly produced in (inter)action. Its relation to the body, to culture, place, class, race, age, history, institutions, other people, sexuality, are all implicated in the production of meanings by which gender comes to be read as natural.

The term "gender" has largely taken the place of (or become a synonym for) "sex" in popular discourse in recent years, merely used as a shortcut to describing a person's position as male or female, or the distinctions between men and women. However, its usage in academic discourse has previously been intended precisely to trouble that link between biological sex and social mechanisms. Gayle Rubin coined the phrase "the sex/gender system", defining this as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (1975). The decoupling of gender, and what have been termed as gender roles, from the biological division of sex, allowed for the analysis of differences, relations and hierarchies based on gender. This has not, though, always led to a significant change in perception. Christine Delphy criticises what she sees as a continued tendency to "think of gender in terms of sex: to see it as a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy"; seeing "gender as the *content* with sex as the *container*" (1993, p. 3: 3). She takes issue with the idea that sex causes gender, suggesting instead that gender precedes sex: that is, that sex,

assigned as a dichotomous classification and envisaged as a natural biological trait, is a sign required to mark out the gender hierarchy in society. Hierarchy precedes and engenders the division into male and female.

It is almost impossible, in English and a large number of other languages, even to speak of a person without revealing their (presumed) gender, and the first thing asked about a baby is its sex (if it is not made clear by clothing or accessories). As Erica Burman (1995) puts it, "[t]o treat a baby as gender-neutral, as an 'it' rather that a 'he' or a 'she'… is tantamount to denying its (or perhaps I should say his or her) humanity". The existence, but more importantly the "treatment", of individuals who cannot straightforwardly be assigned a sex, as discussed by the socio-biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling in relation to intersex infants, is indicative of the social construction of biology (Fausto-Sterling 1992, 2000). Biological traits that are inherently value-free are assigned values, inserted into hierarchies and mapped onto divisions which are social (cf. Connell 2009). This should not, though, be taken as a suggestion that the body is irrelevant or disposable in making gender, as I will explore further in a forthcoming section. But gender does not follow straightforwardly or inevitably from biology, as Cordelia Fine and Lise Eliot's work critically analysing psychological and neuroscientific research with (or on) children illustrates (Eliot 2009; Fine 2010). Rather, it is learnt, practised, produced and performed through social interaction from birth onwards.

Performing gender

Well, I'm not dumb but I can't understand why she walked like a woman and talked like a man
– the Kinks, *Lola*

Once born and immediately determined to be a girl or boy, living in a particular historical moment and geographical, cultural, and socio-economic location, the girl/boy must begin going about the never-ending task of becoming a girl/boy, and eventually a woman/man. (S)he must participate in the social construction of

gender.[2] The idea that gender is socially performed has a lengthy heritage. The ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel discussed this in his famous ethnomethodological study of Agnes, a transsexual woman, detailing her extensive knowledge of the supposedly "natural" behaviours required to appear feminine. Although she considered her femininity a given (and, in fact, natural), she needed to appear unquestionably female to others – to "live up to the standards of [feminine] conduct, appearance, skills, feelings, motives and aspiration while simultaneously learning what those standards were" (1984[1967]: 147). Garfinkel uses the study of Agnes to illuminate how behaviours which seem unproblematic and natural are in fact accomplished through visible forms of speech and action – forms that Agnes was able to learn. Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna in a similar tradition, and also drawing on transsexual individuals in their argument, maintained in their now classic text that gender is a construction, which does not necessarily follow from biological sex (1978).[3]

One of the most influential recent gender theorists has been Judith Butler, whose work is situated within a more literary/philosophical paradigm but has had resonance throughout the social sciences for its radical rethinking of the nature of gender (Lloyd 1999; McNay 1999; Lovell 2003; Renold 2005; David et al. 2006; Davies 2006; Hey 2006; Nayak and Kehily 2006; Rasmussen 2006; Youdell 2006; Davies 2008; Haywood 2008; Taylor 2008). She argues that gender is something that is done, not something that exists (1990). Centrally, for Butler, identities do not pre-exist actions. Rather, gender is constituted through a series of performances, through which the subject makes and reiterates his/her gender; there is no true self behind these. Drawing on Foucault's (1979) theorisation of disciplinary regimes, as set out earlier, she argues that gender is produced on and through the body; it must be viewed as a stable, unchangeable fact of identity in order to maintain the order of heterosexuality, "in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of

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[2] I use "(s)he" in grammatical preference to the sometimes used "s/he" to refer to an individual of either gender.

[3] This should not be read as an implication – at least not on my part – that transgender and transsexual people are not "really" the gender they wish to be, any more than discussing gender as a social construct implies that I can no longer describe myself as a woman.

sexuality within the reproductive domain" (Butler 1990: 135). This close intertwining of heterosexuality and gender, central to Butler's and many other theorists' conceptions of gender, will be explored further below. The performativity and instability of gender requires that it constantly be reperformed, and in so doing, gender is remade: "This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler 1990: 140).

Butler's concept of performativity has been highly useful for analysing the ways in which people enact gendered behaviours. The conception of gender as precarious and always potentially destabilisable is particularly helpful in explaining the compulsory and compulsive nature of many performances of gender, and the social/cultural/psychological anxiety surrounding the possibility of gender transgressions. This compulsivity is arguably particularly heightened among young people and children (Lloyd and Duveen 1992; Blaise 2005b; Renold 2005; Paechter 2007). Children, pre-puberty, would be outwardly indistinguishable by gender, were it not for the efforts gone to by themselves and their parents to make them distinguishable. The teenage years are figured as a time in which boys/girls "become" men/women. It is the time when sexuality is first speakable, if still stringently regulated, but the proximity of supposedly asexual childhood represents a risk; and thus it is particularly important to enact an "intelligible gender" (Butler 1990: 23). The disciplinary context of the school also has specific and important effects on gender at this time, as explored in further detail below.

Critics of Butler point out that her early theories (in particular those set out in *Gender Trouble*) are overly voluntaristic. Her metaphors of performance, and the discussion of those acts which are read as performance in the theatrical sense (such as drag) in conjunction with those which are emphatically not (such as performing of femininity by wearing makeup), can give the impression that gender performances can be taken up or cast off at will. As Lloyd (1999) points out, the distinction between performance (a "bounded act") and performativity (a reiteration of norms which "precede, constrain and exceed the performer" (Butler 1993a: 24)) is not

always clear. Butler does acknowledge and address this criticism in later work, maintaining that there is no "instrumental subject" who can choose their gender styles prior to being interpellated, hailed as boy or girl (Butler 1993b). So, too, Butler can sometimes seem to overemphasise the inherent instability of gender and the potential for transgressive gender performances, and for failures in gender performance, to expand the boundaries of gender possibility. Transgressive performances of gender may be exposed, ridiculed and harshly policed by others, reinforcing gender norms rather than undermining them, as I explore in more detail in relation to agency in the next section. Transgressive does not necessarily equal progressive (Jackson 1996).

The performativity of gender, then, is done in the context of varied restraints and constraints. Normative masculinity and femininity are defined in particular and differing ways contingent upon and in conjunction with location, age, race, class, culture, etc. Individuals negotiating the social and material world as gendered do so in relation to these norms; but this does not necessarily mean that they are seeking to emulate a particular form of gender: "If gender is a norm, it is not the same as a model that individuals seek to approximate. On the contrary, it is a form of social power that produces the intelligible field of subjects, and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted" (Butler 2004, p. 48: 48). Gender relations are "tightly corseted" around acceptable ways of doing femininity and masculinity (Kehily and Nayak 2008, p. 176: 176). These acceptable ways of doing gender vary, not only between people, but in any one individual, changing depending on one's social context and the people one is with. My analysis takes up the questions of how young people navigate and police acceptable ways of doing gender. A question remains here, however: how is it that different subjects negotiate particular contexts in different ways?

The trouble with agency

"Why do you always say what's on your mind?" "Because we want to! Because we want to!"
– Billie Piper, *Because We Want To*

I am a weapon of massive consumption; it's not my fault, it's how I'm programmed to function
- Lily Allen, *The Fear*

Above, I set out the concepts of discourse and performativity, and how they aim to explain the formation of people as subjects, and shape their actions and decisions. As I briefly discussed, though, these concepts have been criticised as problematic in appearing to limit the possibility for individual agency. That is, if subjects are shaped through discourse, are their actions entirely determined by the discourses they can access; and, if that is the case, how is it that different people seem to take up particular discourses in different ways, and how is it that there can be resistance, and demonstrable social change? To what extent, and in what ways, can a person make their own decisions and choices between different courses of action? This is, in many ways, the fundamental question of sociological thought, and I do not here attempt to give a definitive answer, but I discuss some of the debates and set out my position. I also consider some of the complications of differing definitions of agency, and the complicating features of neoliberal discourses of choice and individualism.

Within Butler's theorisation of "discursive performativity", she suggests that the subject, as created through the productive power of discourse, is capable of what she calls "linguistic agency" (Butler 1997, p. 15) or "discursive agency" (Butler 1997, p. 127). Although performative utterances/actions are citational – they call back to prior discursive practices – they can also take on new meaning in new contexts. The subject is capable of resistance and reinscription, and it is this which opens up the potential for political and social change:

> the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center

of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for
deconstructive thinking (Butler 1997, p. 161)

For many (perhaps all) feminists, this opening up of possibility, the potential for
reinscription and rewriting of dominant discourses, is a vital source of hope (cf.
Coleman and Ferreday 2010). And, perhaps for this reason, agency can be conflated
with political resistance, with active resistance to dominant societal discourses,
particularly those which seem to benefit men and/or masculinity. Within feminism
and particularly within girlhood studies, there is a strong tradition of research that
highlights "alternative" ways of "doing girl": exploring how and when girls and
young women can resist dominant gendered and sexual norms (e.g. McRobbie 2000;
Gonick 2003; Harris 2004a; Currie et al. 2006; Kelly et al. 2006; Rasmussen 2006;
Renold and Ringrose 2008). But this research also illustrates the problems with, and
limits to, resistance. A subject may deploy particular performances which –
intentionally or otherwise – are dissonant with normative or hegemonic discourses.
But, as Lise Nelson (1999) points out in her discussion of Butler's early work on
performativity, we need also take account of the effects of performances. Whether a
particular performance is able to disrupt, to rewrite, may depend on who they are,
where they are, what resources they have at their disposal.

Importantly, too, agency in the individual sense – people making choices – does not
necessarily entail deviating from cultural and societal norms. This is a point summed
up by Terry Lovell in her discussion of Butler, resistance and agency in a political
context:

> individual agency is not necessarily aligned with resistance and... neither
> 'dispositions to resist', nor performative acts of resistance, guarantee political
> effectiveness (2003, p. 14)

That is, it is entirely possible to accept that people may *choose* to act in accordance
with normative gendered discourses, without this implying they are "cultural dupes",
mindlessly following society's dictates, determined by societal structure. Rather,
there are myriad reasons why a person might perform within the norms: for one, as I
will explore throughout this chapter, and throughout my own analysis, there is often

significant punishment for violating norms. And, as Deborah Youdell says in relation to "the binaries of penis/vagina, man/woman, hetero/homo":

> We might struggle to refuse these subjectivities, but subject-hood is dependent on our intelligibility and so we might have to take them up; we might find them put on us; and we might be attached to them, politically, socially, relationally, psychically, orgasmically. (2010, p. 88)

Throughout this thesis I will be trying to illuminate how and why young people are "attached to" circulating gendered and classed discourses, as well as how they can cause pain and distress. It is also important to emphasise that young people do not necessarily take up discourses uncritically, even those that might be seen as problematic. Young people throughout my study (particularly young men) were frequently reflexive and could be critical of particular social norms, and also of their own actions in perpetuating them. But a critical ability to reflect on social norms did not necessarily mean that they would not continue to perform normative identities. Young people can consciously as well as unconsciously take up normative subject positions, including those that constrain their choices or options; to avoid social punishment, because that is what they have always done, because it's easier, safer, more comfortable.

It is important, too, to note that people *saying* they are free to make individual choices often means very little. This is particularly true in the contexts of contemporary western neoliberal society. Neoliberalism, as a broad term for a collection of connected economic, political, social and cultural positions, is defined by Steinberg and Johnson as as a "tendency to transformation which … is affecting, in fundamental ways, the nature of social and economic relationships in our world, and also the forms of subjectivity or individuality in relation to collective life and social solidarities" (Steinberg and Johnson 2003, p. 8). There is a neoliberal incitement to embody an autonomous, agentic self, who makes her own decisions, expresses her individuality, and at the same time must constantly surveil herself and better herself through the "biographical project of the self" (Rose 1989). Throughout my own work, I found compulsory individuality to be a particularly powerful discourse. It is, perhaps, particularly acute for teenagers, whose choices are

constrained by age, and whose ability to make individual decisions and choices is often denied. I am interested in exploring how this discourse of compulsory agency is mobilised in young people's negotiations of their own subjectivities and relationships: how they construct narratives and perform identities that highlight autonomy and downplay dependence, and how this can engender complications and contradictions in their own relationships, as well as create hostility towards others. I explore this question throughout my analysis, but in most detail in chapter seven, in relation to individualisation and sexual violence.

Throughout my argument, I follow the example of Laura Harvey and Ros Gill, who argue in relation to "new femininities" (discussed below):

> To note the extent to which this subject has become a normative ideal,
> then, is resolutely not to deny agency, but is instead to open up a
> language in which subject-object, power-pleasure, discipline-agency are
> no longer counterposed as antithetical, binary opposites (2011, p. 56).

While I take the ability of young people to make choices as a given, and I do not deny them agency, my focus is on the constraints of those choices, and, conversely, the differing conditions of possibility that allow for particular ranges of action.

Performativity and the body

My body is a cage, that keeps me from dancing with the one I love (but my mind holds the key)
– Arcade Fire, My Body is a Cage

Acceptable and (arguably) possible ways of doing gender are shaped by the discursive constraints, and also by related constraints of the body. Masculinity and femininity are not performed in the abstract, but by, with and on individuals' sexed bodies. Again, these bodies do not exist outside of sociality; they are produced in a social world. Foucault theorises the human body as constituted by a range of discourses: the state, legal, medical, educational systems and so on produce the body as a seemingly natural object – the product of "bio-power". While Foucault's early

work has been criticised for his apparent lack of attention to corporeality; the body seen as entirely written by external discourse, his later work develops theories of "technologies of the self". Through these, subjects work upon and constitute themselves, within and utilising power (though Foucault's body remains unproblematically, marklessly male (cf. Ramazanoglu 1993; Grosz 1994)).

The body is the most salient and obvious signifier of gender. Its materiality influences and can limit the range of possible actions; and alter how these actions are understood and reacted to by others. First and most simply, the body sexed as male is allowed and expected to perform masculinity; the body sexed as female is allowed and expected to perform femininity. The penalties for not so doing can be severe. Of course, the uncertainty and inevitable slippages of meaning in "masculinity" or "femininity" complicate such a task; indeed, it is impossible to fully and permanently achieve either (e.g. Butler 2004; Kehily and Nayak 2008). But gender is written on the body and with it, in interaction with other bodies, institutions and environments.

Bodily forms of signification can be experienced, and represented, as choice and/or constraint. Normative femininity and masculinity both involve practices of bodily regulation. The female/feminine body, in particular, is often figured as excessive, as naturally in need of regulation to control it; a figuration which is bound up with class regulation, frequently attached to the working class female body (cf. Skeggs 1997). As Deborah Youdell puts it, "[u]nlike the feminine body, the masculine body does not need to be reigned in or controlled – it is in control" (2005, p. 256). The centrality of bodily control to femininity, and the way it connects policing (by self and others) of sexuality with other forms of perceived bodily transgression, will be taken up in my analysis of social cultures of sexuality in chapter four, where I connect it to classed forms of identification and othering.

Youdell's observation is in the context of the distinctions between girls' and boys' bodily postures in school, and the adolescent body in particular is a site oversaturated with tension and contradiction, where the discourse of excess interacts with – and is

produced by – that of adolescence. Catherine Driscoll, discussing the physiological discourse around puberty and adolescence, describes it thus: "late modern puberty marks a crescendo of bodily disruption that should ideally be resolved in the course of puberty" (2002, p. 82), characterising the modern conception of adolescence as an "unwilled and uncontrollable assertion of the sexual body" (ibid.: 84). Thus physiological change is represented as and often understood as an unwelcome imposition, constraining the actions and possible expressions of the body. As Butler points out, "The body not only changes, but changes in ways that others see, and both desire and dread emerge in the course of that transformation that is, after all, a social one" (2006, p. 2). This visibility is heightened by the perpetual social surveillance of teen school cultures, as I argue in chapter four, that works not only in-the-moment but also longitudinally, as young people's current performances of gender – as created with and on their current bodies – exist on top of, and haunted by, their earlier performances.

Allowable gender performances are constructed in conjunction with discourses of age and maturity (Hauge 2009). Research with children often highlights their understandings of the differing bodily practices that are required with increasing age, and sometimes their sadness at these: for instance, Paechter and Clark report a girl regretting the fact that "apparently you're not allowed to run in year six or year seven." (2007, p. 321). This can be shaped by individuals' differential rates of physical development. In general, too, one's physical appearance can shape how particular gender performances are interpreted; for instance, boys or men who are physically large/strong can express behaviours which would be coded as feminine in a less physically "masculine" individual, without sanction (Thorne 1993; Francis 2008).

A body, sexed in a particular way, gendered in a particular way, according to the desires of the subject interacting with and produced by the constraints of the discursive and economic positions available to it, does not then exist in a vacuum or present the same impression everywhere it goes. It continues to produce meanings (and itself) in interaction with the environment, or rather, with different

environments. We have already seen that mobility becomes gendered at an early age, and it remains the case throughout the lifecourse that men tend to take up more space through their activities and through their bodily posture (McDowell 1999) – a point that has been remarked upon and changed little since Goffman's analysis of gender in advertising (Goffman 1976). Those with bodies that do not fit gendered norms can starkly highlight how gender is created in and by place. Halberstam discusses "the bathroom problem", whereby she as a masculine woman finds herself often being challenged in her use of the women's toilets (1998, pp. 20-29: 20-29). It is not simply the appearance of her body that produces this reaction, but the fact of the construction of toilets that are divided by binary gender. Rasmussen, discussing the same issue, elaborates on how the very existence of such architecture creates difference and enables power:

> toilets give truth to the presumption [that bodies fit into two neat categories] – in effect, they tell us who we are, and how to define those around us. We do not simply choose to be queer in response to the space of the toilet; rather, public toilets are an architectural feature that can make us feel queer, or cause others to police gender identity: putting the lie to the idea that we can somehow free ourselves of the gender binary (Rasmussen 2009).

The important point here is that, as I argued previously in discussing agency, gender – and sexuality, and class, and other aspects of the self – is not determined solely by the actor. Although this is not a position explicitly argued in any research or theoretical accounts, the importance of others' readings, and of social interaction, in producing gendered performances, is not always clear in some of the more abstract gender theorising. This is not necessarily an inherent failing; neither Butler nor Halberstam attempt to approach gender from an explicitly social perspective, as their work is situated within philosophy, literary theory and cultural studies. But as their theories have been extremely influential within the social sciences, it is important to recall the location of their work within these different paradigms. They cannot necessarily be applied wholesale to analysis of the social; their discussion can operate at a level of abstraction detached from everyday experience, focussing on signs and neglecting their reception. As Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott point out in their discussion of theorisations of sexuality, in which they argue for a rehabilitation

of interactionist approaches, such focus has sometimes led to an underemphasis on social interactions and embodied practices (2010, pp. 141-145). The abstract performing subject discussed by Butler cannot be uncritically transferred into studies of the social, but needs to be embedded in time, place and interaction (Nelson 1999). Throughout my discussion I take up the situation of a particular subject in its embedded context, investigating the social practices of young people's interactions (while, as I discuss in the next chapter, taking heed of the methodological shaping of my understanding of these social interactions).

Gender expressions: masculinities/femininities

It is all too easy to speak of "gender" in the abstract, all-encompassing sense, and to argue its constructed nature and the falsity of its binaries. But when it comes to analysing its expression, it is virtually impossible to avoid falling back onto binary categories, analysing behaviours or identities or bodies as masculine or feminine. There is space for queer expressions of either, of unconventional femininities, or masculinity performed on female bodies; but these continue to reference the binary. Carrie Paechter argues that the issue of binaries is not such a problem as others have maintained, stating "The gender binary […] only operates at the level of the label. There are only two labels, but what they denote will vary considerably between situations, and will frequently overlap" (2006, p. 258). While this is undoubtedly true, it surely neglects the power of the label to divide and structure perception. Two genders are assumed to be mutually exclusive; the very definition of feminine *is* not-masculine; masculine *is* not-feminine. This forces a constraint on discussion – it is impossible to talk of gender without specifying genders, and the genders specified return us to a binary. But although in some ways this seems restrictive, denying the possibility of imagining other ways of being, the power of the binary should not be glossed over when talking of the lives of those who are, happily or unhappily, men, women, boys and girls. As such, I will shortly go on to discuss masculinities (which will mostly involve men) and femininities (which will mostly involve women), and throughout this thesis I talk primarily of femininity in the context of female bodies,

and masculinity in the context of male bodies, in addition to in the realm of discourse.

We have already seen that masculinity and femininity are entwined with sexed bodies but not reducible to them. Theoretically masculinity – if the question is "what makes a man a man" – is difficult to get a handle on; hard to define, the meanings slipping with time and place and context. This is correspondent with its everyday expression and experience. Both masculinity and femininity are constructed in opposition to and negotiation with each other, but also in relation to other types of masculinity/femininity as practised by others in their social location, and to representations and imaginary forms circulating in public and media discourses. They can be used as resources for identifying with a group, as well as for disidentification (e.g. from particular classed forms of gender expression). The forms of gender individuals (and groups) want to and strive to achieve require analysis just as the forms they do achieve, as do the slippage and gaps between these. Of course, to investigate these is not always simple and not always possible, but I discuss in the next chapter how I attempt to analyse the nuances and slippages within young people's subjectivities.

Masculinities: border work

I'm not the world's most masculine man…
– the Kinks, Lola

Probably the most influential theorist of masculinities has been Raewyn Connell (1987; 1995, 2009), who developed the concept of "hegemonic masculinity", which as she first defined it is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995, p. 77: 77). This theory is based on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which explains the dominance of particular groups in society as working partially through ideological means; a consensus of values based around the dominance of these groups is constructed, which importantly is

also understood by the subordinate groups. Hegemonic masculinity cannot, in this theorisation, be said to be practised by a large number of men, but exerts a powerful influence. In relation to the hegemonic form are subordinate masculinities, most conspicuously gay masculinity, and other forms of subordinate masculinities symbolically equated with femininity; and complicit forms of masculinity, through which though men may not embody hegemonic masculinity, they have "some connection with the hegemonic project", and reap a "patriarchal dividend" from the existence of hegemonic masculinity (ibid.: 79). Hegemonic masculinity may be constructed and interpreted both in relation to cultural representations (e.g. sportsmen, film characters) and local relations. It is imaginary in the sense that it can never be fully embodied, and Connell does emphasise its status as a goal constantly to be strived for but never fully attainable. Its impossibility is key to its power (cf. Wetherell and Edley 1999).

However, Connell's theorisation, which has been taken up by many empirical researchers since in a wide variety of settings, can be and has been criticised on several fronts, many of which are evaluated and responded to by Connell with James Messerchmidt (2005). Hegemonic masculinity can be seen as representing an overly fixed ideal of what masculinity is or should be, even though it is often impossible to find anyone who embodies hegemonic masculinity in its entirety. Connell's concept of multiple masculinities is often used to produce typologies of masculinity in a given setting. Transferring these typologies, which may be somewhat valid (if limited) in a localised setting, to other settings, can be less illuminating than distorting and restrictive. Looking for the hegemonic form of masculinity in a setting can obscure the multiple, complex and shifting relations between different expressions of masculinity. In addition, masculinity studied only among men, as is quite often the case in empirical research, can neglect its fundamentally relational character and the role of women and of femininity in constructing masculinities, as Connell and Messerschmidt point out, calling for more research into the relationships between the two (2005). (Femininity as studied among women rarely suffers from this particular problem; researchers, and girls and women, do not have the luxury of overlooking masculinity.)

My own project is aimed at foregrounding this relational interconstruction of masculinity and femininity, both in the context of heterosexual relationships themselves (which I explore in chapters five and six in most detail) and in the negotiation of heterosexuality in social context more widely. In my own analysis, while I have found many of Connell's ideas helpful, I have not used the concept of "hegemonic masculinity", as I did not see enough evidence for any particular local hegemonic configuration. This is partially methodological: through an interview-based study, I was not easily able to observe social configurations. It is also particularly difficult to analyse the relation of "hegemonic" masculinity with class. Negotiating the imaginaries of masculinity is not a simple question of closer to the hegemonic = better. Those with greater socio-economic power may in fact have the leeway to perform a greater range of gender expression without sanction, and indeed some "hegemonic" images of masculinity – for instance, those incorporating physical strength and validating physical labour – are often quite strongly associated with working-class practices and ways of being. Thus the concept of hegemonic masculinity can work to obscure other power relations. Ann Phoenix, Stephen Frosh and Robert Pattman's (2002) research into young masculinities in the UK illuminates some of the complexities of intersectional relations of gender, race and class. The most validated form of heterosexual masculinity among the boys they studied was often associated with black boys and their associated cultural styles (which were sometimes emulated by white boys). But black boys also had to negotiate racism, black masculinities were often linked with physical strength in a perpetuation of particular race-related stereotypes, and the ways in which these forms of masculinity interacted with education meant that the status of black masculinity could lead to a trade-off in educational achievement. The status of hegemonic masculinity also becomes complicated by age, as Chris Haywood and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill (2003) explore. Hegemonic masculinity is an adult-centric concept, and children/young people are often therefore "disqualified" from dominant forms of masculinity. Boys and young men must negotiate their own positions within more complex generational dynamics, rendering the "impossible practice" of masculinity even more

impossible (although as the authors point out, this is not always recognised sufficiently within research on young masculinities).

Investigating the performance of masculinities, then, I have been concerned to integrate masculinity with dynamics of class and age, which I take up particularly in chapter seven. I have also tried to highlight the complications of multiple masculinities. Over-emphasis on hegemonic masculinity can veil the complications and contradictions within particular groups, and indeed within particular individuals, who may invest in varying forms of masculinity, and perform differently in different settings (for instance, as a boyfriend and as a member of an all-male group) or at different times.

Nevertheless, so-called subordinate masculinities remain associated with femininity; men and particularly boys who don't live up to masculine expectations are often denigrated in gendered terms. This has been commonly linked with homophobic forms of abuse and policing of heterosexuality (cf. Kehily and Nayak 1997; Steinberg et al. 1997; Plummer 1999; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Pascoe 2007; Ward 2012). In my research, overt forms of homophobia were seldom mentioned. This may support the thesis of some authors that homophobia is no longer an issue in British schools, as male sixth form students are increasingly pro-gay and physically tactile with each other (McCormack and Anderson 2010; McCormack 2011), particularly given the middle-class location of my participants. This may also have been a methodological issue: young people might not have wished to admit to homophobic abuse in their cultures. However, there undoubtedly remained a policing of masculinity and exclusionary practices, often enacted through humour (Kehily and Nayak 1997). This seemed frequently to be focussed around young men's girlfriends (as I discuss in chapters five and six) or those they engaged in sexual activity with at parties (as I discuss in chapters four). In my analysis of these forms of regulation, I consider the anxieties and negotiations of masculinity for boys, but I also explore how these exclusionary practices affect the girls who become the vehicles through which boys denigrate other boys.

Femininities: neoliberalism, change and sexuality

The best thing about being a woman
is the prerogative to have a little fun
Go totally crazy, forget I'm a lady – men's shirts, short skirts…
Colour my hair, do what I dare, oh, oh, oh,
I wanna be free, yeah, to feel the way I feel.
Man! I feel like a woman.

– Shania Twain, *Man! I Feel Like A Woman*

Femininity as performed by women is done in an interactional relationship with masculinity as performed by men, as well as through interactional relationships with other forms of femininity (both imaginary and represented, and embodied and social). The hierarchical concepts Connell and followers use to analyse masculinity, however, pose problems when applied to femininity. Connell argues that while she once intended to use a concept of hegemonic femininity (correspondent to hegemonic masculinity) to describe the dominant form of femininity, she instead chose to employ the term "emphasised femininity" (Connell 1987). While hegemonic masculinity can afford social power to those men who are complicit with it, the dominant, normative form of femininity is one in which women are subordinate to men. Skeggs (1997, p. 10) employs a distinction between strategies and tactics, seeing femininity as a resource which can be used socially only in tactical ways: "tactical options have more to do with constraints than possibilities. They are determined by the absence of power just as strategy is organized by the postulation of power".

Masculinity and femininity, as I have already argued, are defined centrally by the relationship between them, and not just by their difference to each other (Schippers 2007). The centrality of the relationships between masculinity and femininity will be further discussed later in the context of the 'heterosexual matrix' structuring masculinities and femininities. But any implication that "*all* femininities are rendered powerless *relative to all* masculinities" (Rasmussen 2009) needs taking issue with. Rasmussen objects to the dualising and lack of nuance in this argument, as indicated in Connell's denial of a space for hegemonic femininity and Paechter's

(2006) concurrence with this. Importantly, emphasis on this duality makes it more difficult to attend to the intersection of gender with other axes of difference; as we will see below, class and age interact with gender in multiple ways.

This conception of femininity (which admittedly is something of a straw woman argument) has been particularly disputed recently with the changes in social life in western cultures, brought about with the increase in women's paid employment and changing family structures. The so-called "crisis of masculinity" at the turn of the century has supposedly left men, and in particular working class men, as disenfranchised and anxious about their role in society given the decline of industrialisation and the male-as-breadwinner model (cf. e.g. McDowell 2003). Concurrent with this, it has become almost a cliché that the young woman, or girl, is the "ideal neoliberal subject" (cf. Driscoll 2002; Harris 2004a; Harris et al. 2005; Kehily and Nayak 2008). She is flexible, adaptable, autonomous, free to construct her identity as a liberated woman through consumption, and adept at the emotional labour and 'soft skills' necessary for success in the service sector jobs that have become dominant in the UK and other western countries as employment in manual labour has declined with deindustrialisation. Later in this chapter, I will return to how this conception influences girls in education, and middle-class girls in particular.

However, as many commentators have pointed out, the idea that the young woman is the "winner" of the modern age, and should be free to enjoy her femininity as an autonomous agent, is problematic (Harris 2004b; Harris et al. 2005; Baker 2009; Gonick et al. 2009; McRobbie 2009; Baker 2010a). As Gill argues in depth (2007, 2009a, b), although of course the cultural activities marked as 'feminine' can be pleasurable, "this emphasis [in women's magazines] on playfulness and fun displaces the extent to which feminine appearances are normatively expected of girls and women, rather than simply being pleasurable hobbies" (2007, p. 188). Why, she asks, if women are free agents who choose their own paths and control their own preferences, should there be "a growing homogeneity organized around a slim, toned, hairless body" (2009b, p. 106)? As I argued above, without suggesting that

young women (or, for that matter, young men, although the agency of young men rarely seems to be a disputed issue) are 'cultural dupes', it would be naïve and redundant to accept at face value the unproblematic pleasures of feminine performance. The real question, as Gill emphasises, is how it is that "socially constructed ideals… are internalized and made their own"? (2009b, p. 106).

In addition, any implication that there is a singular femininity fails to recognise the wide range of women's experiences and opportunities, which are shaped (and constrained) by class, race, sexuality, religion and many other 'differences that make a difference', as I discuss further below (p. 62). The opportunities available to express one's individuality and autonomy through consumption are laced with assumptions about economic potential, and the image of acceptable femininity is constructed around class-based cultural hierarchies of 'taste' and 'sophistication' (cf. Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001; 2005). In such a context, more marginal femininities are invoked as the unacceptable other, against which the ideal white, British, heterosexual, middle-class neoliberal success story is built. Throughout my own analysis, I explore how participants drew on these othered femininities in constructing and performing their own classed identities.

The rise of sex(y)

Femininity, importantly, remains tightly bound up with sexuality. In recent decades there has been a growing space for women's sexuality to be conceived of as acceptable (and desirable, or even demanded) within a 'proper' femininity; or at least, a certain form of women's sexuality. Discourses of female sexual power and assertiveness have developed, visible in cultural representations such as the television programme *Sex and the City*, with its successful, single, sexually confident women, and sold in women's magazines – though these are cultural tropes heavily classed and raced. It is not, I would suggest, merely a coincidence that a vast amount of the cultural practices that go towards making up an image of femininity are in some way related to sexuality and/or the related field of reproduction (fashioning a (hetero)sexually desirable body, looking after babies, etc.). These changes in sexuality need to be seen in the context of what has been termed the "sexualisation

of culture" – the idea that sex, and representations of sex, have become increasingly more visible and mainstream in western societies in recent years (Attwood 2009). These changing representations, of course, encounter highly differing reactions. They are often viewed (especially in the popular media) as a social problem, but some commentators see positive progress and applaud the "democratisation" of sex and desire (McNair 2002). Here, however, rather than viewing these changes as a narrative of moral decline or one of unproblematic progress, I build on the work of those who explore how changes in cultural and societal representations of sexuality might be affecting gendered and sexual relations and subjectivities (e.g. Bragg and Buckingham 2009; Coy 2009; Jackson and Gilbertson 2009; Buckingham et al. 2010; Jackson and Westrupp 2010; Ringrose 2010; Bragg et al. 2011; Epstein et al. 2012; Ringrose and Renold 2012).

Whether sex and desire have truly been "democratised" is certainly debatable. Gill's analysis of the "midriff" figure suggests that the old vocabulary of "objectification" is no longer sufficient to describe the representation of women in advertising. Instead, the "midriff" is a (presentation of) an active, playful, "empowered", desiring sexual subject. As I have discussed above, she critiques this presentation, highlighting its attachment to a white, middle-class, young, heterosexually attractive feminine body (2009a) which is to be strived for (see also Attwood 2006). Women's desire is only acceptable (only feminine) within these strict constraints – as Gill caustically puts it, in bodies that "come straight out of the most predictable templates of male sexual fantasy" (2009b: 102). Although it is very often suggested that "sex" is everywhere these days, used to sell everything, this is something of a misidentification. The *suggestion* of sex is what is used to sell a vast swathe of products, and sex is still (in the vast majority of cases) suggested and signified by women's bodies. Even vibrators and erotic novels written for and by women are advertised by and illustrated with scantily clad women in traditionally sexually alluring poses (see the blog Erotica Cover Watch) (2009). The pleasure sought and bought by the new feminine sexual subject is "feeling sexy" (Storr 2003; Holland and Attwood 2009). It seems to me that this is a state very far from that of seeking and enjoying sexual pleasure. For teen girls in particular, being a sexually desiring

subject is not easy, as will be discussed in greater detail below in this chapter, and as I return to in my analysis in chapters five and six.

One of the most prominent features of the so-called post-feminist age, closely linked to the discourses of neoliberalism discussed above, is the disavowal of power differentials and the assertion of individualism (McRobbie 2009; Gill and Scharff 2011). A discourse of gender equality as positive has become (almost) universal, thereby working to occlude the workings of power and inequalities that inhere in many spheres of life. This is evident in a particularly acute form in the area of sexuality, and (hetero)sexual relationships, where, arguably, the divisions between masculinities and femininities are most clear. Love is often seen as incompatible with power; the young women Donna Chung studied, for instance, were insistent that their relationships were equal, despite evidence in many cases to the contrary (2005). And perhaps the disavowals are not surprising; after all, intimate relationships and sexuality form an area of life in which people are highly invested, and often find considerable pleasure – and acknowledgment of inequality does not often sit easily with pleasure. This argument and its repercussions are central to my analysis of intimate relationships, gendered emotion work and heterosexualised violence, in chapters five and six. The following sections will discuss sexualities, in particular young sexualities, and the ways in which heterosexuality is intertwined with gender. It will become clear that many of the supposed 'oppositions' and differences between masculinities and femininities go hand in hand with a heteronormative structuring of relations, and that sexuality both constructs and is constructed by gender.

PART TWO: YOUNG HETEROSEXUALITIES, CLASS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Young (hetero)sexualities and gender

He was a boy, she was a girl… can I make it any more obvious?
– Avril Lavigne, *Sk8er Boi*

Much as we have seen that the idea of gender, and sex, as natural – an idea deeply embedded in culture – has been destabilised and troubled by theory, so has the concept of heterosexuality as natural and desirable been destabilised in recent decades by queer theorists. The normative status of heterosexuality, a status which is historically contingent (Weeks 1985; Katz 1995), serves both to other and regulate behaviour of those who can be positioned outside it, and to regulate gender and sexuality for those within it. Defining sexuality is as impossible as defining gender; all that is connected with sexual relations, all that relates to the erotic; sexual preferences, relationships, desires, pleasures, fantasies, expectations, actions. Its influence extends far beyond simply considering sexual acts themselves (whatever they are) and has deep connections with gender.

As a system of categorisation and an organisation of social relations, gender is ordered around and closely linked to the reproductive arena. Connell defines gender thus: "Gender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes" (2009: 11). Of course, this assertion can be easily qualified: those who lack reproductive capabilities, such as children, infertile people and post-menopausal women, are not considered without gender; and, of course, increasingly effective means of contraception also trouble the connection. But the basic distinction between men and women would be considered by most to be centred around reproduction, and thus around sex. It is tied closely in with sexual relations between men and women, with heterosexuality (two categories which might or might not be considered synonymous); but there is much debate over how closely they are tied, and in what ways.

Feminist theorists have frequently posited the embedding of gender within a heterosexual framework: one of the early and most influential being Adrienne Rich's critique of the power of "compulsory heterosexuality" as a political institution (1980). Monique Wittig examines the construction of women and men in opposition to each other and in the framework of assumed heterosexual desire between both sexes; for her, sex is constructed and "woman" is by definition one who desires men

(1992). Rich and Wittig both in different ways present lesbianism as the appropriate reaction to and escape from the oppression of institutionalised heterosexuality. Central to Butler's previously discussed theories of the performativity of gender, and the norms and constraints guiding what performances are acceptable, is what she terms the "heterosexual matrix". This matrix provides a structure in which performances of masculinity (by men) and femininity (by women) are (or should be) enacted in opposition to and interaction with each other. Being a man necessarily involves being sexually attracted to women, and vice versa. Given the precariousness of the gender order, the boundaries between appropriately heterosexual genders require constant policing. This policing can be witnessed in the othering of those who exhibit gender identities, sexualities and/or gender behaviours which fall outside the norms of heterosexual masculinity/femininity. Ingraham, who similarly sees heterosexuality as essential to gender (1994, 2005) coins the term "heterogender" to emphasise the relationship between and essential dependence of gender upon heterosexuality. She argues that heterosexuality is taken for granted as 'natural' and that this "conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution" (1994, p. 203).

The heterosexual matrix, then, provides a frame for how women and men are to be women and men, always in relation to the other. Although masculinit(y/ies) and femininit(y/ies) are not entirely reducible to their desire for the other, as Schippers puts it, "the construction of hetero-desire as the ontological essence of gender difference establishes the meaning of the relationship between masculinity and femininity" (2007, p. 90: 90). The framework can, though, be criticised. Atkinson and DePalma, while acknowledging the usefulness of the heterosexual matrix as a concept for analysis, worry about the reification of the existing order through continued use of the term in research. They agree with Butler's own misgivings about the metaphor of the "matrix", which suggests an inescapability and totality and prefer to use her rethought concept of "heterosexual hegemony" (1993a) (as does Renold (2005)). The matrix does not exist beyond our reinscription of it. Their misgivings about reinscription are useful, and the exhortation to pay attention to

rupture and transgression as well as norms and regulation is particularly pertinent (cf. also Renold and Ringrose 2008). Despite this, though, we might not want to overemphasise the power of academia. The power of regulatory norms still requires acknowledgement, and their analysis requires naming; much as one cannot (?) analyse gender without perpetuating it. Although naming can be a means of reinscribing norms, it can also bring things previously unsaid into the realm of the sayable, and make visible previously hidden workings of power. Much of the power of heterosexuality, after all, lies in what is *not* said or acknowledged, but merely assumed.

The heterosexual matrix, then, implies a structuring relation for practice of all gender, making it highly difficult to do gender without reference to it – perhaps particularly so for those who consider themselves heterosexual and negotiate heterosexual relationships. Gender is not always performed in accordance with heterosexual norms; they can be subverted and reworked, and indeed the existence of subversive or non-normative gender expressions is necessary for the normative to maintain its influence. But as Butler puts it, "if the norm renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for us, then being outside the norm is in some sense being defined still in relation to it" (2004, p. 42: 42).

The close link between heterosexuality and gender, institutionalised in the structure of the family and normative relationalities between men and women and/or masculinities and femininities, continues to exert a powerful influence. Men who fail to embody masculinity are often disparaged for being like women and simultaneously for being gay, and gay men considered to be feminine; and vice versa in the case of women. But as Katz (1995) details, this link is historically constructed and heterosexuality as we currently conceive of it has been around for not much longer than 100 years; and changing in that time. And as noted above, bringing all performances back to their relation to the norm can obscure the power of transgressive performances and emphasise continuity at the expense of seeing change. With gender norms in flux, influenced by the feminist movement and by changing global economic and social contexts, and non-heterosexualities similarly

becoming more visible, the link between heterosexuality and gender might no longer be so rigidly fixed.

We have seen already the possibilities for (and limitations of) doing gender beyond the limits of the body. Although in *Female Masculinity* Halberstam restricts her analysis to masculine women through history who display same-sex desire, she recognises that female masculinity need not correspond with lesbianism, as a modern construction, nor even with "gender variant" women who have practised same-sex sexual relations (or expressed such desires) in various temporally and socially contingent forms, but that it can also encompass women who lead heterosexual lifestyles and/or have heterosexual desires (1998, pp. 57-59). While she sees queer female masculinities, where the strictures of heterosexuality as well as the strictures of gender are transgressed, as more threatening to the established and protected status of male masculinity and gender normativity, there is also surely room for subverting gender relationality and thus gender/sexual norms through heterosexuality/ies. Non-normative sexualities, too, can be done in variantly transgressive, and variantly queer, ways. Indeed much of the struggle for civil rights for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender[4] people is to some extent rooted in the premise and desire for normativity, or at least normality. My own research focusses on heterosexualities, and within that broad umbrella I attempt to unveil the diversities of gender relations as well as the similarities.

Heterosexuality, significantly more so than other sexualities, is "not only sexual" (Jackson 2006, p. 117: 117); indeed, heterosexuality, as the unmarked category, is so embedded in social practice that it can be discussed and referred to extensively without consideration of the sexual, while non-normative sexualities are inevitably sexualised. We see this particularly clearly in education and discourse around childhood, where it is thought not quite right to have to "explain" gay people to children (Curran et al. 2009): this is bound up with discourses of "childhood innocence", that I discuss further below. But heterosexuality, as heteronormativity,

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[4] The interests of the groups/individuals covered by this amalgamation may not always or even often coincide, but the acronym is useful when discussing certain social movements.

spreads into a wide variety of social practices and institutions. Stevi Jackson (1996) distinguishes between the institutionalisation of heterosexuality within society and culture, associated social/political identities, the practices involved; and their experience. Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe and Rachel Thomson similarly distinguish between layers or levels of "heterosexual power": as language; agency and action; structured, institutionalised power relations between sexual partners; embodied practices, sexual experiences and their meanings; and they emphasise its nature as historically specific and subject to change (Holland et al. 2004[1998], pp. 22-23).

These categories are, of course, not entirely separable – the layers are closely interconnected and entwined. Embodied practices and sexual experiences, for instance, affect and are affected by institutionalised power relations, but they do not exist in a causal relationship, whereby one can simply infer that gendered power is expressed through a particular sex act. But there may be disconnects and tensions between these layers, as well as continuities. I explore further in the next chapter the layers and levels of heterosexuality that I try and analyse, and the methodological complications of excavating and interpreting these. In paying close attention to the interactions and negotiations of heterosexuality, I take the view that heterosexual sex and heterosexual relationships are not merely an illustration or reproduction of heterosexuality as the norm, but function as another site – like that of education, or work, or the household – in which gender and heterosexuality are performed. This is counter to the views of some feminist writers (e.g. Dworkin 1987; Mackinnon 1989; Jeffreys 1996), whereby heterosexuality is at heart an eroticisation of power difference, central to an oppressive system in which men are dominant over women, and that at least at the present moment it is difficult if not impossible to do heterosexuality without becoming part of this system. It is also, if less explicitly, counter to a tendency in some queer writing to see heterosexuality as something of a monolith, the boring and conventional norm to which queer is opposed. As Smart points out, heterosexuality is often "presented as a unitary concept" (1996), in contrast to the acceptance and celebration of different queer sexualities (cf. also Richardson 1996; Ingraham 2005). We ought instead to speak of heterosexualities,

allowing for a similar exploration of and focus on diverse ways of doing heterosex(uality), while retaining a conception of the power of heteronormativity as a still highly influential institution.

Classed subjectivities: personal investments and sexuality

Rent a flat above a shop, cut your hair and get a job, smoke some fags and play some pool, pretend you never went to school. But still you'll never get it right, 'cause when you're laid in bed at night, watching roaches climb the wall, if you called your dad he could stop it all.
– Pulp, *Common People*

Class analysis is sometimes spoken of as if it stands in opposition to what is (dismissively) referred to as the "identity politics" of gender, race and sexuality – as if these "modern" categories of analysis are superficial, and their discussion detracts from the deeper truths of older leftwing analyses of class . But class is not experienced separately from gender or sexuality; they are closely intertwined with each other.

Since the significant changes in the employment landscape and deindustrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the context of post-Thatcherism neoliberal policies and discourse, the landscape and particularities of class have changed. Class is commonly absent from government policy and media discourse, replaced by discussion of "social exclusion" or "marginalisation", a drive towards "social mobility", and occasionally by talk of "child poverty" (adult poverty being seemingly a non-issue). As Steph Lawler points out, these discourses around inequality are discourses of lack (Lawler 2005b): those who do not "surmount class barriers" (p. 800) are portrayed as lacking in some way, and this lack is frequently portrayed as individualised, rather than societal (Jones 2011). Several influential social theorists have argued that with the de-industrialisation of society, social organisation has become individualised, with traditional divisions and inequalities based on class becoming less important as individuals are able to produce their own life paths and biographies (e.g. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; 1998; 2005). This echoes similar arguments about gender inequalities explored above. There has, however, been considerable dissent from

these theses of individualisation, by authors who argue that class remains a highly relevant and significant dimension in social life and opportunities.

This scholarship has expanded upon older understandings of class in socio-economic terms, exploring the cultural meanings of class and the ways that class is experienced by individuals (e.g. Reay 1997; Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001; Sayer 2002; Savage 2003; 2004; Devine et al. 2005; Lawler 2005a; 2005b). As such, it focuses on exploring the processes through which class is made and reproduced, as opposed to defining what (and who) is characteristic of certain class positions. This has been particularly important in relation to gender, and exploring class in relation to women. Traditional concepts of class, particularly those coming from a Marxist perspective, have frequently been rooted in socio-economic positioning, and tightly tied to individuals' positioning in the labour market. These concepts were designed around and often primarily applicable to men, rendering women liable to have their class position defined merely in terms of their father's or husband's job.

Feminist scholars have in particular turned their focus to the personal side of class: the emotional and psychosocial investments that are made and felt in classed subjectivities (e.g. Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001; 2004; Ringrose and Renold 2012). We have seen how gender is performed, yet deeply felt and deeply embodied. So it is with class, which is performed with and read from the body in gendered ways, from the clothes a person wears to the way they walk – the "bodily dispositions we learn as a result of positioning" (Skeggs 2000, p. 143). The difficulties that come with trying to negotiate unfamiliar terrain are not merely practical but deeply emotional; for instance, working class women trying to negotiate the largely middle-class world of academia (Hey 2003). The intertwining of class and gender is a key focus of these understandings. It is not simply that working class women perform femininity differently from middle class women, nor that working class men and women perform gender differently. Concepts of gender and sexuality, and moral and value judgements about them, are deeply bound up with ideas about class, propriety and respectability. The bodies of working class women, for instance, have historically been figured as representing sexual excess, in violation of an ideal

of appropriate middle-class femininity, which involves keeping sexuality discreet and under control (e.g. Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001; Lawler 2005a; Walkerdine and Ringrose 2008). This can be seen today, for instance, in the cultural figure of the oversexed teenage mother, an object for concern in policy, vilified in the media, and parodied and mocked in popular culture (the archetypal figure of recent years being Little Britain's Vicky Pollard). Her visible sexuality is a source of classed disgust. Of course, in addition to violating norms of femininity, she is also violating norms of age. These historical ideas about sexuality have become complicated by more recent changes; as we have previously seen, with western society becoming more sexually 'open', sexual norms are changing. But the discourses around sexuality remain very classed; as I argued above, those who are 'allowed' to be 'sexually liberated' are frequently those who are white, educated and middle class. Classed subjectivities affect (and are affected by) the kinds of sexuality that can be legitimately expressed, as Taylor demonstrates throughout her work on (mostly) lesbian and gay sexualities and class (2007; 2010; Taylor and Addison 2009). It is in these contexts that young people must negotiate their own developing sexualities, being and becoming middle-class subjects at the same time as engaging with the contradictory discourses of age-based sexuality. In the next sections I go into more detail on these negotiations, and how my own work fits in with them.

The disgust that attaches to certain representations and perceptions of working class people, importantly, acts as a vital resource for the formation and maintenance of middle-class identities, as Lawler (2005a) outlines. By representing the working class as 'other' and repellent, the middle class can shore up their own worth. Skeggs explores this in detail in much of her work. One particular example illuminates the intersections of class, gender and sexuality, in which she explores the perception of women visiting gay bars and clubs as part of hen parties. Here middle class gay men saw hen parties as a threat to gay space, but conceived of this threat very much in classed terms, viewing the women in question as repellent, with "associations of contagion, pollution, danger, distaste and excess heterosexuality" (2005, p. 966). This is a theme I take up in chapter four and in more detail in chapter eight, looking at how my young middle-class participants regulated sexual transgression, and their

own narratives of sexual and social development, through classed othering and abjection. These constructions and narratives were also closely intertwined with participants' negotiations of their educational subjectivities. The next section looks at class in the school context, and the particular connections between middle-class young subjectivities and educational achievement.

Class, schooling and young people

A person's gender, sexuality and class are, of course, inflected by other axes of difference. Age (and generation) is one of these. Young people experience and negotiate class in specific ways, influenced among other things by their family and household situations, as well as their school. Those still at the age where education is compulsory, who are focussed on in my research, are in a slightly odd position when it comes to class. Their class positions are in one sense highly visible. Much of the anxiety which coalesces around 'youth' is extremely classed. The cultural spectres of the teenage mother and the feckless yob represent the imagined face of the working class, and these faces are young. But at the same time, there is a sense that young people do not *really* belong to any class or another; they are in limbo, until they have left school, gone into the workplace (or into unemployment) or higher education, and can then be properly slotted into a class category. Much of the debate in media and policy over educational inequalities focusses (implicitly) on how many young people can be 'lifted up' out of working-class backgrounds, and the deciding point for this is the end of compulsory schooling. Young people's identities are seen as not yet fixed. They may be near the top of the ladder or nearer the top of the snake, but they have not yet reached the top or fallen off the bottom.

My young participants were comfortably near the top of the ladder, in a school situated in a generally very affluent middle-class area. Of course, this does not imply their classed identities were identical; as we will see in later chapters, there are class fractions and divisions even within a fairly homogenous class landscape. In pursuing my research questions, the educational context was vital to take into account. Schools are a prime site for making class, as detailed in a wide range of literature

(e.g. Willis (1977) and Nayak (2003) on working class boys, (Ball et al. 2000; Ball 2003)). For middle-class young people in particular, schooling plays a crucial part in forming subjectivities and is difficult to escape from. Research in the sociology of education has long recognised the ways that school ethos expects and produces middle-class values (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977), and the school works as a site for the reproduction of middle-class privilege and social inequalities.

In recent years a significant body of work has focussed on investigating middle-class subjectivities and negotiations of schooling, both from the perspective of children and young people themselves and from the perspective of their parents. A consistent thread running through this work is what Stephen Ball describes as "the combination of dread and confidence" (Ball 2003, p. 8) – the confidence that educational and economic success is rightfully theirs (or their children's), battling with the dread that, in the context of changed patterns of employment and the expansion of higher education (Brown and Scase 1994; Brown 2000), that rightful place will not be attained. Barbara Ehrenreich says of the middle class: "If this is an elite, then, it is an insecure and deeply anxious one" (1989, p. 15). That anxiety and insecurity is key in understanding middle-class young people's negotiation of their educational subjectivities, but also – because they are so closely intertwined – their sexual and social subjectivities.

Within this context, schooling becomes highly competitive. In the past twenty years in the UK there has been an increasing focus on measurement, targets and achievement within education. Middle-class parents must work to gain positional advantage for their children, both through strategies relating to educational choices (whether this is choosing independent schooling, higher education choice, housing location), and through investing in their development as "rounded individuals" via extra-curricular "enrichment activities" (Vincent and Ball 2007). In school, children and young people must constantly strive towards higher achievement, and that model of "achievement", as described by Becky Francis and Christine Skelton, is "narrowly conceived from a credentialist model that prioritises exam success over other aspects of education" (Francis and Skelton 2005, p. 134). They make this point in context of

critically analysing the "gender gap" debates: the recurrent concerns over boys' underachievement in assessment in relation to girls. These debates construct boys as failing, lacking and in need of saving, while girls are conceived of as unproblematically educationally successful, echoing the figuration discussed earlier of the young woman as quintessential neoliberal success story.

However, as many authors have pointed out, this model of achievement is problematic both in its narrow focus and in its construction of gender (Epstein et al. 1998; Francis 2000; Francis and Skelton 2005; Ringrose 2007). The culture of "excellence for all" (DCSF 2009a) engenders anxiety and relies inherently upon the spectre of failure, as Helen Lucey states:

> Excellence is produced within dynamic relation to its opposite and therefore depends upon the continued presence rather than the eradication of failure (2001, p. 182)

For middle-class young people, then, the constant exhortation towards academic success, and threat of failure, often comes with a high personal and emotional sense, and "a sense of never being good enough" (Lucey and Reay 2002, p. 322). Middle-class parents expend great effort, time and energy on their children's schooling. Parental anxiety is often tied closely to fear of the working class or ethnic "other" as encountered through schooling, particularly in ethnically and socially mixed areas (Reay et al. 2005; Reay et al. 2007; Reay 2008; Williams et al. 2008; Hollingworth and Williams 2010). Children and young people themselves also negotiate these fears, differentiating themselves from "others" (Lucey and Reay 2002; Kehily and Pattman 2006). My own research took place in a much more homogenous environment, a high-achieving school in an affluent area in which most of the pupils were from middle-class backgrounds. As such, it shared some characteristics with the selective, independent schools in the research of Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton (2010b; 2010a; 2012a), Claire Charles (Charles 2010a; Charles 2010b) and Alexandra Allan (2006; 2009; 2010), all four of whom explore gendered and classed identities of girls and young women. However, my school lacked the definition as an "elite" institution that shaped girls' negotiations of class in that research. In chapter

seven, I look at how young people in this socio-economically homogenous but ostensibly comprehensive school negotiated their educational and sexual subjectivities together, in combination and in tension.

 My work attempts to build on this body of research into middle-class subjectivities, following the argument by Mike Savage that "'the unacknowledged normality of the middle-class needs to be carefully unpicked and exposed' (2003, p. 536). These negotiation of classed educational subjectivities are, of course, not done separately from negotiating other aspects of subjectivity. Discourses of educational success and achievement often sit uneasily with discourses of gendered heterosexuality, and in the next two sections I will explore the contradictions and tensions inherent in the mixing of sexuality and school, which are shaped by discourses around childhood innocence.

Childhood, sexuality, and the seduction of "innocence"

Certain forms and representations of sexuality, as we saw earlier, may have become more visible. But the place of sexuality as a centre of social anxieties persists in shifting forms, and nowhere is this more the case than in relation to children and childhood. The young people in my research were at a particularly fraught age: children by law, they might be viewed (and view themselves) as children, adults, or somewhere in between, fluctuating and caught between childhood and adulthood. Childhood has, historically, often been conceived of as antithetical to sexuality: the child is that who is not (or should not be) sexual. Central to this is the idea of the child as "innocent": vulnerable, naive, and in need of protection from the dangers of the adult world, which has become central to the conceptualisation of childhood in the western world since the Romantic era. Most specifically, the child needs to be protected from sexuality, lest she be corrupted.

This concept of childhood innocence, which is a very powerful discourse running through Western society, culture, parenting, and education, has been analysed and critiqued by many academics (Jackson 1982; Walkerdine 1997; Higonnet 1998;

Hawkes and Egan 2008; Faulkner 2011; Egan and Hawkes 2012). Emma Renold's work empirically investigates children's own experiences of sexuality; she demonstrates the ways in which discourses of innocence contribute to the silencing of sexual harassment and gendered power within the primary school (Renold 2005). Much further research with young children supports her argument, including the extensive work of Kerry Robinson on sexuality in early childhood education (Robinson 2005; Robinson and Diaz 2006; Robinson 2008; Robinson and Davies 2008; Robinson and Davies 2010).

Importantly, the figure of the "innocent child" is one that is gendered, racialised and classed: that is, the discourse of innocence is configured through representation of a white middle-class girl. As Valerie Walkerdine states in her influential work on working-class young girls and women, "social class 'plays a central role in the regulation of femininity and the production of Otherness'"(Walkerdine 1997). The innocence that needs protecting in the middle-class child frequently means protection from malign influences, and as we have seen, discourses of troublesome sexuality are frequently attached to the working classes. These gendered and classed discourses of innocence have been particularly prominent in debates and anxieties around the influence of mass media and technologies on childhood. Media, from comic books through television, and more recently the internet, provoke particular anxiety because they are seen as intruding upon the "innocent" space of childhood (Buckingham 2000; Valentine and Holloway 2001; Bragg et al. 2011; Buckingham 2011). In the past three years, this debate has taken a particular turn in several Anglophone countries, focussing on "sexualisation": the idea that children are becoming prematurely sexual (or, rather, being *made* prematurely sexual) because of sexual imagery and representation in media and culture, and that this is a dangerous and worrying change. In the UK, the "sexualisation of children and young people" has emerged as a significant issue in policy and news media, with three reports commissioned within as many years by both the Labour and Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition governments and the Scottish Parliament (Buckingham et al. 2010; Papadopoulos 2010; Bailey 2011). Academic critique of the Papadopoulos report (Smith and Attwood 2011) and the Bailey review (Barker and Duschinsky

2012) has highlighted the different ways in which they recirculate gendered assumptions, constructing girls as passive and vulnerable, and boys as active and predatory. These critiques, and wider analysis of the sexualisation debates, also highlight the unspoken classed subtext of the anxiety (Duschinsky 2010; Egan and Hawkes 2012): dangerous sexuality is that associated with working-class styles, and "sexualisation" is associated with "lack of aspirations" for women. "Sexualisation", then, is something that girls need to avoid in order to maintain a middle-class respectability: echoing the historical associations previously discussed. The impact of sexualisation on boys, by contrast, is rarely viewed as a problem, except insofar as their behaviour affects girls (for instance, boys treating girls as "objects" because of their viewing of pornography or sexually explicit music videos). The sexualisation debates, then, reinscribe an old ideal, fraught with anxiety: that childhood be viewed as a time without sexuality. But as children grow older, the time of life becomes differently fraught: as well as protection from outside influences, teenagers need protection from themselves.

Teen sexuality: liminality, risk and the school setting

Cordelia: "Well, does looking at guns make *you* want to have sex?"
Xander: "I'm seventeen. Looking at linoleum makes me want to have sex."
– "Innocence", *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

The teenage years are constructed and experienced as liminal; teenagers are caught in between childhood and adulthood. It is during this time that the majority of individuals enjoy (or otherwise) their first sexual experiences: in 2001, 26% of young women and 30% of young men in the UK reported being under 16 at the age of first sexual intercourse; the median age was 16 (Wellings et al. 2001).[5] Teenage sexuality is, generally, constructed as a social problem. UK government policy guidance on sex and relationships education focuses on preventing sexual experience among teenagers for as long as possible as the ideal: the current good practice guidance states as its fifth guiding principle, "Secondary pupils should learn... the reasons for delaying sexual activity and the benefits to be gained from such delay"

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[5] This is the most recent year for which reliable figures are available.

(Department for Education and Employment 2000, p. 3).[6] Particular indications of teenage sexual activity – in particular, STI rates and teenage pregnancy – are considered negative outcomes, and considerable effort and funding goes into attempts to decrease them.

Teenage sex, then, is considered a societal problem. Yet, as the quote with which I begun this section indicates, the teenage years (or, perhaps more appropriately in this instance, "adolescence") are also conceptualised as a period where young people – in particular, boys – are overwhelmed by "raging hormones", compelled by their biology to obsess over sex (I will discuss later in the thesis the ways in which these physiological discourses work with concepts of masculinity). At the same time, teenage girls are conceptualised in popular culture (and some popular science) as the ultimate object of male desire. So teenagers negotiating their own sexual subjectivities confront a web of confused and contradictory discourses. A significant part of this web is woven within and through the school. Although it is important to emphasise that teenagers' experiences are not confined to school (research with teenagers is often carried out through schools for ethical and practical reasons, even if not focussed specifically on the school environment), it is nevertheless vital to most teenagers' lives. Social networks often centre around school. My participants were still in compulsory education; attendance level at their school was high, and students were generally invested in educational achievement.

Middle-class identities for young people in school often entail compliance with the educational ethos and norms of the formal school, and with what Kofoed calls "appropriate pupilness" (2008). This is, importantly, intertwined with sexuality. Sexuality and desire in school are suppressed, both in sex education and in wider school cultures (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002; Epstein et al. 2003; Allen 2005c; Youdell 2005; Allen 2006, 2007a; Taylor 2007). Female sexual desire, in particular, is largely absent in sex and relationships education, as Michelle Fine

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[6] The Labour government's 2010 consultation on updating this SRE guidance shifted the focus somewhat, speaking not of "delay" but of "resist[ing] unwelcome pressures to be sexually active (p.10). However, no final version of this guidance has been produced, as the Department for Education under the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government states it wishes to cut back on centralised guidance to schools.

argued in her influential article in 1988 and reiterated eighteen years later with Sara McClelland (Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland 2006), and as Louisa Allen, among others, explores in her work (Allen 2011). But sexuality and desire are, of course, ever-present in the heteronormative informal cultures of the classroom and playground. As Youdell makes clear, the identities of "student (child)" and "girl (proto-woman?)" are competing and contradictory, constrained by the institutional requirements of school (2005: 256). Louise Archer, Anna Halsall and Sumi Hollingworth's research with young working class women explored their investments in particular forms of working class heterosexual femininities, which often worked against their engagement in education. Charles' work with elite upper-middle-class young women in Australia highlights the difficult negotiation for her participants of, on one hand, "hypersexuality" as an ideal of femininity for young women, and on the other hand, the association of elite schooling with a "modest" form of femininity. Some of the young women "flirted" with hypersexuality, but this was often done through "parody and fantasy" (in the context of a research task involving their imagined futures), and was less evident in their embodied practices. Walking the line between different ideals of classed, gendered and sexualised identities is often problematic and precarious. My analysis explores the intricacies of how middle-class young people walked those lines, sometimes successfully, sometimes less successfully. In chapter seven, in particular, I engage with research exploring competing investments in education and heterosexuality, looking in detail at how these competing investments produce emotional tensions in relationships and how young people live with these contradictions.

Doing gender in young heterosex

But once it's underway, there's no escaping the fact that you're a girl and he's a boy
– Pulp, *Underwear*

It is in the arena of the heterosexual relationship that gender might be thought to be most salient and obvious. The ideal of complementarity and assumption as discussed above – that masculine and feminine are opposite – is made flesh in heterosexual

relationships. Yet they can also be envisaged as a site where some traditional performances of gender can be relaxed, particularly those associated with masculinity; in contrast to homosocial environments, a place where men can express more emotion and be seen to be more vulnerable (Redman 2001; Korobov and Thorne 2006; Allen 2007b). This is a theme I will take up in particular in chapter five, looking at intimate relationships, and considering the possibilities and limitations of heterosexual intimacy. Either way, for teenagers, sex is one more space where gender is practised (in both senses of the word), and, as I have highlighted, it is surrounded by tensions.

The view of sex as softening gender is not only one of popular discourse but also finds some parallels in academic discussions, often with a focus on sex. Lynne Segal, exploring the embodiment and material conditions of heterosexuality and arguing for the possibilities of heterosexuality to go beyond a maintenance of gender boundaries, discusses sex between adults, maintaining "in consensual sex when bodies meet, the epiphany of that meeting – its threat and excitement – is surely that all the great dichotomies… slide away" (1994, p. 86). This offers, perhaps, great hope for the futures of my young participants, of heterosexuality as a site of pleasure and reworking of gender. I would argue, though, that even for adults, this depiction of sex as transcendent somewhat obscures the many anxieties, negotiations, discussions, (mis)communications and silences that may surround it – the ways in which it is profoundly socially situated (cf. Jackson and Scott 2010).

For young people, certainly, sex does not appear to be so positive. Detailed interview accounts given by young people of their own first experiences of heterosex present a different picture, in Holland et al's extensive study of gendered power in young heterosexual relationships (Holland et al. 2004[1998]). Here sex might have been pleasurable – particularly for young men – but was also fraught with anxieties and disappointments, and self-consciousness before, during and afterwards; the feeling of division and distance between partners was often much more evident than any sense of togetherness. Of course, this is not to say that this is the only way sex was or is

experienced by these or other young people, but it does foreground the centrality of gendered power within young sexual practice.

The argument put forward by Holland et al. is that (young) heterosex (re)produces a set of discourses of masculinity and femininity in which relations between women and men are implied that are "natural, oppositional and hierarchical" (Holland et al. 2004[1998], p. 21). In their accounts, young men are positioned and position themselves as sexual subjects, in charge of the sexual encounter and relationship, while young women have little sexual autonomy; sex was constructed and conceived of around men's pleasure and desire. They sum it up thus:

> Normative heterosexuality and the normative heterosexual act, define young people in relation to each other: him as actor, her as acted upon; his agency, her subordination; her body for his pleasure. His body for his pleasure too (p. 102).

The Male in the Head was published over ten years ago and the empirical work carried out some twenty years ago. As such, although it of course postdates second wave feminism, and young women and men were cognizant of and largely supportive of ideals of sexual equality in theory if not in practice, discourses and practices of gender have altered substantially. But more recent work indicates that many of the gendered discourses highlighted in *The Male in the Head* persist. They are, though, often obscured and veiled by avowals of equality and individual freedom, as discussed above.

Research by Louisa Allen (2003, 2005b, d, 2007b, 2008b; 2011) and Anastasia Powell (2008a, 2010) investigates the contradictory narratives of continuity and change in young heterosexual relationships. Traditional expressions of heteromasculinity, for Allen's young men in New Zealand, were tempered by desire for romance and equality in relationships (but not in casual sexual encounters) (Allen 2007b). Young women saw themselves as having power in relationships, but in many cases, as Allen puts it, "have reconstituted their own pleasure so that it is indistinguishable from that of their partners" (2003, p. 240). Powell (2010) found

that Australian young men and women adhered to a range of "unwritten rules", and, importantly, points out that these rules are not merely external, but that young people were "active participants in their self-regulation" (p 40).

Claire Maxwell, researching the negotiation of gender, heterosexual relationships and sexual experiences among young men and women and discussing the change (or continuity) in attitudes to heterosexuality, found contradictory narratives, and variable levels of resistance to traditional or normative frameworks for heterosexual relationships (such as those explored in Holland et al) (2007). Most of the participants talked of the dichotomy between "slut"/"nice girl", although they didn't necessarily subscribe to this view; men felt pressure to pursue relationships and women to be "gatekeepers"; but men also expressed a desire for more equal relationships, and sharing of emotions, and women often said they were active in relationships. Importantly, though, the "alternative" narratives of more gender equal relationships were not often played out in actual relationship experiences as described by participants. In other work, Maxwell, and her colleague Peter Aggleton, specifically explore the negotiation of sexuality and sexual experience among privileged young women (aged 16-18) attending independent schools (Maxwell 2009; Maxwell and Aggleton 2010b, 2012a). They argue that the class position of these young women allows them greater freedom for "agentic practice"; that young women felt they had power within relationships, and were able to exercise agency within their sexual encounters and sustain this in their romantic lives. They also link these feelings of power and agency to young women's descriptions of their bodily experiences of pleasure and sensation. These findings are significant in suggesting the ways in which upper middle-class young women may experience sexual pleasure and feel independence and confidence. However, it is also important to consider the discursive identity work is being done through these young women's talk, and the investments that young women may have in constructing themselves as independent and self-confident, tying in with my earlier points around the autonomous neoliberal self. I discuss these methodological issues further in relation to my own analysis in the next chapter. In my own discussion of young women's sexual practice and desire,

in chapters six and seven, I discuss narratives which involved similar assertions of autonomy and agency, but also ambivalence and uncertainty.

Despite the shifts and changes, then, the continued limited space for women's desire and pleasure in (hetero)sexual relations, and the policing and punishment of girls/women who exhibit too much or the wrong kind of desire, has been a staple of the double standard for many years (Fine 1988; Lees 1993). And complementing it have been the requirements on boys/men to perform an active heterosexuality as a central part of masculinity, showing an interest in and pursuing sex with girls (e.g. Connell 1995; Pascoe 2007). While heterosexuality is highly important to masculinity, however, the less active heterosexuality of girls is arguably more important to femininity. Boys can achieve masculinity through other means, such as sporting ability or general coolness (Renold 1997; Frosh et al. 2002; Renold 2005) whereas girls are almost universally required to display a conventionally attractive heterosexual desirability in order to be regarded as appropriately feminine. While there is an increasing discourse of female desire as commensurable with heterofemininity, it remains limited and constructed around phallocentric imaginations of sex. These gendered norms of heterosexual relating and sexuality shape the relationships between young people, and also shape the conditions of possibility for gendered violence, which I now go on to discuss.

Heterosexual norms and gendered violence

The term "gendered violence" is one that is employed by many feminist activists to encompass a wide range of violences against women and girls. Here, and throughout the thesis, I use the term "violence" in a broad sense, encompassing not only physical violence but forms of gendered harassment and cruelty. There is certainly disagreement over its scope: for instance, some would consider pornography and sex work to be forms of gendered violence (e.g. Jeffreys 1997), while others would strongly disagree that, by definition, selling sex constitutes a form of violence against women. However, as an umbrella term, it contends that violence with gendered roots exists as a problem which is qualitatively different from other forms

of violence, and that different forms of gendered violence (for instance, domestic or intimate partner violence, and rape and sexual assault) share characteristics that are linked with gender inequalities within societies.

Feminist theories of intimate partner violence view it as a means of maintaining dominance and control over a partner within a relationship, and highlight the ways in which cultural ideas of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality may support and enable gendered violence, as well as downplaying its importance (e.g. Dobash and Dobash 1979; Stanko 1985; Kelly 1988; Hester et al. 1996; Hearn 1998). Rather than focussing on discrete acts of violence, the sustained nature of intimate partner violence – "occur[ing] in the context of continuous intimidation and coercion"– is highlighted. The dynamics of violent relationships are such that ending the relationship is often very difficult (especially as ending a relationship does not mean violence will end; on the contrary, violence often becomes more severe after an abused partner ends or tries to end the relationship (Fleury et al. 2000)). Sexual violence, similarly, is theorised as being enabled by and situated within a context of normative discourses of heterosexuality. Liz Kelly developed the theory of a "continuum of violence", emphasising the commonalities between different forms of sexual violence against women, all involving the exercise of power: "the abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to control women" (1988, p. 75). She stressed that sexual violence does not have to involve the use of physical force, but experiences exist on a continuum of pressure, coercion and force; and that experiences of sexual violence are often downplayed and minimised by women (despite their evidencing distress) because they do not see them as "serious" enough, and as a coping strategy.

We have already seen how relationships between teenagers are situated within contexts of normative heterosexualities and gender. Relations within the school context are highly heterosexualised, and there has been much research into the school as a site for sexual harassment, and cruelties and abuse based on gender and sexuality. This gendered and sexualised abuse is found in early years education (Blaise 2005b), continues throughout the primary school years (Renold 2005) and

into the secondary school (Duncan 1999; Ringrose 2006; Pascoe 2007; Ringrose 2008a; Ringrose and Renold 2010; Ringrose and Eriksson Barajas 2011), etc. Of course, the school is by no means the only site where such relations are played out: relationships that may (or may not) originate in school are carried through into other spaces, and vice versa.

Recently, there has been a significant increase in interest in teenage intimate partner violence, in particular (Hird 2000; Jackson et al. 2000; Chung 2005, 2007; Barter 2009; Barter et al. 2009; Wood et al. 2011). Much of this research, however, has been carried out primarily with disadvantaged or vulnerable teenagers, either deliberately (with a focus on vulnerable populations, such as Marsha Wood, Christine Barter and David Berridge's 2011 research) or because of difficulty gaining access to more advantaged young people (as with the same researchers' related school-based project in 2009 focussing on a wider population). Melanie McCarry's focus group work with young people in Glasgow explored young people's perceptions of and attitudes towards relationship violence (2009; 2010). While participants generally did not condone violence, they saw it as a "normative aspect of young, adolescent and adult masculinity" (2010, p. 25), and saw violence as understandable within an intimate heterosexual relationship if the girl had violated normative gender positions. Young people also tended to feel that young men in relationships had a right to exercise control over their girlfriends, for instance, in telling her what to wear, and that she was in the wrong for not complying (2009). McCarry situates these attitudes within young people's understandings of heteronormative gender roles. Her findings resonate with earlier research on young people's attitudes, in which half of young men and a third of young women thought physical violence or forced sex against women acceptable in some circumstances (Burton et al. 1998).

This, then, indicates a context whereby, although relationship and sexual violence are professed to be unacceptable, underlying assumptions and justifications are not so condemnatory. Young people's investments in particular discourses of masculinity and femininity shape the way they interact with sexual partners, and,

importantly, also the way that they think about others' sexual interactions. My work investigates how these investments and interactions are negotiated by middle-class young people. In chapter six, in particular, I look at how blurred and complicated the lines between "normal" relationships or interactions, and "violent" relationships or interactions, can be, in practice.

Changing times?

"But the game's out there, and it's play or get played."

– Omar Little, *The Wire*.

Norms of class, gender and heterosexuality pervade the culture in which the young people of this study make their identities. Yet they are both commonly dismissed as irrelevant in an age of supposed equality, in which a neoliberal compulsion to be individual is paramount. Young people commonly assert their autonomy and independence from their backgrounds, whether of gender, peer groups or class. But their opportunities, subjectivities and relationships are still heavily shaped by the intersections of class and gender. These are not just imposed externally but deeply felt and invested in.

We have seen in this chapter that gender is not a natural fact, but is (re)constructed in iterative performances and interactions, as is sexuality. Yet the majority of people consider themselves to be male or female. Gender is felt and experienced. It is a highly important way in which individuals construct and understand their sense of self and identity. But they do so within a regulatory framework that thrives on categorising, border control and punishment of transgressions.

Exploring the gender discourses, heterosexual experiences and classed identities of young people, I am investigating not only the selves of the future, who may rewrite gender for a new generation, but the gendered selves that exist in the here and now. Their negotiations of gender, sexuality and class are not done in the same way as those of adults, but neither are they unrelated to them or merely budding versions of the adult form they will eventually achieve. They may emulate, disavow, or

otherwise draw on cultural representations and personal knowledge of adult sexualities (and they may do differently in different contexts). They must negotiate a discursive terrain where their sexuality is simultaneously seen as object of fascination and as social evil.

Normative gender/sexual subject positions can provide considerable pleasure, comfort and security. The pleasure in, desire for, and need felt for identification and identity is a central part of constructing particular forms of gendered selves. The search for identity is particularly salient within the discourses of adolescence and growing up. There can, too, be pleasure in performing gender – it is not only or primarily felt as constraint and unreachable goals. Such pleasure can be experienced from a multitude of different gendered positions: those who succeed in achieving desirable femininity in a female body, embodying the much-fabled ideal neo-liberal subject (despite the anxieties and restrictions that go with it); and those who do gender differently, subvert the norm, play with expectations, provoke traditionalists and go some way towards revealing the fiction of gender (although this may be unintentional). The projects of the latter, though they make the subjects who enact them unpopular and even put them at risk, are often seen as beacons of possibility for change, while those of the former are seen as accommodating, conforming, regulated.

But as I have already indicated, recognition of pleasure is not sufficient to put an end to analysis. It is the internalisation of norms, the ways in which a girl becomes subjectivised and comes to *feel like* a girl, want to do girl things, worry about girl things, that is the very centre of sustaining the heteronormative gender order. The "decision" to do gender differently is hardly one made freely or easily. Resistance to norms is made significantly easier if one fits in with other norms and can access resources, discursive, symbolic and economic. Nor can the effects of resignification be determined by the subject, as I have argued throughout this chapter. Performing gender differently cannot be done out of social and historical context, and cannot be unremarked upon by others; gender cannot be fully demolished by individuals. Mary Lou Rasmussen puts it thus:

> My understanding of post-structuralism's relation to gender identity is not that gender is something I want to do away with, but rather that it is something I can't do without, and definitely something that I cannot avoid, or be freed from, even if, sometimes, I might wish that I could, single-handedly, eschew gender binaries. (2009, p. 439).

Differences, and avowals of progress, often rest on exclusions and disavowals of others; narratives of progress and superiority for these young people may be built on denigration of other young people's identities. While my focus through this thesis is on the making of middle-class young people, and as such I explore their anxieties, insecurities and pains, I also highlight how this making frequently relies on disidentification and othering of working-class identities, perpetuating broader middle-class privilege and inequalities.

The question for me is whether, and how, middle-class young people are doing gender differently, and whether they can do gender differently in heterosexual relationship cultures, given their heteronormative context. And if they are doing it differently, are they merely doing it differently from their parents, or is there greater space for variety, diversity, freedom? How do their privileged positions in society shape their negotiations of their own sexuality: do they widen, or constrain, the fields of possibility (or both at the same time)?

The heterosexual relationship, in many ways signifying the cornerstone of gender relations, is perhaps not the most obvious setting for a rethinking of gender norms. But I would like to think that heterosexuality does not have to condemn all its adherents to restrictive forms of gender. It is vital to investigate the ways in which supposedly normative relations might allow space for resistance and difference. The utopia/dystopia envisaged at the beginning of this chapter, where gender and sexuality are meaningless, detached and almost non-existent, is certainly not a reality. Gender continues to constrain and regulate. Many of the old ways of doing gender and sexual relations(hips) are persistent. But the assertion that gender is not naturally determined brings with it a knowledge that gender is reworkable, changeable and changing. Young people are actively reworking their genders and

their sexualities, and changing the discourses which constitute them. The question is how, and how much, they are so doing.

In the next chapter, I set out how these broader questions shaped the research questions the rest of this thesis aims to answer.

Chapter three
"What the f***'s it got to do with you?" Researching middle-class teenagers' sex and relationships

The words that form the title of this chapter were the (perhaps understandable) response of one participant to an early question about sexual experience in the questionnaire that formed one part of my research project. The censorship is not my own: the asterisks were present in the original graffiti. I found this self-censorship a strangely endearing (though also, maybe, dispiriting) illustration of muted resistance. It seemed to encapsulate the respectability and conformity to school expectations that characterised many of the students in the middle-class school where my research was focussed, and had such a significant effect on the research itself.

In this chapter, I will explore some of the complexities and difficulties of carrying out research on sexuality and relationships with young teenagers in the school that I myself attended as a student, and examine in particular the ways in which my own classed, aged and gendered positionings, and those of the participants, came to bear on the research process and data. I begin by introducing the setting, go on to explore political and ethical perspectives, and then discuss the process of research itself. Throughout, I try to integrate reflexive insights within the body of the discussion. I also discuss ethical issues throughout, rather than singling them out. My research was, of course, approved by Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences ethics committee before carrying out fieldwork, and I followed guidelines with regards to consent and confidentiality that I discuss in this chapter. But I view ethical practice – or rather, the pursuit of ethical practice – as ongoing and situated, progressing through from initial research aims to the process of analysis, writing and dissemination. As such, I discuss moments of ethical dilemma and negotiation as they arise within the text, rather than penning them into a separate, limited section.

As introduced in chapter one, my research was aimed at asking the following broad research questions.

1. How are young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships?

2. How are middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts?

3. How are power dynamics experienced, enacted and gendered in middle-class teenage sexual and intimate relationships?

4. In what ways, and to what extent, do young middle-class people experience violent, controlling and coercive behaviour in their relationships, and how do they understand these experiences? How are these located in relation to normative discourses of heterosexual relationship cultures more widely?

To investigate these questions, I took what Jennifer Mason (2006) refers to as a "qualitatively driven approach to mixing methods": beginning from a background of "qualitative thinking", emphasising context and the "dynamics of social processes", but drawing on quantitative methods to explore different dimensions of social experience. As Mason argues, this approach is not aimed at the triangulation or corroboration of data, but rather entails "creative dialogue" between different questions and explanations (Mason 2006, p. 21). In answering the fourth question, and to a certain extent the third, I wanted to gain an overall picture of particular experiences within relationships in the population I was studying, and chose to carry out a survey of all students in a year group. Exploring all the research questions, I hoped to gain an understanding of young people's understandings, experiences and constructions of their sexual subjectivities. I chose to use interviewing as my primary method to explore these questions, in order to create a space of some privacy to explore questions of intimacy and personal negotiations of relationships, a space within which myself and participants would actively construct our own temporary

relationship. I gave volunteer interview participants the option of being interviewed alone, or with one or more friends. I will explore these issues in greater detail below.

"It's not that type of school": introduction to the setting (and the researcher)

They said all teenagers scare the living shit out of me

– My Chemical Romance, *Teenagers*

William Bishop School is situated in a very affluent area of the Home Counties, in the south-east of England.[7] It is a non-denominational, non-selective local authority maintained school. The medium-sized town in which it resides has an overwhelmingly white and mainly middle-class population, some of the UK's highest house prices outside London and a very low crime rate. William Bishop itself is oversubscribed and well-regarded as one of the best state schools in the area: in 2009, 75% of pupils achieved 5 or more A*-C grades, compared to an average of 50% for maintained schools in England, and 59% average for the local authority) (Department for Education 2009).[8] 95% continue in education post-16, with two-thirds attending the school's sixth form, and 87% of sixth-form leavers continue on to higher education. Not surprisingly, its catchment area is overwhelmingly (upper) middle class; house prices are (even post-recession) prohibitively high (and the school's proximity itself adds significant value to houses, perpetuating a cycle of advantage).

The school is large, with 2000 pupils, including 400 in the sixth form. Two large main 60s-built buildings, and several more smaller and more recent buildings, nestle in a leafy, well-kept site, surrounded by sports fields, attractive student sculpture and playgrounds. Facilities for learning, sports and creative subjects are extensive and modern, and the school has specialist status in two subject areas. Pastoral care is emphasised: a permanent head of year 7 is in charge of those just beginning at the school, and heads of subsequent years follow their students through the school, with

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[7] This is a pseudonym. Other schools and locations mentioned in the texts are also given pseudonyms.
[8] I cite 2009 figures as these were the last known results when I was carrying out my fieldwork.

the aim of keeping continuity and retaining knowledge about the students. Recently the school have introduced a fortnightly lesson in "healthy lifestyles" for those in their GCSE years (as my participants were), including (among other topics) advice on "healthy relationships", lessons in ballroom dancing, and meditation, designed to alleviate the stress induced by studying for ten or eleven GCSEs. The uniform code is strict, with a legendary deputy head known for his enforcement of the uniform rules. The regulation-length and style skirt (introduced around fifteen years ago to anger from the student body) goes some way towards regulating girls' sexuality as performed through the restrictions of school uniform; although girls are allowed to wear trousers (similarly regulated and carefully designed to be different from the boys'), few do. The summer uniform includes the freedom to wear polo shirts, differently coloured depending on what house the wearer belongs to.

I spent seven mostly unhappy years at this school. It served me well; I left in 2003 with good A level and GCSE results and a university place at Cambridge (arguably, my progress to writing this thesis is proof that it continues to serve me well). My unhappiness was little to do with the school and much to do with being a shy teenager who didn't know how to perform femininity very well (even if she didn't particularly want to), didn't have many friends, didn't get invited to parties, didn't do what teenagers are supposed to do. Returning to my school, then, provided me with mixed feelings. There was pleasure, bordering on triumph, that I had escaped from school and was returning as a (reasonably) competent adult, with not only academic success but also a social life. There were also bad memories, fear and anxiety. The feeling of panic and despair that I remembered from being an unwanted teenager standing around in a playground on the edge of a group was uncomfortably present in being an unwanted researcher, wondering how to approach a group of intimidatingly cool teenagers. Skelton (2001) details her own experiences while researching young working class women, feeling afraid and intimidated by girls who seemed "the same as the ones who had terrified [her] at school… the commonalities of class and socio-economic environment created an anxiety in me which was bound up in my own background and positionality" (ibid.: 170, p. 170). While the socio-economic environment differs, this account resonates strongly with me; all the more

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so, in my case, because of my return to the setting of my own school experiences. As someone who was a gay teenager with minimal sexual experience, for whom sexuality was the most closely-guarded secret of all, asking young people about their relationships was particularly fraught. I will return later to issues of sexuality and self-representation.

The decision to access participants through school, and not through other means such as youth clubs, was not made without consideration of the impact of the school context on the research process. Many researchers have emphasised the ways in which school, as a physical space and as a "set of institutional processes and structures" (Allen 2005a), influences research which takes place in school. The interaction of young people within school culture(s) produces very specific forms of embodied identities which cannot help but be present and difficult to escape in the context of school research. And, as David et al. (2001) point out, the notion of consent can become problematic in a school setting; Horton (2008) refers to "deeply embodied forms of obedience and consent", which were certainly in evidence during my time researching in the school. Researching sexuality in school raises particular problems. Schools are generally heavily invested in suppressing and muting expressions of sexuality (e.g. Epstein and Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002; Epstein et al. 2003), and research often brings anxieties around sexuality in educational contexts to the forefront.

However, despite these issues, I felt that school was the best option; I was interested in gathering (as far as possible) a broad range of young people, within the confines of my interest in a middle-class population, and considered school to be the most fruitful avenue. My focus on middle-class subjectivities also led me to conclude that a school approach would be necessary: as Alexandra Allan (Renold and Allan 2006; Allan 2009) and Claire Charles (2010a) found with their elite upper middle-class participants, many of the young people I spoke to were engaged in a wide range of extra-curricular activities outside school, and might be unlikely to spend time in youth clubs, which are often aimed primarily at young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. From personal knowledge of the town, I was aware that the

youth clubs available were viewed as attracting a demographic of "outsiders", those who felt they did not fit in at school, and although I appreciate the importance of the existence of these spaces and do not wish to suggest that researching these young people would have been in any way inferior, I wanted to have the opportunity of accessing a broader range of young people, including the fortunate people, the "popular kids", those who did "fit in". As my project included an element of quantitative methodology, I also wanted the chance to survey a broad population (while accepting, of course, the particularities and peculiarities of the population in question). In addition, although school is only one part of young people's lives, it does play an extremely important role, one that is compulsory and very difficult to escape. I was interested in peer cultures, including not only those chosen by young people but those forced upon them; the involuntary nature of much of teenagers' day-to-day experiences has an extremely significant effect upon their lives and subjectivities, and I felt that given this, the school context was particularly important to investigate.

Epistemological thoughts and the politics of reflexivity

If you swear that there's no truth, and who cares, how come you say it like you're right?
– Bright Eyes, *We Are Nowhere and It's Now*

In the previous chapter, I introduced some of the poststructuralist concepts of gender, power, identity and subjectivity that have shaped my approach to interpretation. These concepts suggest a particular approach to knowledge, and shape the possibilities regarding whether, to what extent, and in what ways, experience and social reality can be accessed and understood through sociological inquiry. In this section I will outline the broadly feminist, poststructuralist epistemological position taken in this thesis, while acknowledging its inherent limitations and contradictions. As Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland emphasise, any methodology involves making choices, which are influenced not only by theory, but also by political, emotional and pragmatic considerations (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002).

Poststructuralist epistemologies are varied and impossible to collect together under one umbrella. However, they all take as a point of departure humanist, Enlightenment concepts of truth and rationality. As theorised by René Descartes in the 17th century, man (the rational subject being conceptualised as male) is possessed of a rational intellect which allows him to seek truth through observing the natural world. Within his philosophy, the mind is superior to the body and the senses, and the seeker after knowledge is separate from the object of that knowledge. In the sociological tradition, Auguste Comte, seen as the founder of sociology, developed the theory of positivism, within which true knowledge about the social world can be obtained through rigorous observation. Within these traditions, there is conceived to be an external reality that is accessible to a rational observer through observation and inquiry, and can be discovered and represented.

We have already seen in the previous chapter how poststructuralism has questioned the idea of the coherent subject, and this has particular impact on the idea of the rational, objective individual observer. Poststructuralism questions the stability of an object of inquiry; observation, and the observer, inevitably change the object. Foucault, in his work on power and knowledge, posits that knowledge production is always implicated in relations of power, and claims to truth are never neutral. As he puts it:

> power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relation (Foucault 1979, p. 27).

As such, knowledge production is never outside the field of human relations; different truth claims come to be constituted through discourse, and produce particular effects. Like many feminists (e.g. Butler 1990; Hekman 1990; Weedon 1997; St Pierre and Pillow 2000; St Pierre 2000; Davies 2003), I find this understanding of the politics of knowledge to be illuminating in its ability to facilitate investigation of how ideas have come to be known as "true" (for instance, the discourses of gender, class and (hetero)sexuality explored in the previous

chapter. I do not, therefore, consider my interpretation and analysis to give access to an external reality, uncovering the truths of young people's lives. Rather, I recognise that the knowledge produced here is partial, situated, shaped by my own interaction with participants, theory and data, and produced from a subjective position.

Nevertheless, I do not, like some poststructuralists, relinquish the idea of studying experience entirely, and attempt only to investigate discourse, language and representation. I accept that experience can only be incompletely understood through mediated representations, whether that be verbal language or observation of bodies. But I situate my work (broadly) within sociology and as such, following Bev Skeggs (1997) I think it necessary to acknowledge and try to understand people's experience as an object of study. This is not to suggest that experience exists "out there" in any pure form; rather, as Joan Scott states, "Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (1988, p. 37). Although experience is undeniably discursively constituted, these discourses produce effects beyond the linguistic, as Ramazanoglu and Holland point out: "Embodiment, violence, institutionalized dominance, material resources, for example, produce experiences that are more than discourse or performativity" (2002, p. 126). Following these authors, then, I consider social and subjective experiences to be possible and worth of investigation. I will elaborate further later in the chapter on the ways these epistemological considerations shape the analysis of my data (as well as its generation).

Highlighting the situated nature of knowledge, then, also requires foregrounding the position of the researcher (or, in other cases, researchers) in constructing that knowledge, throughout the research journey from design to this text. This is in contrast to research accounts within the scientific tradition which aim to render the writer invisible; instead, as Amanda Coffey (among many others) argues, to write the self into the text (1999). While her discussion focusses on ethnography (as, indeed, does a great deal of writing on reflexivity and the authorial voice in social research), it is no less important to ask these questions of other methods. The ethnographer's

personal influence on data generation may be more easily recognised, but all methods are shaped by the researcher and author. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss my own intentional and unintentional positionings within the research process. I aim also to render these positionings visible throughout the analysis. However, I also concur with the positions of those who have urged the need for caution in reflexive writing (Adkins 2002; Skeggs 2004), asking what is achieved by, and what dangers may lie in, the "incitement to reflexive confession" within social and educational research (Burman 2006, p. 315). Bev Skeggs (2004) critiques particular modes of reflexive writing that, she argues, foreground and "reauthorize" the researcher's self at the expense of understanding participants (and exploiting participants to "shore up the composite of the academic reflexive self" (p. 131).):

> This formula of self narration often presupposes that the problems of power, privilege and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one's self into the account and proclaiming therefore that reflexivity was practiced; where, in fact, it was just about talking about one's own experiences from one's own perspective. (p. 128).

As such, I try (though may not always succeed) to use reflexivity not as a mode of confession, but as a tool to better understand how my strengths and limits shaped my relationships with my participants and my data, as I go on to explore in the next section.

Researching teenagers and researching the norm

As I have discussed in chapter two, the experiences, perspectives and desires of young people are often ignored and silenced (particularly in the realm of sexuality). Many authors working within the (fairly) recent paradigm of childhood studies have, rightly, drawn attention to this in the context of research, and to the importance of listening to young people's interpretations of their own experiences (e.g. Qvortrup 1994; Prout and James 1997; James et al. 1998; Christensen and Mikkelsen 2008), often accompanying these theoretical positions with exhortations to more participatory research with children and young people.

As I will discuss in the forthcoming analysis section, however, despite the centrality of foregrounding young people's viewpoints within my research, too narrow a focus on their own interpretations is both difficult (impossible?) and not wholly desirable. Holland et al. (2004[1998]) discuss the complications of adopting a standpoint epistemology, and the tensions between taking participants' views seriously and critically analysing when those views may be formed and negotiated through discourses that may be sexist, racist, etc. These tensions are constantly present within research with young people's peer and relationship cultures; at the most simple level, which participant's viewpoint should be prioritised when two stories conflict? As Sally Holland, Emma Renold, Nicola Ross and Alexandra Hillman caution,

> there is a real risk that children's analyses are heralded as of superior authenticity in understanding children's lives, than that of others involved in their lives, or indeed of social scientists who place qualitative data in the wider sociostructural, sociocultural or psychosocial context (Holland et al. 2010).

The positioning of young people as a wholly marginalised group, too – although it can be accurate and useful in analysis – is also a restrictive and incomplete view of the complexities of teenagers' cultures. Such a broad-brush characterisation of participants by age can obscure other vital "differences that make a difference", and silence other political considerations. As Alexandra Allan (2012) argues, there is a need to critically examine the negotiations of power in research with privileged young people. Most of the young people that I was researching, as we have already seen, were advantaged in many ways. They were likely to achieve 'success' in the educational context. These advantages were sometimes expressed through denigration of a disadvantaged other – discussing the school, for instance, in relation to schools in less affluent areas of the town, and constructing negative images of the students at these schools (cf. Reay and Lucey 2000; Reay 2004). The expression of participants' identities and perspectives, then, often relied on perpetuating problematic conceptions of others, often more disadvantaged than themselves.

In addition to the study's focus on middle-class, advantaged groups, I was also primarily interested in researching heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships. I

wanted to focus my gaze on the "ordinariness", the everydayness, of teenage sexuality, and unfortunately this remains staunchly heteronormative. Acutely aware of how (silently) indignant I would myself have been at the age of fourteen at a researcher presuming heterosexuality in her teenage objects of interest (and interested also in how queer young people might view their own and others' sexualities and relationships), I did not exclude young people who might identify with other sexualities from participating. I took care to pose initial questions in a gender-neutral way, and to leave the scope of the study open for non-heterosexual young people to participate. I did not, however, speak to any teenagers who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or otherwise queer; my survey did not ask young people to identify their sexual orientation but did ask about the sex of their partners, and only two people admitted to having had same-sex partners. I defined 'partners' in a broad sense (which I highlighted in my verbal introduction to the survey), designed to include anybody respondents had had romantic or sexual contact with. However, it was clear from interviews that respondents had, at least for this question, interpreted it more narrowly than I intended, as several girls talked of kissing other girls at parties, which was not evident from the survey question.

Self-presentation of my own sexuality and relationships was an issue I considered with some trepidation. I was initially most anxious that participants might enquire about my own teenage sexual experiences, forcing me to disclose my lack of them. This, I imagined, would both position me as hopelessly uncool, and lead me to a necessary disclosure of having been gay as a teenage student at their school, in (partial) explanation of this inexperience. Unsurprisingly, in practice participants proved to be entirely uninterested in what probably seemed to them my distant past, with the exception of occasional discussion of commonalities and differences in the school since I had been a student there. I also considered disclosure of my current sexuality. Deborah Youdell (2010) discusses the tensions and discomforts involved in negotiating whether (and when, and how) to 'come out' as a queer researcher, and the difficulties in particular of embodying a queer positioning within the constraints of educational research.

I eventually decided to disclose my bisexuality only in the event a participant specifically asked about it, or in the case it seemed appropriate in identifying with a participant who was talking about their own feelings of same-sex attraction or experience. I did not, in the event, encounter (or construct) any of these moments; although there were instances where I felt unsure about not talking about my own sexuality. For some time during the fieldwork I was going out with a man, although this relationship ended partway through my fieldwork (providing me with a timely opportunity to empathise with a participant's break-up story the next day). Again I was willing to talk about the relationship if it was appropriate or if I was asked about my relationship status (cf. Mellor (2006) on the researcher's use of his own relationship status in developing rapport and relationships with children); although like Youdell (2010) I worried that in doing so, I would be perpetuating heteronormative frameworks by obscuring other sexualities. I struggled, too, in wondering whether to challenge participants' occasional homophobic remarks, and gendered and classed expressions of distaste, as I discuss further below.

In presenting and analysing the data, then, I wanted to take a critical look at the norms and assumptions of my young participants, in an attempt to understand and partially destabilise these norms, as well as allowing a space for young people to express their own understandings and experiences. I try and employ a queer perspective in studying these norms, following empirical research into young heterosexualities which works at critically investigating and questioning heteronormativity (Epstein et al. 2001; e.g. Blaise 2005a; Renold 2005; Haywood 2008; 2008; Renold and Ringrose 2008; Ringrose and Renold 2011) I do not mean to suggest that my participants were necessarily rejecting traditional norms, nor do I mean only to focus on the subversions and resistances that are found within young people's everyday practices of heterosexualities . Rather, if it is important to research and analyse non-normative sexualities, it is surely also vital to research and analyse normative sexualities. Sara Ahmed argues that queer theory's emphasis on fluidities and transgressions builds another hierarchy, whereby "queer" lives, as transgressive, are valued higher than "gay and lesbian" "assimilationist" lives (2004). I would add to this that queer approaches sometimes (by their nature) disregard heterosexual

subjectivities as being normative and thus of little interest. While I do not, of course, mean to argue that heterosexual subjects endure the same difficulties within the restrictions of a heteronormative, gendered social order as those who cannot place themselves within the heteronorm, those who may fit more easily within the norm nevertheless remain regulated and controlled by it.

In reading and presenting the experiences of these young people, I do not consider myself to be the ultimate authority on their lives; but in this space, it must be acknowledged that I have the ultimate authority over presenting them. My own perspectives and standpoints have influenced every stage of the research, and I see this as not only inevitable but also not undesirable; I analyse and incorporate the ways in which these perspectives have affected and constructed the data. But within these constraints, I want to construct a reality that doesn't mislead, a reality that, however constructed (as all research realities are) is as close as I can come to a truth. My research aims to represent (but does not merely report) the experiences, emotions and interactions of (some) teenagers doing (hetero)sex and gender, and the patterns into which they fit (snugly or awkwardly).

Getting in

Access to the school was undoubtedly aided by my position as an ex-student. I initially approached the school via a letter to the headmaster (who was headmaster while I was a student), giving a brief outline of my research and putting it in context of recent policy, and remembering myself to him. Given the aforementioned problems that can arise with attempting to research sexuality in school, I spent some time working out how to frame my interests, eventually phrasing the focus of the project as "teenage relationships, with a particular interest in gender and problems that can arise in such relationships, including control, coercion and abuse". Although I was not entirely happy with suggesting that all teenage relationships might be problematic, I felt that pragmatically, placing my research within such a problem-based framework was a necessary compromise in order to increase the likelihood of it being seen as worthwhile (and, indeed, a significant part of my proposed research

did cover such issues). After some follow-up phone calls, my letter was passed on to the assistant headteacher in charge of child protection, Mrs White, who had taught me and my younger sister PSE (Personal and Social Education) for several years. I set up a meeting with Mrs White, and after discussing with her my provisional plans for the research, she agreed that I could carry out the research in school provided she and the headmaster could see the consent letters for participants and parents and the questionnaire first (although with certain alterations to my plans; I had wanted to research both years 10 and 11, but it was deemed that research with year 11 would be too disruptive to their GCSE studies). In the next couple of weeks, we organised a date for me to carry out the questionnaire which formed the first stage of research.

After I had prepared the questionnaire and consent letters for participants and parents and had them approved by the teachers, I was invited to address a year 10 assembly to introduce myself and my research. This was attended by all year 10 students in school on the day, as well as all the year 10 form tutors. Standing up in front of a crowd of 300-odd cross-legged 14/15-year-olds, all staring at me, was a nerve-wracking experience; as Mrs White introduced me as a visitor they were "very lucky" to have, and praised the importance of my research, I felt an acute surge of impostor syndrome. In my speech I introduced myself and my research, explaining that I was interested in their perspectives on and experiences of relationships, both good and bad, and stressing my desire to be non-judgmental. I tried to walk the line between being interesting and approachable in the eyes of the students, and appropriate in the eyes of the teachers; although my sister had approved of my mild use of "crap" in the speech, telling me this would get the teenagers on-side, as I looked out at the face of the aforementioned strict deputy headmaster, my courage to utter even this inoffensive curse deserted me and I replaced it with "rubbish".

This assembly took place the week before the questionnaire that formed the initial part of my research was due to be carried out. The opportunity to present my research to the entire school year (and to carry out research with them too) was welcome, as was the opportunity to speak to them without interruption, giving me the chance to let students see who I was and hear from me directly. The setting of the

presentation, though, no doubt affected participants' reactions to me. The presentation was a very one-way affair. There was no opportunity given for students to ask questions, and indeed I cannot imagine any would have taken an opportunity given the setting. The endorsement of the school and introduction by Mrs White, although helpful and necessary for pragmatic purposes, did align me with the school administration.

At the assembly, I gave out parental information letters, and the same letter was also sent out to parents by the school's parent email system. I had agreed with the school that an opt-out parental consent system would be appropriate for this part of the research, so parents or carers were requested to return their signed consent form to the office if they did not wish their son or daughter to participate in the survey. I did not, in the end, receive any requests from parents to opt out. Students were similarly asked to return a form if they did not wish to participate, and would be allowed to stay behind in their form rooms if they did not want to take part. I recognised that this was not a perfect arrangement, as students would inevitably be noticed by their peers in choosing to absent themselves, but there was unfortunately no easy way to rectify this. Participants did, of course, retain and use the ability to subvert the demands of research by not filling in the questionnaire, answering questions falsely, or challenging the questions (as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter). This need not be seen merely as disobedience or irritation (although they may make quantitative analysis more difficult), but can also be used as valuable insights into young people's identity constructions and subversions of the research process and school ethos, as Allen (2006) points out in her discussion of young men's sexually explicit answers and references to pornography to a questionnaire on sex education.

Researching experience(s) quantitatively

"I hate it when adults use the term 'sexually active'. What does it even mean? Am I going to like deactivate some day or is it a permanent state of being?"
– Juno MacGuff, *Juno*

Within the feminist tradition of research, and in particular research with young people, my decision to include a quantitative element of survey research in my project is perhaps anomalous. Such methods are often referred to merely in passing, in evocation of problematic research which does not pay attention to nuances or complexities in seeking objective truth. Of course, survey research does have limitations – like all research methodologies. It constructs only one version of reality, but that version can provide very valuable insights on a breadth of experience among a wide range of respondents. It falls within a tradition of critical survey research and quantitative analysis among feminist researchers. This has been particularly important in the study of gendered and sexual violence, uncovering the scale of these problems (e.g. Kelly 1988). My choice to incorporate this element of data generation was based on a desire to build on previous research, as well as to gain an ability to set the insights that would be gathered through qualitative interviews within a broader context of knowledge about some of the experiences of the population of my school.

Shortly before my own research began, Barter and colleagues conducted a wide-ranging NSPCC survey, designed to investigate experience of emotional, sexual and physical violence within teenage partner relationships (2009). This was carried out as part of a mixed-methods study into relationship abuse, incorporating interviews with young people who the researchers felt had engaged particularly closely with the survey. They looked at eight schools, and aimed to carry out fieldwork in a broad range of locations covering young people of different socio-economic backgrounds. However, the researchers encountered significant difficulties in accessing schools in more affluent areas (Barter et al. 2009, p. 14). As I was interested in similar issues, covering abuse, control and power dynamics within relationships, I wanted to use the opportunity of access to a school in a well-off area to extend the knowledge that had been gathered in the NSPCC survey. I met Christine Barter, one of the lead researchers in the study, to discuss the administration of her research project and the problems they had encountered. She also gave me permission to base some of my own questionnaire on the one used in her research. This had been developed with

substantial input from a young people's advisory group so I was keen to expand on this work.

My own survey was developed partially on the basis of this questionnaire, but substantially expanded to cover details and specifics of experience in more detail as well as tailored for a slightly older audience, both in content and presentation. After developing the final draft of the questionnaire, I piloted it with eight young people aged between 14 and 15, some in Cardiff and some in the area of the study (but in different schools), and received feedback from them on the design and content of the questionnaire. This was useful in flagging up problems and elements which were difficult to understand, as well as discovering the length of time the questionnaire would take to complete. Feedback from the pilot resulted in my changing the layout and altering some questions to be more specific in their questioning. Some individuals also raised issues of a more general nature about the targeting of the survey, since much of it dealt with asking about sexual and relationship experiences, with a strong focus on negative experiences, and as such they did not feel it was relevant to them. Although I accepted this as a fair comment, it was unavoidable given the research aims. I did ensure that in introducing it the survey I acknowledged that I understood the questions would not be relevant to everyone and apologised that some would have less to say.

The majority of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) asked about respondents' experiences of a variety of violent, abusive and controlling behaviour in relationships, and experiences of sexual violence within and outside relationships. It included follow-up questions on the impacts of these experiences, as a major criticism of much survey research into gendered violence is the focus on prevalence of particular actions without understanding of their effects (Stanko and Lee 2003; Cook and Goodman 2006; Johnson 2006; Barter 2009). I also asked respondents to attribute perceived reasons for these actions, to explore perceptions of intent and meaning. The questionnaire began with demographic information on age, gender, ethnicity, family make-up and nationality, and a section on relationship experiences more widely. I included a section asking whether young people had ever committed

any acts of violence against their partners, as I did not wish to focus the research gaze solely on victims. However, analysis of this data is not included in my thesis, as only a limited number of respondents completed this section. In retrospect, I would not include questions on committing violence in the same survey as those on experiencing violence. My quantitative data were entered into SPSS 16/17 and I carried out descriptive and bivariate analysis using that software.

The survey itself was carried out in lesson time, but during an extended form time set aside for target-setting, and took place in one of the school halls, which had room for approximately 150 people sat in exam-style conditions, and in the nearby dining hall (as there were not enough tables in the hall itself). The school year consisted of 310 students, of which 278 took part in two sittings of around half an hour each (including introduction). I introduced the survey, emphasising anonymity and confidentiality. I explained the format, clarified some of the terms used and forewarned participants that the questionnaire dealt with negative and potentially abusive experiences, stressing that I was aware these would not be relevant to everybody. The assistant headteacher who had been my main contact also spoke at this point, again emphasising anonymity and asking students to answer honestly, an intervention which I felt was not necessarily helpful in that it again heightened my own alignment with the school; and also telling them to be quiet – "as if you're doing an exam, but it's not an exam".

While participants filled in the survey, I and some teachers supervised from the front of the hall; at one point, the teacher had to leave to attend to a query, and I was the sole adult in the room. I realised at that point that it was only my presence that was drawing the line between a group of 150 young people talking, interacting, acting out their friendships and rivalries, and a group of 150 school students following the orders of a teacher; I had become the embodiment of school discipline. It was at once strangely exhilarating, and deeply disconcerting. There was little to no "disruption" from students. The smooth running of the survey contrasted with what Christine

Barter reported from her experience researching similar issues[9]; this was partly an artefact of the different settings used (Barter's study was conducted in classrooms). It was also a production of the middle-classed educational context, in which "appropriate pupilness" (Kofoed 2008) is readily embodied.

After a certain amount of time, students were allowed to leave and return to their form rooms when they had finished, in order to allow for the differential times at which they would complete the survey. This was no doubt a substantial contributing factor in the rate of non-completion, but I felt it preferable than requiring everyone to stay longer than they wanted. The formality of the setting, although problematic in some ways, was advantageous in that it meant students could not see what others were answering. Given the sensitive and personal nature of the questions, I considered this to be preferable to carrying out the survey in classrooms, where it would have been much more difficult to keep answers private. All students had an information sheet giving my contact details, and also including helpline phone numbers and websites relating to sex, relationships and relationship abuse, and were asked to take this with them (which the vast majority did).

I have set out ways above in which I tried to foreground ethical concerns in the quantitative part of my fieldwork. Nevertheless, I was and remain aware of the ethical dilemmas with carrying out a survey with young people in school on such personal issues (some of which are explored above). Participants were given little opportunity to participate nor to shape the agenda. I situate these dilemmas within the complications of a wider political project: it is only through knowledge and investigation of gendered inequalities and violences that we can hope to make things better, for a wider population. But I recognise the inevitable contradictions of this standpoint, and the ways that power is implicated in the production of this knowledge.

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[9] Personal conversation.

Interviews: talking about sex

I chose to follow up the survey with in-depth interviews, giving participants the choice of whether to talk with me individually or with a friend. Interviews, of course, are a constructed and "artificial" interaction; but like other contexts, they are a social space in which people (re)construct their gendered, sexual and classed identities. I explore later in this chapter some of the complexities of these constructions as played out in the interview setting. Sexuality, in one sense, is a strange subject to research through interviews, as it is so rooted in concepts of embodiment, the physical and the non-verbal. But, as Plummer emphasises, talking about sex, and sexual storytelling, are pervasive in Western culture at the start of the 21st century (Plummer 1995).

The stories produced in interviews cannot (and should not) be taken as uncomplicated reflections of truth in practice, as I discuss further in the analysis section below. But the ways in which these stories are produced provide deep insights into relationships and identities. Interviews worked as a "collaboration" (Gubrium and Holstein 2002), generating detailed and insightful accounts very specific to the situation, co-produced in the interaction between researcher and participant(s). In contrast to larger group interviews and ethnographic observation, interviews can be highly productive for allowing young people to share personal thoughts and reflection. It is for this reason that I chose to use this method. Researching sexuality in any context is likely to be sensitive, but particularly so with young people. I discuss in chapter four the social contexts of sexuality, which make it extremely difficult to speak about freely. Much research with young people, as I have discussed in chapter two, has foregrounded their public talk about sex, particularly in regard to young men's often homophobic and misogynist discourse (e.g. Steinberg et al. 1997; Pascoe 2007). I am not arguing that the talk produced in interviews is more "authentic" than that produced in peer group interaction, but that it provides an opportunity for different constructions of intimacy and gender. Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman discuss how boys produced "softer" versions of masculinity in individual interviews than focus groups, speaking more

about emotions and being more "serious" (2002, p. 33). Similarly, Lynn Michell (1999) found that it was only in one-to-one interviews that individuals would express their feelings about their place in the school "pecking order", and about their personal vulnerabilities and marginalisations. This was clear at many points in my own interviews, when young people shared thoughts that they explicitly told me they had not shared with friends. There were, though, instances in paired interviews when participants' conversational collaboration seemed to open up space for discussing particular issues further.

My interviews were open-ended; I did have an agenda and issues I was interested in pursuing, but I did not always ask all my questions, nor ask them in the same order. I preferred to follow participants' lead in pursuing conversational paths that seemed fruitful or of interest to them, giving young people the chance to drive the interaction as far as possible, and to shape their own narratives in ways that they chose, as Claire Maxwell (2007) describes in her interviews on young people's sexual identities and practices. I did not always pursue lines of questioning that seemed uncomfortable, as I was wary of asking young people to disclose more than they wanted (Kvale 1996; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007), particularly given the school context discussed above. But equally, I attempted to create a "conversationally safe space" for narrating difficult or upsetting stories (Owens 2006, p. 1162), aware that young people had volunteered and might have little opportunity to speak about their sexuality in private settings.

Getting to the interview room

When carrying out the survey, all participants had on their desk a sheet asking them to volunteer their interest in being interviewed. I did not have any criteria for inclusion in the interview stage beyond desire to participate (although I did hope for a mixture of boys and girls). They were all asked to tick yes or no and return the sheet (giving their names if ticking yes), in order that participants could express their interest without others knowing. This sheet was returned separately from the surveys, to retain the anonymity of the questionnaire answers. Asking for volunteers

for interviews at this point will have influenced the responses. The questionnaire focussed heavily on potentially negative and abusive sexual and relationship experiences, and those who found this irrelevant to their own experiences may have been more reluctant to take part. I did, however, make clear, in my oral introduction to the survey and on the volunteer sheet, that the interviews would be more broadly focussed. In addition, since part of my interest and some of the interviews' focus would remain on problems and conflicts, to hide this would have been ethically problematic, even if it did result in more volunteers. (Some may have volunteered precisely to put me right.) I also emphasised that I was not only interested in talking to those who had a lot of relationship experience, but it is inevitable in a project of this focus that my interview sample eventually consisted of those with more relationship experience than the average (as indicated by the questionnaire responses).

Forty-seven young people responded positively to the request for interviews, and I then set up a meeting with those young people. I was reluctant to meet them as a group before speaking to them individually, as I felt that they might be unhappy with all the other interview participants knowing that they had signed up. However, the school would not allow me to move forward without a group meeting, as Mrs White felt I needed to speak to them as a group in order to explain child protection guidelines and the limits of confidentiality. Unfortunately, the notice asking students to come to the meeting was not very well circulated, so only around 20 attended in the first instance. Mrs White spoke for what seemed to me (and to the participants) an overly long time, stressing that I would need to report to the school any information that indicated they were 'at risk'. I was worried about this meeting, fearing that Mrs White's talk would discourage many students from taking part, but in the event I felt that she gave enough leeway, emphasising also that the school wanted participants to be honest and that, for instance, talking about under-age sexual activity would not be a cause for me to repeat their information to the school. I also spoke to the students, reiterating the importance of confidentiality and that I would not tell the school anything they had told me before discussing it fully with

them first. I then gave out letters for their parents, information for the students and opt-in consent forms for them both.

The procedure we initially set up for arranging interview times involved emailing students at their school e-mail address. This proved largely ineffective, as the vast majority of students did not use their school e-mail address (as teachers can read all their school emails, this is not surprising), although I did set up a few interviews this way. Throughout the following months, I set up two further group meetings with those who had not attended the first (or who had attended, but had not signed up for an interview time or returned their consent forms), asked students in a class, begged interview participants to remind their friends to sign up, and at one point, after a chance meeting with Mrs White in the corridor, pulled a participant who had forgotten her interview time out of her science lesson. I ended up with even more sympathy for teachers and school secretaries than I previously had, as well as a greater respect for the school IT system which could see where each student was at every point of the day.

Interviewing in the school

I eventually interviewed 21 participants, of whom 12 were girls and 9 boys, and all were white. I gave participants the choice of whether they preferred to carry out their interview alone or with a friend, depending on which made them feel most comfortable. Some interviews were conducted in pairs (and one in a group of three), and others individually: I interviewed three girls and two boys individually, three pairs of girls, and two pairs of boys; no participants chose to be interviewed in mixed-sex groups. The interviews took place in one of two small meeting rooms designed for one-to-one or small group meetings, in which we sat either around a round table, or across from each other with a low table between us. These spaces were quiet, private and removed from the general bustle of school activity as well as from participants' normal experiences of school (several commented that they had not previously known of the rooms' existence). This did mean that I missed out on some of the very interruptions and distractions that can provide insights into

everyday goings-on. Anderson and Jones discuss the different "lived spaces" of young people's everyday practices that they discovered through carrying out school interview research in classrooms and store-cupboards (2009). But while the classroom context provided insights into young people's "'hanging out' practices", these interviews were also constricted by the "classroom 'lifescape'" (ibid.: 295, p. 295), by the presence of teachers and other students. The privacy of the setting I used was advantageous in allowing for talk to go on undisturbed, which was particularly important given the personal nature of many of the topics we were discussing. Nevertheless, it remained a fairly formal setting.

I attempted to position myself as far as possible as somebody separate from participants' teachers and the workings of the school. This was constrained, of course, by the need to keep gatekeepers on-side. I dressed informally whenever I visited the school. I did not, though, try to emulate the style of the young people I was speaking to, as the inevitable failed attempt could be just as alienating (cf. Abell et al. 2006 on the backfiring of self-disclosure as an attempt to empathise with young people in interviews). Participants were aware of my self-positioning but perhaps not entirely convinced by it: one boy, when I was speaking to a meeting of potential interview participants, asked me a question with the following: "Miss – or are we not allowed to call you Miss?" Such difficult negotiation of roles is a common feature in school fieldwork (e.g. Epstein 1998a; Delamont 2002; Smith 2007), and I was aware that I needed to downplay my association with the school authorities. I often used my status as an ex-student to try and create common ground, sharing memories and opinions especially of teachers. Participants were clearly conscious, particularly at the beginning of interviews, of the "danger" of talking to me given my association with the school, with several people using a variant on "but don't tell Mrs White!" after disclosing information and one boy asking me if it was OK to swear (I encouraged it by fairly regular incidental swearing myself, but this tended not to override participants' sense of acceptable behaviour in school).

Because of the particular limitations and constraints of the data generated in the school context, I planned to carry out follow-up interviews with young people

outside of school, in their homes or in town. However, although I emailed all participants several times in an attempt to set up meetings (and several replied suggesting they were willing to take part), in the end I only managed to arrange follow-up interviews with four participants. Several of the participants who did reply took several weeks to do so; speculating, some of the lack of response may be because participants did not use e-mail regularly, interacting with their friends through Facebook instead (boyd, 2009, has reported such a decline in email use among US teens). Although I did consider approaching participants via Facebook, I felt that given my initial approach through the official channels of the school, it would be inappropriately intrusive to contact them this way.

Gender, power and friendships in the interview space

The majority of my interviewees were female, which I had anticipated at the beginning of my project. Of course, my sample is not large enough to speak definitively of differences in interview experiences between male and female participants, but dynamics differed in interviews; this was based not only on gender but also, importantly, on whether I was talking to young people individually or with friends. In common with the experience of Highet (2003), pairs and groups often proved very productive in sparking conversation and leading to greater depth in stories and depictions, as well as providing insights into the social interactions between the participants themselves. Participants would often allude to their friend's past experiences, prompting them to share more than they might otherwise have volunteered. The interaction was occasionally awkward, as when I asked one participant about a particular event and in response she (slightly reluctantly) told a story that her friend had not previously known (although the two were very close). The paired interviews were also slightly better at eliciting stories and information about wider peer cultures and general attitudes towards and negotiations of relationships, than they were at letting young people speak about their own relationships. I was keen not to cause problems by making participants reveal more than they wanted to in front of their friends, so there were times when I would not

question participants as far in a paired interview, as I would have had the interview been individual. Although I did ask questions of participants individually in paired interviews, it became difficult sometimes to pursue one line of questioning about one person's relationship, as the other participant would then be left out of the conversation.

Individual interviews, of course, came with their own different dynamics. Many participants did share information that they would not have done in paired interviews (but presumably chose to speak individually partially because they wanted to share such information). As a generalisation, girls tended to be more forthcoming and initially expansive in interviews than boys (although the cultural stereotype of teenage boys as inarticulate was certainly not upheld). This was doubtless influenced both by my gender and by a host of socio-cultural factors. While some ethnographers have rightly drawn attention to the problems that may arise in analysis from paying greater attention to boys' often louder or more obviously visible actions in classrooms than girls' quieter behaviour (Gordon et al. 2005), it would be problematic and overly simplistic to see interviews as providing a better space for girls to be heard. Femininity, particularly middle-class femininity, often comes with an expectation of helpfulness, and also of accommodation with school identities. Much research has explored the frequent association of anti-school attitudes with masculinity (e.g. Willis 1977; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Francis 1999) and teachers' different reactions to girls' and boys' "misbehaving" in school. While discipline in the school, as I have already discussed, was generally good, boys were still more likely to subvert lessons, and thus were likely less immediately willing to be accommodating and helpful in the research process. The focus on relationships also meant that girls were perhaps more ready to speak at length, as masculinity – particularly young masculinity – is often (although not always) bound up with ideas that talking about emotions and relationships is a feminine and therefore dangerous activity (Allen 2007b).

Within interviews, it was often difficult to work out how to respond to opinions and attitudes that I disagreed with politically, in particular, homophobic remarks and

attitudes towards women, as well as classed expressions of distaste. I struggled with the battling instincts at once to argue with participants and put forward my own view, and to keep quiet in order not to "rock the boat" and to keep participants feeling that I was "on their side". Kathryn Morris-Roberts discusses the ethical dilemmas she faced in work with friendship groups, being drawn into "colluding with compulsory heterosexuality" (2004) through joining in practices of exclusion and not objecting to "homophobic banter". While in theory she supported a "politics of intervention", she says that in reality this proved "aspirational" (p. 221). Sarah O'Flynn also reports feeling uncomfortable when one of her participants expressed homophobic views, and expressing "astonishment and disapproval" but not putting forward any counter-arguments (2007, p. 54). I faced a similar dilemma in one interview when a participant talked incredulously and with disgust about another school – "and they have these two girls there who are lesbians, they like hold hands in school and stuff". I too did not explicitly disagree, although I did express my surprise and scepticism at their attitudes. I tended to leave problematic remarks unconfronted, although I did not express agreement. I felt that since my time with these young people was limited, my influence over their opinions would also be limited. I was also reluctant to shut down these conversations around issues of sexuality and gender. I felt that participants were aware of an official school disapproval of (overt) homophobia or sexism, and that they already often made efforts to position themselves within discourses they felt would be considered appropriate by adults. Ethically, although I felt uncomfortable letting such instances pass, I felt that enabling young people to express their own attitudes as freely as they were willing to would in the end be of more ethical and political advantage (I did not want to produce an unrealistically optimistic picture); and that in any case a check from me would hardly significantly alter their perspectives, and be primarily of use in assuaging my own conscience. This, of course, is hardly a situation unique to the research process: similar situations arise daily in negotiating social life.

The question of collusion with problematic peer dynamics also arose for me in relation to young people's friendship networks and social hierarchies. I found myself particularly interested in talking to (and about) a particular group of girls, who as a

group were described variously (mostly by outsiders) as "popular" and "bitchy". Being a researcher afforded me privileged access to a group I never had the opportunity to join at school. While I don't feel that I neglected other participants, I did ask many other participants specifically about this group in addition to talking about their own friendship groups. The entangled nature of peer cultures and the way in which the "popular kids" were talked about and viewed in terms of spectacle means that I feel this questioning was valid, revealing and useful, as I explore further in chapter four. Nevertheless, I recognise that some of my interest stemmed from a mixture of envy and fascination at these girls' lifestyles and position in their peer groups; I identified with the desire to gossip about them.

Class, articulacy and narratives

Interviews are sometimes seen as problematic methods because they privilege the verbal narrative, and the forms of narration open to people are bound up with dynamics of privilege and power. The interview format encourages reflexive discussion of the individualised self, and, as Skeggs argues, such self-reflexivity is a resource that is available to and deployed disproportionately by middle-class people (2004; 2008). Middle-class young people may well have more experience and confidence in speaking to strange adults and shaping their own narratives in a way they think is appropriate for adult listeners. David Buckingham discusses his research in school on children's relationship with media, noting that middle-class participants were more likely to "perceive the interview context in 'educational' terms, and to adjust their responses accordingly" – for instance, by discussing media in a framework of critical discourses relating to its perceived negative effects – and to "defer to the interviewer's power" (2000, p. 113). I would concur with these perspectives. For me, it is precisely the classed nature of the interactions and narratives produced by my participants in interviews that was vital in analysis, and central to understanding their constructions of their identities and relations: as Bev Skeggs, Nancy Thumim and Helen Wood term it, "how methods make class" (2008).

Simon Charlesworth explores at length the "articulatory styles" of working class people – primarily, working class men – and the ways in which language is central to lived class identities. Working class speech, he says, is marked by "a practical injunction for honesty and expressivity, that propels participants to outspokenness that might shock were it not part of the logic of the spaces working class people claim as their own" (2000: 214). There is an "obligation to be natural, expressive and open" (226). While not wishing to reify class divisions and differences, my experience of interviewing middle-class young people was one where they were sometimes naturally guarded, and confident in choosing what to share and what to conceal (many participants, for instance, concealed the names of people they were talking about). I recognise that this is not merely a product of their class, but of the entanglement of their class, age, the school context and the interaction with myself as researcher. As Skeggs and colleagues' middle-class participants used "scholarly and critically distanced views on 'reality' television, involving lengthy elaborations" (2008: 9), so my participants discussed themselves, their relationships and other teenagers in articulate, measured and often distanced language. They were aware of adults' perceptions of teenagers, of talking to me as an adult, and tailored their speech registers accordingly: Lucy notably observed "I do think that social networking sites can be a problem". Participants' self-conscious negotiation of my (perceived) expectations and of adult discourses around sexuality was frequently visible and will be a point that I return to in following chapters, particularly chapter seven.

The process of qualitative analysis

The process of qualitative analysis is an ongoing and iterative one. Making meaning, and making connections, began as I was carrying out my interviews (as I had ideas and noted down impressions and emotions), influenced my data generation (as thoughts generated from previous interviews affected how I pursued particular lines of inquiry), and has continued through the process of writing (as particular ideas fall into place – or fail to – as I try to place them in a coherent order). As such, as

Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson suggest, analysis was not a "distinct stage" of research (1996, p. 6), but was a reflexive activity embedded in the broader project. The period of interviewing spanned the school summer holidays, with some of the initial interviews carried out in the summer term, and some in the autumn. This gave me a significant period of time to think through the data I had already generated, and pursue connections in the forthcoming period of interviewing.

In categorising, coding, thinking through, dividing and connecting, I was trying to represent how young people were creating themselves as subjects in the specifically located space of the interview, the ways and extents to which they invested in particular gendered and classed discourses, as well as their representations of their own experiences. As Miller and Glassner (2004/1997) argue, it is not necessary to choose between form and content in the analysis of interviews; while always interpreting the interview as a situated form of interaction, I still analyse the interview talk for its mediated representation of experience, as I have discussed previously.

To aid in the process of formal analysis, I used qualitative analysis computer software (CAQDAS). Specifically, after audio-recording and transcribing the text of all interviews, I entered the transcripts into NVivo 8. As many writers have cautioned, CAQDAS is not capable of doing the thinking and is not a substitute for analysis, but it can be a helpful tool for aiding organisation, access and retrieval of data, and for developing themes and concepts through categorisation. I began by coding the data, looking for themes and patterns across the body of interviews. Throughout initial coding, I employed both "in vivo" and "sociologically constructed" codes (Strauss 1987), categorising both according to participants' own talk and use of language, and according to theoretical interpretations based on previous literature and related to my research questions. In this sense, analysing and interpreting participants' talk was also a process of going "beyond the data" (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Silverman 2000), making linkages with wider thought.

The coding, categorisation, splitting and retrieval of data can create problems of decontextualisation, which may be exacerbated by the ease of these techniques in CAQDAS (Fielding and Lee 1998). A particular point made by a participant on a particular topic may be coded and retrieved alone, and thus the meaning that it carries in its context (why is it said at this particular point? What has just happened?) can be lost. This is particularly important in a study exploring the discursive construction of identity, where talk is not being taken at face value but also for how it functions in the conversation. In order to combat this decontextualisation, I frequently returned to reading the interviews as a whole, which was made easier by the relatively small dataset. I also sometimes revisited the recordings when interpreting particular sections of data, in an attempt to combat what Steinar Kvale has called the "violence" of transcription, where the nuances of tone are lost in translation to the page.

Listening for talk

I have already explored the situational context of the interview interaction, and some of the complications, limitations and possibilities of interpreting talk and relating it to experience. The interview as a genre, which carries particular conventions and expectations, is widespread and well-known in western society through media (Plummer 1999); both interviewer and interviewee[10] are aware of and shaped by these conventions. So throughout analysis, and through the thesis, I take this context into account, not only through understanding and acknowledging limitations, but also through using the context as a source of data, interpreting how young people make use of the interview setting to perform gender, class, sexuality and age (Allen 2005b). I was looking for the "discursive positionings" (Davies and Harre 1990) taken up by participants within conversation; how they positioned themselves as particular kinds of subject through interaction with me, and, in group interviews, with the other participants. I wanted to explore what Walkerdine et al. refer to as "subjectification (the production of 'the subject' in discursive practices) as well as

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[10] While I use the term "participant" throughout the thesis, here I use "interviewee" to draw attention to interpretations of the setting based in prior experience, which cannot be wholly erased no matter how an interview is carried out.

subjectivity (the lived experience of being a subject)" (Walkerdine et al. 2001, p. 176) – a matter as much of what was not said (as I discuss shortly) as of what was. How did young people produce themselves in the context of the interview? What kind of narratives did they tell about themselves and about others?

Analysing the words that young people used, and the way they used them, I was reading for, as Holland and Ramazanoglu summarise, "ideas, beliefs, norms, discourses, reproduction of culture, and their effects" (2002), as they circulated around gender, sexuality and class. I sought to examine the underlying discourses of heteronormative masculinity and femininity, and how young people negotiated these in their talk about their own and others' experiences. As I analysed the interviews I became increasingly focussed on the situation of subjects in their wider social contexts, and the ways in which subjectivity was being produced through interaction with and imagination of others. I use the term "relationship cultures" throughout the thesis, to illustrate the ways in which young people's (sexual) subjectivities were bound up with their friends and peers, and to highlight the extent to which young people's peer cultures were heterosexualised within school. Analysis of this intersubjectivity was differently possible within group and individual interviews, and would, of course, have been different again through ethnographic observation.

Listening for silence

Seeking out discourses, practices, and identity constructions is partially a matter of looking for patterns and connections, for how young people try and make themselves as coherent subjects. But, as I have discussed above, identity is *not* coherent. As Skeggs puts it, for the working class women she researched with, "searching for coherence is an impossibility, an ideal and a fantasy" (1997, p. 29). So it is just as important to seek out the contradictions, differences and tensions in young people's accounts; the "discursive contradictions" that young people "live with and navigate... on an everyday basis" (Ringrose 2008, p. 41). Thus I paid particular attention through the analysis to looking for equivocation, denials, disavowals, downplayings, and minimisations of emotions, statements and experiences. This is not to suggest that my interpretation of young people's experience is superior to their own, but to

argue that not all positions are consciously known, willingly accepted, or freely shared (Hollway and Jefferson 2005), and that people represent their experiences in particular ways for particular reasons.

In a study on young sexuality and class, silences speak loudly. As mentioned in the previous chapter, class is often unmentionable, only referred to by proxies, uncomfortable to speak about (Savage et al 2001). For young people, talk about sexuality, too, is often uncomfortable, and for me (as I have explored earlier) it was often difficult to navigate the lines of ethical practice, working out what was acceptable to ask. The body, too, is central to understanding sexuality, but often unspoken. This is particularly so in relation to teenage girls, for whom desire as embodied feeling is often difficult to articulate (Tolman 2005, Fine 1988). It is, perhaps, especially difficult to understand young people's relations to their bodies through the verbal method of the interview in the desexualised space of the middle-class school. But I agree with Sara McClelland's argument that feminist researchers need to excavate and allow space for girls' desire, *"even when it is denied or stuttered"* (2008, p. 255, emphasis in original). As such, I have tried to read through to spaces for pleasure and desire, as well as looking for times and techniques through which desire is denied, disavowed, silenced, by girls themselves and by others.

Throughout my thesis, I have aimed to remain aware of the responsibilities of analysis: that is, as Holland and Ramazanoglu put it, "interpretation is a key point in the exercise of power" (2002, p. 116). Although I am critical (sometimes, in both senses of the word) of the young people I have studied, I aim to represent them fairly, appreciate their contradictions and multiplicities, and produce knowledge that may work towards improving a small part of the world.

Conclusions: creating a story

In this chapter, I have set out the parameters and objectives of my research project, and the methodology that I used to investigate my questions. I chose to use a questionnaire method in order to gain a broad picture of the extent of relationship

violence within this particular middle-class school population – although, as I discuss in chapter six, this picture is partial. In-depth individual and paired interviews were chosen to allow a space for exploration of young people's perspectives, understandings and experiences. My analysis of interviews sought to illuminate experience and practices, to see the discourses that shaped young people's subjectivities, and to explore the tensions and complications in young people's lives.

The shape of my four analysis chapters begins with a wide-angle view, looking in chapter four at the social contexts of heterosexuality within my participants' peer cultures. In the following two chapters, I focus in more detail on intimate partner relationships and on young people's negotiations of their own sexual subjectivities. Chapter five examines the everyday micro-practices of heterosexuality within relationships. Chapter six explores the darker side of sexual and intimate interaction, investigating gendered and sexual violence. Finally, chapter seven draws the lens back again and situates young people's negotiation of their heterosexual subjectivities in the context of age and class.

Throughout the analysis that follows in the coming chapters, I will continue to foreground the ways in which method produced and constructed the data about young people's lives that I go on to discuss. In the next chapter, I move on to analysis of the relationship cultures that shaped young people's negotiation of sexual subjectivity in and outside school.

Chapter four
Public displays of affection: the social contexts and cultures of teen sexuality

Sexuality is very personal, and often seen as private – indeed, as the most private area of our lives. But it is also, crucially, deeply social. As I argued in chapter two, sexual subjectivities, identities, behaviours, practices and relationships all take place in social context, with these different spheres interacting, influencing and overlapping with each other, as well as potentially conflicting. Valerie Hey, in her classic ethnography of girls' friendships, argues that to look at girls' friendships separately from "an analysis of the patriarchal social structures of school and community" is impossible: "sexual divisions are the terms through which we encounter the social world" (1997, p. 14). Yet it would be just as accurate to state: social divisions are the terms through which we encounter the sexual world. The intertwining of social networks and sexuality is particularly acute – and inescapable – for teenagers at school. As we saw in chapter two (and will explore further in chapter seven), middle-class young people's subjectivities are deeply implicated within educational contexts. For my participants, the school produced social contexts from which it was almost impossible to withdraw without serious educational and social repercussions. In a middle-class environment where academic achievement was particularly valued, physical escape through truancy was rarely considered an option; although, as we will see later, there were various ways in which young people tried to withdraw, or stay detached, from the pressures of the knowledges of the peer group. Young people may, of course, form important friendships and social networks outside of school, but they nevertheless remain caught within those that circulate inside school.

As such, then, it is impossible to begin to understand the ways in which young people negotiated their heterosexual subjectivities within sexual and romantic relationships without simultaneously exploring their negotiation of and shaping by heterosexualised peer cultures which surrounded them. This chapter introduces and

analyses those peer cultures and the ways in which they were shot through with heterosexuality. The claustrophobia of the school social network (heightened still further by the communication made possible by technologies) formed a very particular set of constraining conditions. This chapter explores those conditions, and also looks into those forms of heterosexuality taking place outside of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. I will discuss how sexual subjectivities were inhabited and mediated, not only in sexual acts and relations(hips), but also in the storytelling and social relations that surrounded them. Far from being private, sexuality was often highly visible, and talked about. Relationships, and sexual encounters, were entangled within the networks of friendships and friendship groups. Friendships and relationships were often, though not always, competing forces (as I will show in more detail in the next chapter).

I should point out here that, as with all studies where participation is voluntary, my participants were not necessarily reflective of the experiences of the year group as a whole. In particular, they may have had more relationship experience than average, given their interest in volunteering. My survey data indicated that 78% of respondents had had a relationship in the past (I did not define 'relationship' here, choosing to let people use their own understandings) and that 19% were in a relationship at the time of responding. The experience of interview participants did not seem to dramatically differ in percentage terms from the picture given by the survey data, but I am aware that the perspectives and experiences of those who had little relationship experience are likely missing from this picture. Without an extended ethnographic study, my picture of the landscape of social groups in the school year was necessarily incomplete and blurred in places, but I did build up an understanding of some of the relations and conflicts between and within them, and the ways in which these relations and conflicts interrelated with sexuality.

Stories and the burden of being known

Young people's social knowledges about their potential and actual partners shaped the ways they approached them, and within school they were trapped in the nets of knowing and having been known since they were 11.

> Zelda:[11] that's why you don't wanna go out with anyone at school, they're just not mysterious enough
> Link: Also you've known them since they were like 12, and you've known them since they were really short [...]
> Link: Yeah, you don't know if they were really fat when they were –
> Zelda: I was really fat when I was young

This exchange between Zelda and Link (after which they continued to discuss Zelda's 'fat' past with humour) speaks to the bodily anxieties and appraisals that form such a central part of doing sexuality in the public eye. This intersects with the heightened embodied awareness of physiological change and difference that comes with adolescence – during which time, as Catherine Driscoll says, sexual difference "makes vividly visible something apparently prior to culture but also instantiates the self's place in culture" (2002, p. 87). It also highlights the limits of performance, as discussed in chapter two: while a young person might try to perform gender differently (by working on their bodily presentation through clothing, adopting a different style or spending time with different groups of friends), the power of that performance lies in how it is read/interpreted by others. Crucially, that reading is filtered not only through the actors' social contexts at the time of interaction, but also through the reader's prior perceptions and mutual historical awareness.

This consciousness of being known, and the awareness that performing sexuality in certain ways would make one known differently, was, as we will see, ever-present. Gossip about other people and their (rumoured) sexual encounters and practices was a key part of life. Such talk and gossip served in many ways as a form of entertainment and diversion, in a similar way to talk and gossip about alcohol

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[11] As throughout, these pseudonyms are of participants' own choosing. "Zelda" suggested hers first (as something of a joke), and "Link" was then named after the main character in the Legend of Zelda computer game series. Link in the games is a man, but the girls did not specifically comment on this (although the discussion was not very serious).

consumption (and experiences while under the influence) has been discussed in other research – as a "social currency, which stretched far beyond the initial consumption activities" (Johnson 2011, p. 398). Indeed, when discussing the importance of relationships in their lives (a question which I asked most participants at the beginning of the first interview), several participants gave a variation on Lucy's comment:

> Lucy: it's just a bit of gossip, to create conversations with.

Lucy's use of the modifier "just" serves discursively to minimise the importance of relationships, as well as "gossip". In chapter seven, I discuss further the nuances of young people's downplaying of sexuality and relationships. Here, though, I point out Lucy's self-aware positioning in relation to talk about sex; she is not *relaying* gossip, but talking *about* gossip, and her choice of the term "gossip" – with its connotations of insignificance, pettiness, and its related association with femininity (Rysman 1977; Collins 1994) – carries an implication that she understands this talk to be unimportant. In addition, I would suggest that the dismissal inherent in the word "just" does not reflect the vital importance of talk and narration of sexual stories as a part of young people's social cultures. Among my participants, parties, in particular, became a talking point and focus of spectacle. Stories circulated widely and swiftly about things that had happened at parties, often fixing people's (especially girls') perceived sexualities and identities in the light of particular acts.

Through telling such stories – both among their friends, and to me in their interviews – young people negotiated their own sexual identities in their identifications and disidentifications with others. Certain friendship groups, in particular, provoked particular fascination both from those who were part of the group and those who weren't. The "popular group" – their parties, friendships, rivalries and sexual encounters – were in the spotlight, and their position as "popular" and talked-about was very much connected to their reputation as more sexually active, more sexually visible and more heterosexually desirable than other groups. Participants' fascination surrounding these young people was absorbed and is reinforced by both my questioning and my analysis. I asked participants who were not part of these groups

to tell me second-hand stories; my interest was piqued by the visibility and publicity of their performances of sexuality, but also, I think, by the distance between these young people's experience of life and my own teenage (in)experiences. As I retell the stories, I refocus the perpetual gaze on the sexualities of the popular girls. I commented in my fieldwork diary after one interview:

"this is better for gossip than data" (5 July 2010).

This chapter, then, is in one sense another round of Chinese whispers, of gossip. But, as Ken Plummer tells us, sexual stories are a central resource for telling the self at the start of the 21st century (1995) – although the repertoire of sexual stories available for teenagers to tell is a very particular and constrained one. And these narratives formed an essential part of how young people navigated and constructed their own sexual selves.

Queen bees and wannabes: the 'popular group' and despicable femininities[12]

Popularity in school and sexual desirability/action

"I'm sorry that people are so jealous of me, but I can't help it that I'm so popular"
– Gretchen, *Mean Girls*

The concept of the school "popular group" is deeply embedded in popular culture, and bound up (as many researchers have found, and as I shall go on to emphasise) with particular notions of teen femininity. Researchers have frequently highlighted the importance of being seen as "popular" for children and young people in schools (e.g. Hey 1997; Currie et al. 2007; Read et al. 2011). Being popular is significant for both boys and girls, but the dynamics of popularity are gendered very differently. For teen girls, being popular is a desirable but also a very difficult position to hold, and a difficult position to retain. As Lyn Mikel Brown explores in detail, it is bound

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[12] I take this subheading from Rosalind Wiseman's popular text *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (2002). It formed the inspiration for the 2004 film *Mean Girls*, starring Lindsay Lohan, a US high school satire detailing various high school "cliques" and in particular the adventures of the popular girls known as the "Plastics".

up with ideas (and, often, practices) of "bitchiness", of indirect relational aggression and manipulation of friendships. It is, essentially, impossible to be a popular girl without being heterosexually desirable, but as we will see, this is not an unproblematic subject position, given the vast potential that "sexiness" holds for being too sexy.

Discussion of the "popular group" at William Bishop came up frequently in my interviews, and was closely tied in with sex, relationships and parties. It was often spontaneously mentioned by participants, although I did sometimes ask specifically about the subject when it had not come up in conversation. Most of my participants did not see themselves as belonging to the popular group, but they talked and thought about them, and used them and their sexualities to identify with or disidentify from, in differing ways. The popular group were viewed as those who were most interested in relationships and sexual activity, and were often defined by going to a lot of parties and drinking a lot at these parties (more of this later). "Popular" is, of course, in many ways a problematic and hazy term; these people were not necessarily the most well-liked. Quite the opposite, in several cases: the girls in the popular group, in particular, were frequently classified by their "bitchiness", a finding that resonates with Dawn Currie, Deirdre Kelly, and Shauna Pomerantz's (2007) work on girls' relational aggression, in which "meanness" was frequently associated with popularity by participants. Lucy also spoke of disliking the boys.

> Lucy: I find quite a lot of the boys quite intimidating to be honest… So I was quite annoyed that they think it's funny to upset other people, to annoy other people.

The slipperiness of the term was not lost on participants. Adrienne (who was taking part in the interview with Lucy) pointed this out after she had herself introduced the term "the popular group" to describe them:

> Adrienne: But they're only really popular in their own group

However, while their likeability was often debatable, it did seem that they were the most heterosexually desirable; in a somewhat circular fashion, heterosexual

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desirability was both necessary for and determined by 'popularity'. Steve and Alex were both in long-term relationships, and were quite 'cool' (they were in a band that had recently played at a music festival, wore several wristbands from music festivals and had fashionable hairstyles). They did not see themselves as part of the popular group, but as "probably like one down, borderline", and said this about popularity:

> NH: Are some people really popular with girls, or girls with guys?
> Steve: in our year group there is a big popular group and then no-one outside that doesn't nearly do as well as that. Cos the people in that popular group, the guys get with the girls and it's inevitable that pretty much every guy will get with every girl in that group.

We begin to see in their depiction the constraints on sexual partners shaped by one's status in the sociosexual hierarchy – as well as the seeming ease of "getting with" someone, for those in particular positions.

Natalie and Rachel, whom I interviewed together, were very much part of the popular group, and were discussed fairly extensively by other participants. Natalie was involved in modelling, had long blonde hair and subtly applied make-up, and was very confident and self-assured, taking the lead in the interview. Katie, in a separate interview, described it thus (I discuss the relationship between Natalie, Katie, and Katie's boyfriend, Alex, in the next chapter.):

> Katie: she's got a lot of friends that are very good-looking, and she's very good-looking, she's perfect, skinny

Katie's words indicate the construction of the popular group as being commensurate with attractiveness and desirability. Importantly, it suggests that heterosexual desirability is not merely attached to bodies in the singular, but to bodies as a collective.

Natalie and Rachel were clear about their social position:

> NH: Like, are there some people who are known as being really popular? [...]
> Natalie: Um, there's like one guy or two, one or two, or, well, I think
> Rachel: Yeah
> Natalie: But generally I think it's our whole group.

They seem to exhibit a slight reluctance to name particular individuals as more popular than others, choosing instead to champion equality (within their own particular group). This compulsion to be "nice" and disinclination to single out individuals was notable in many interviews, but very particularly in Natalie and Rachel's. I will discuss the tyranny of "nice", and its entwining with middle-class femininity, further below (Hey 1997; Brown 2005). But the quote also evidences their – especially Natalie's – matter-of-fact understanding and internalisation of their own status. This self-aware positioning extended to a similar casually deliberate acceptance of their desirability and sexual attractiveness, and the ease with which they found partners at parties.

> Natalie: I think everyone feels pressure to pull at a party [...][13]
> NH: Do people, like, notice if you don't pull, or is it just that you feel –
> Natalie: If everybody else is –
> NH: And you're stuck in the corner –
> Natalie: But that never really happens! With any of us, to be honest, we're all kind of out there.

Natalie's reference to her own and her friends' sexual activity as being "out there" is suggestive of the way that sexuality was experienced in a context of visibility, and of how parties worked to focus this spotlight, as I explore further below. It is evidence of the pride and pleasure that some young women could take in the experience of being desired and building on that desire and sexuality in interaction. Natalie and Rachel's discussion resonates with Laura Hamilton's findings in relation to US undergraduate women, in which she describes the party context as an "erotic market"; one participant reported that the "best thing" about kissing at parties was "not physical pleasure but 'know[ing] that a guy's attracted to you and is willing to kiss you. It's kinda . . . like a game to play just to see'." (Hamilton 2007, p. 154). Natalie and Rachel highlighted the pleasure they experienced in the social recognition that "pulling" engendered. However, as I go on to discuss in the next section, the status of feminine desirability could be ambivalent.

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[13] "Pulling" was the standard term employed by young people for kissing, outside the context of a relationship, so usually at a party.

Popular hyper-femininities: "the so called 'bitchy people', wearing short skirts kind of people"

The gendered and sexualised descriptions of the popular group were notable but disguised throughout the vast majority of the interviews. When I asked if the popular group was mixed between boys and girls, participants would answer that it was, and they talked about boys and girls in that group getting together. But when they started describing the popular group, their descriptions almost always reverted to talking about the girls.

> James: Yeah, I mean they're, I mean I'm not gonna say they're dumb, but they probably act... [NH: yeah] kind of stupid [NH: fair enough] they.... yeah, they dress kind of, really so you can nearly see pretty much everything
> NH: Right – this is girls you're talking about, yes
> James: Yes, ha –

James views these girls as performing a particular kind of 'ditzy' femininity, acting "kind of stupid", with the implication that they do this in order to make themselves attractive to men (see Ringrose and Renold 2011 for an analysis of a self-identified "ditzy blonde"). Other participants talked about some girls in similar terms. This did not seem, however, to *necessarily* imply a downplaying of intelligence in academic terms, despite the findings of much educational research which indicates that heterofemininity is often difficult to reconcile with investing in educational achievement, as I discussed in chapter two and explore further in chapter seven. Rather, popular girls seemed, in general, to be able to "balance productions of high achievement and femininity" within the school context, like the high-achieving popular girls discussed by Becky Francis, Christine Skelton and Barbara Read (Francis et al. 2010, p. 327).

Nevertheless, it is notable that some young women seemed to feel (or were imagined to feel) that a performance of "stupidity" was advantageous in building a desirable femininity. Katie's insight into *why* this might be seen as attractive, in discussion of her friend Faith, was revealing:

> Katie: she's not intimidating, she's a bit stupid, so – well she's actually quite clever, but she comes across as very stupid.

Katie imparts to her friend a deliberate veiling of her intelligence in order not to *intimidate* men. The particular men under discussion here were older, more working-class boys, adding an extra element of classed judgement and performance to the negotiation of intelligence (I explore this conversation and representation further in chapter seven). Femininity, of course, has long been figured as the opposite-but-not-equal of the rationality and competence epitomised by masculinity (see Connell 2009 for a discussion).

Ellie had once been part of the popular group, but talked at length in an interview with her best friend Amy about how she had moved away from that friendship group. She described them in these terms:

> Ellie: I'd pretty much always hung out with the so called 'bitchy people', wearing short skirts kind of people.

This characterisation of the popular girls in terms of their clothing being overly revealing was echoed by many other participants. This form of regulation of female sexuality is discussed by Rebecca Raby (2010) in the context of Canadian school dress codes; her participants, while criticising the normative assumptions and restrictions inherent in the codes, also valued their regulation of girls' sexuality, and denigrated girls for particular choices of clothing. Similar contempt based on "sexy" clothing was found by Sue Jackson, Tina Vares and Ros Gill (2012) in their research with pre-teen girls negotiating fashion and popular culture. It was not always clear in my interviews whether my participants' judgements of girls were based on their wearing of school uniform or leisure clothing, but as I shall go on to discuss, the circulation of photos on social network site meant that clothing worn in particular spaces, such as parties, could be looked over and judged at other dates. Popular girls' "excessive" makeup was also singled out.

> Lucy: Also it's kind of a competition of who can wear the least clothes, it is kind of like the shortest skirt, the highest heels, the tightest top. And the most make-up.
> Adrienne: Fake-tan

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The judgements of the popular group, then, were bound up with a perception of the popular girls as hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualised in their appearance and behaviour. This is particularly interesting given the historical tendency to equate hyper-femininity and 'excess' sexuality with working class women (Skeggs 1997; Storr 2003). More recent work, however, has suggested that this traditional link is no longer in place, but rather that "immaculately groomed hetero-femininity" has become "the propertized middle-class cultural and symbolic capital used to mark distinction against the bodies of White working-class and lower-middle class women" (Hey 2010, in a discussion of McRobbie 2009). This ties in with Ros Gill's work on hypersexualisation and the pressure for women to embody a bodily-disciplined, up-for-it sexual subject position (Gill 2007, 2009a, b). But my participants' hostile, negative talk about hyper-feminised girls indicates the catch-22: that although many young women undoubtedly did feel an obligation to embody a hyper-feminine, hypersexualised position (as indicated by their "immaculately groomed" appearances as well as their references to bodily self-regulation throughout interviews), they were harshly judged for embodying that position.

The distaste for the popular girls' hyperfeminine embodied identities bled into a dislike for their perceived doing of social relationships and friendships, particularly with other girls.

> Katie: Natalie's a bit of a, she's a bitch, she's two-faced and she twists things a lot
> [and on the same subject, elsewhere in the interview:] she's very superficial as well, it's all about Tiffany bracelets.[14]
>
> Lucy: I was talking to this girl in the popular group, and she's just bitching about all the other girls, and it's just like, oh my gosh I thought you were best friends? And I was talking to the other girl, and she bitched about her, and then it's just like, oh my god, how, like, if my best friend did that, I'd just be like, you're not my best friend any more [...] Like, really two-faced and everything, all the time

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[14] Tiffany & Co. is an upmarket and well-known jewellery company. At the time of writing, their silver charm bracelets cost £150-£400 (these bracelets, for which extra charms can be bought in order to personalise the bracelet, were a popular style of jewellery at the time). Extra charms to attach to the bracelets started at around £100 and went up into the thousands.

This distaste for girls' "superficial", "two-faced" doing of social relationships is, again, a theme that crops up again and again in both folk wisdom and academic research (Hey 1997; Brown 2005), not just among peer cultures but also among teachers' opinions of girls (Chambers et al. 2004b).

The denigration of the artificial corresponds with a long tradition of equating femininity and women with the surface, falsehood and artifice; as Judith/Jack Halberstam puts it, "the idea that masculinity "just is" whereas femininity reeks of the artificial" (1998, p. 234). This perception is even more acutely heightened when seen in the school, teenage context. The teenage years are traditionally seen as a time when young people are building their identity, and there is a premium put on "authenticity" in that construction (Currie et al. 2006). As Marnina Gonick maintains in her discussion of a girl who "transformed" from a "nerd" to a "popular girl", and the anger felt by her former friends at this transformation, "outside is condemned as mere artifice in the production of self, inside is imagined as a space of wholeness, authenticity, and potential" (2003). This privileging of the "authentic" is complicated by the new discourses of femininity that have arisen in the "post-feminist" age that I discussed in chapter two. Angela McRobbie talks about post-feminist hyper-femininity as a masquerade – the "wearing of clothes in inverted commas" – and maintains that the "new masquerade constantly refers to its own artifice" (2009, p. 65). This approach to femininity could perhaps be seen in some of the young women's negotiations, constructions and displays of their bodies. But as many participants' negative reactions to the perceived "fakeness" of the popular girls indicates, the post-feminist masquerade is hardly an unproblematic subject position, and could not be seen as an ideal to aspire to, but was still viewed critically.

While many of the particular attributes for which girls were denigrated (such as fake tan, short skirts, "excess" make-up) are those which, historically and currently, are often associated with an abject working class female sexuality, the classed articulations and associations that circulated around the popular girls in my study were more complicated than this. The popular girls – those most frequently depicted in terms of their superficial hyperfemininity – were frequently also associated with

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wealth. I have already quoted Katie's description of Natalie's apparent predilection for "Tiffany bracelets". This was set in a discussion of Natalie in which Katie talked at length about her economic status, which I analyse in more detail in the next chapter in the context of Katie's fraught relationships with Alex and Natalie, and their classed subtexts. Talking about "the populars" and their parties, Adrienne and Lucy had this discussion:

> Adrienne: People also show off about their properties and stuff, don't they? [...] Lucy: Yeah, their, like, houses and stuff, and people will say, oh my God, have you seen so and so's? And it's like, well it's not their house anyway, so, why are they showing off anyway? It's their parents', isn't it? And it's, there's like, they used to be, I remember in year 8 it was like designer everything.

Here Adrienne and Lucy's judgement seems to focus on these girls' "showing off" as inappropriate: they are using their parents' resources, rather than their own, to further their own status. But this moralising stance against unearned mobilisation of wealth slips into broader condemnation of their conspicuous consumption ("designer everything"). In the same interview, referring to a particular girl's party and the damage caused there, Lucy again emphasised wealth, making generalised claims about the people who gave parties:

> Lucy: I mean, these people have got like three fields and horses and shit so they've got quite a lot of money, and fancy cars on the drive and all that.

It was clear, then, that the popular girls were viewed as particularly affluent (in a context where the participants were almost all themselves comfortably middle-class). This correlation was also brought up, although not agreed upon by all participants, in Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton's research in an independent school (2010b). Yet, as we shall see later, this did not stop judgements about and surveillance of sexuality being done in classed ways, drawing on identifications of female sexuality with working class markers.

Conflict and ambivalence in negotiating popularity

It is probably clear by this point that the popular group were not always viewed in particularly positive terms. But they were not merely dismissed or disliked; participants often had conflicting and ambivalent views about them, and also about their own position in relation to the groupings. Even those who identified as part of the popular group sometimes felt ambivalent about it. Many participants, like Alex and Steve above, placed themselves somewhere on the edges of this group. This is perhaps not surprising: few people might want to disavow entirely their connection with the "most popular" group in school, on the assumption that the opposite of most popular is least popular. A similar discursive positioning could be found in Jessica Ringrose's study with year 8 and 9 girls, for whom "being 'known' was a delicate balancing act for the girls between being popular enough and being too 'known', which signalled for them the 'hard' 'bad' girls with a 'reputation' who 'do things with boys'." (2008b, p. 513) But participants often stressed their mixed feelings about the popular group, or at least about individuals in the popular group.

> Adrienne: They're really nice by themselves, they'll talk to you in class, they'll be pairs with you and stuff like that, but you just, when you go to the playground, you just…
>
> James: Um, I think... some of them... can be... on the personal level can be alright, and can actually have an alright chat and stuff. Some of them are just dicks.

Laura spoke about moving between different groups of friends, and spending more time recently with the popular girls, but feeling ambivalent about these friendships.

> Laura: there are another group of friends, but I don't so much fit in with them, they're the kind of girls that are – sluts [NH: OK!] sluts if you wanna call it, um, who get into a lot of mischief and all sorts of things [...] I hang out with them but, um, you hear a lot of stories, and you kind of think badly of them, and then you like them cos they're nice to you [NH: yeah, sure] but, um, yeah. They're nice, they're good people, but they're just –

Her description of this group is shot through with defences of her own positioning, as she speaks of her own uncertain place, simultaneously distancing herself and acknowledging the pull of their company. Her pause before terming the girls "sluts",

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and linguistic equivocation ("if you wanna call it") indicates her dissociation from the harshness of that characterisation, even as she lets the description stand. Often more positive viewpoints of the popular group seemed to be put forward as justifications or defences by participants, as a way of convincing me that they were not simply prejudiced or resentful, but balanced in their viewpoints. Participants were engaged in a construction of a mature, tolerant identity; in the knowledge, perhaps, that by discussing their peer groups and popularity at length, they might be conforming to an adult view of teenagers as superficial and obsessed with social divisions. Laura defends her own association with this group in the above quote by appealing to individual personality and an idea of stable identity, behind the "stories" and the actions: "They're nice, they're good people".

This defensive negotiation of the social landscape was differently but especially apparent in Natalie and Rachel's interview. Natalie in particular was very keen to reframe any discussions which might position her as judgmental. After she and Rachel had spent some time discussing Katie and Alex's relationship (Rachel was a good friend of Katie's), in which Natalie had talked about Alex being much more laid-back and less invested in the relationship than Katie, she backtracked:

> Natalie: he adores her like, don't get me wrong […] they adore each other like completely.

Similarly, later in the interview, she and Rachel talked about a group of acquaintances/friends who were renowned for their sexual activities, of which they disapproved. But she returned (after we had moved onto another subject) to the discussion:

> Natalie: I think just going back to this girl, like they're all really lovely [Rachel: yeah], there's no-one that we've mentioned that I dislike at all […] it's just, it's not as if they're doing anything wrong to us [NH: no], it's just the behaviour they do [Rachel: yeah], the stuff they do, we don't. So it's kind of like different, but at the same time, they're all, quite a few of them I'd consider my close friends.
> Rachel: Yeah.
> Natalie: I don't want you to get the wrong impression.

Of course, I do not mean to deny Natalie's and Rachel's assertions that they were friends with and liked these girls, and of course it is possible, common and perhaps valid to dislike people's behaviour while remaining friends with them. However, I am interested in the pains Natalie went to in positioning herself as tolerant. She also stressed the closeness of the year group and her own group of friends.

> Natalie: I think it's just cos our whole group is so close […] and I think no-one wants to upset anyone [NH: yeah] so everyone's got quite a lot of respect for each other […] we still get along with pretty much everyone, I mean, I get along with pretty much everyone in the year group

This image of harmony was not necessarily congruent with the impression I gained from many other participants, as I have indicated above. Natalie seemed anxious to dissociate herself from any hint of "bitchiness". This was clearly a category that other people sometimes put her in, as apparent from Katie, Alex and Steve's discussions of her.

Natalie's anxiety to present herself as "nice" can be seen as an attempt to resist and dissociate herself from a "mean girl" identity (Ringrose 2006). It is as if she has thoroughly internalised the exhortation by teachers to "'just be friends', no matter what the conflict or cost" that Ringrose describes in her discussion of bully discourses and gendered and heterosexualised conflict in girls' peer groups (2008b, p. 516). The girls in this study similarly displayed "anger, defensiveness, and anxiety" (p. 517), as they had explicitly been labelled as "bullying". Natalie is very aware that by passing judgement on other girls' heterosexualities and relationships, she is in danger of occupying the subject position of "bitch" or "mean girl", and that this is problematic for her performance of femininity. In particular, it is problematic within the context of talking to an adult, one who may well be passing judgement herself on the heterosexualised conflicts of teenage peer groups. Katie's words sum up her view of such conflicts, and consolidate her own subject position as a mature and straight-talking young woman.

> Katie: no-one will confront each other, no-one will talk openly like adults, it's all got to be schoolgirly and bitchy

While Katie scorns this way of relating, it speaks to the double bind of femininity, particularly middle-class femininity: where girls strive to be winners in heterosexualised competition, and pursue individualised success, but at the same time must be "nice" and non-confrontational in their overt interactions. Katie's quote also inadvertently highlights a fundamental paradox: the widespread opprobrium heaped on schoolgirls for being "schoolgirly".

Gossip Girl:[15] rumours, visibility and reputation

We have seen already that the popular group was widely talked about, and that the girls especially were judged in terms of their sexualities. Talk about sexuality, or to be more specific, sexual activity, was by no means restricted to that group. No matter what friendship group a person belonged to, sexuality and relationships were seen as ripe for public consumption. Indeed, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the importance of the actual events sometimes seemed secondary to their interest as conversation fodder.

> NH: Do people talk about people who do [have sex]?
> Zelda: I think so.
> Link: If people find out, they're like, "oh, everyone", because it's – interesting.

There was a consensus that everybody was interested and curious about sexual activity, and that if it was discovered, it would quickly become news. This gossip was often focussed around parties, which I will look at in more detail below, but sexual activity in relationships was also a hot topic. Sexual activity and 'pulling', for the most part, fell into one of these two categories: either happening at a party, or in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. Although I heard a few stories about casual sex in other settings (and one story about a girl who had a "fuck buddy"), these were very much seen as the exception. Natalie said:

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[15] This subheading comes from the US television series "Gossip Girl", based on the series of novels of the same name by Cecily von Ziegesar, which focus on the lives of upper-class teenagers in New York City.

Natalie: I think a lot of people speculate [about sexual activity] especially during relationships or like, I think for people in relationships the first couple of months is like where everything starts to happen, and I think also that's where a lot of rumours speculate [NH: Right] and things kind of get exaggerated.

Zelda and Link complained about people's assumptions about sexual activity in relationships, and their propensity to ask about it. They were clearly very close friends, but they talked about Link's tendency to keep relationships private.

Zelda (to Link): You never tell me about your relationship!
Link: I don't like sort of telling people, cos then everyone just assumes, like, you're doing stuff.

Zelda: Yeah, I was impressed with that [Link's mum having never found out about her relationship], but you hid it from me for like eight months.
Link: Yeah, I was quite proud of myself, I hid it from everyone.
NH: Oh really, how come? Oh, I suppose you said at the beginning, you –
Link: I don't like the attention you get from going out with someone.
Zelda: And loads of pressure you get to do stuff when people know, people are like, have you done that yet, oh, have you done this yet.

Christina similarly resented the ways in which friends wanted to know about what was going on in relationships. She had been going out with her boyfriend, Matt, for eight months, and they spent a lot of time together. But she took great care to keep some aspects of their relationship secret:

Christina: No-one at this school knows [that they have had sex] cos we didn't want, like, rumours going around or anything.

Christina: Oh, there was a rumour going round a while ago that I'd given Matt a blowjob [NH: right] which was sort of true! But I just, like, was denying it, I was just like, no that's *not true*. [NH: yeah] cos I didn't want anyone to know.[16]

Many young people, then, felt the need to strictly compartmentalise their relationships from the rest of their social lives, in order to keep them private. Christina did, however, tell her friends at another school about her and Matt's sex

[16] Her tactic was certainly effective for at least two of her friends, who spoke in their interview of how strange it was that Christina and Matt were close emotionally but not physically.

life; as they were not entangled in the social networks she and Matt moved in within school, their knowledge did not pose a threat and provided a space for her to be more open. Zelda and Link described the danger of telling anyone about sex within relationships:

> Zelda: Yeah, cos sometimes one of the people tells one person and then it gets round everyone in the year in like a day.
> Link: And the next day everyone in the school knows.

And Katie spoke of her feelings of betrayal after a friend failed to keep a secret:

> Katie: Another friend who's very popular, is called Rose, and she, I confided in her about something, and Rachel mentioned it the other day [NH: OK] and I was like oh God I can't believe you said that! And I was like – I can't believe I confided in her and then, but, I guess, you learn not to trust anyone.

This quote indicates again the slippages between "popularity" and "bitchiness", as well as the fraught and tense nature of girls' friendships and the intensity of emotion. Katie's reaction – "you learn not to trust anyone" – is resigned and severe; she prefers to cut off emotional connection with her female friends rather than risk further compromise. She spoke of her friends' failings in this area in contrast to the intimacy of her relationship with her boyfriend, which I discuss further in the next chapter. These anxieties about friends spreading secrets were widespread in interviews with both boys and girls, and they were often spoken about in contrast to the emotional closeness and privacy that could be found within heterosexual relationships, as I discuss further in the next chapter. These relationships could form a unit, a shelter from the treacherous waters of teenage social cultures – a finding that will be important when we come to discuss violence within heterosexual relationships in chapter six.

Party hard: the party as focal point for sexual spectacle

Gossip, then, did circulate about those involved in relationships. But the most fruitful source of rumours and sexual stories were the parties that were (mostly) given and attended by the popular group and their friends. These provided a wealth of tales to

be spread by those who were there, and to be repeated (and no doubt enhanced) by others. These tales were not only about sexual exploits, but also about drunkenness and damage. For many participants, telling these stories seemed an extension of the mingled fascination and repulsion they felt towards the popular group. Parties happened fairly frequently at some people's houses, although more in summer than in winter, as parents preferred parties to be held in gardens (and those who held parties usually had large gardens). The frequency with which people went to these parties, and by extension, the frequency with which they got drunk, formed another source of participants' disapproval and disidentification.

> Christina [in response to a question about whether much drinking goes on]: Oh my gosh loads. So much, it's crazy. I, there's like the popular group [NH: yeah] and they go to parties like every week and it's just like, I wouldn't want that cos I dunno like you do so much damage, I mean obviously I'm not saying I'm never going to get drunk [NH: yeah] but I just don't think, to do it every weekend at this age, is just...

Certain parties lived on in legend, often owing to the extent of the damage. Those which had been broken up by the police or where guests had needed their stomachs pumped after too much alcohol were often mentioned. Participants (who had not been present) often retold these stories in interviews as exemplars of the shocking and salacious things that went on (although they did recognise the limitations of their knowledge – "Well, we've been told that, whether that's actually true or not is another matter, but…" (Lucy)).

> Adrienne: Cos, sometimes they like, put pictures on Facebook of the damage, and it's so much. Like, one boy's cat was killed…
> NH: Oh, no.
> Adrienne: Cos they force-fed it, like, alcohol, and stuff like that. And I'd be really annoyed, that they killed my cat (NH: Yes), and he just like carried on being friends with them, and I would just be like, well, like, what are you doing?
> […]
> Lucy: There was a house down the road and they had a house party and I think, the girl was straightening her hair, and somebody arrived at the door so she put her hair straighteners down and forgot about them, and I think it was at like 2 o'clock in the morning and we heard a fire engine and the whole of the roof was just in flames.

While bearing in mind the possibly apocryphal nature of this story, it speaks to the stickiness and unbreakability of social bonds within the claustrophobic networks of the school: there would be no way for this boy to withdraw from friendship with the people who killed his cat – it is easier to let it go past. Stories were retold in a similar way, with equal but more informed loving detail, by those who were frequent partygoers. These narratives enhanced the social aspects of the party and alcohol consumption, stretching the experience beyond the initial events, like the teenage drinking stories recounted by Peter Johnson (2011) in focus groups and Fin Cullen (2010a) in participant observation. Their pictures of the parties (along with those of people who were not invited) often strengthened the portrayal of the popular group as made up of people from well-off families. Natalie gave a particularly extensive and detailed portrait of a party she had thrown the previous year:

> Natalie: Me and a friend [Alex] had a joint party in his field, um, and we had 100 people [NH: OK] but it was, they've got like five acres [NH: fair enough] […] and it was everyone comes and camps and stuff like that, and we were like, can people bring alcohol? And his mum was like no, we don't want alcohol, especially if everyone's staying the night, it can be a bit risky, and after a while we persuaded them. So what we did was, everyone paid I think seven pounds [NH: OK] and they got like three small bottles of alcohol and they got like food so it was like burgers, everything, like anything, crisps, croissants, baguettes, everything and then breakfast in the morning and squash and juice and all that kind of thing so it was really nice and it meant that it was controlled, we had wristbands to control it and like they got crossed off every time someone had a drink and, but still people tried to sneak it in, like we had one girl unstitch a teddy bear, put a vodka bottle in and stitch it back up again.

Clearly this is a highly salubrious backdrop for a party, and through Natalie's narrative she builds a picture of herself and her family and friends which emphasises restraint and control as a counterpoint to and condition for hedonism: a "controlled loss of control", as Fiona Measham (2002) describes in the context of women's use of drugs. The need to carefully maintain a controlled, but desirable and exciting, feminine identity recalls the work of the young women Fin Cullen studied in the context of their drinking cultures (2010a), who constructed and monitored their drinking identities carefully, in an attempt to negotiate a "sassy, party-girl" femininity, but also maintain more traditional feminine ideals of not being too

"slutty" or drunken. In this particular extract Natalie also draws on the resources provided by parents, both economic (in providing the five acres, food and alcohol) and relational (in allowing the party to be held); the party is bound within a legitimate adult space.

"Absolutely battered": Alcohol and balance

Alcohol, then, was the defining feature of a "proper party" and much of the performance and regulation of sexuality was entangled with that of alcoholic consumption. We have seen already how some participants who did not attend these parties constructed those who did go as excessive, and this was a frequent refrain.

> Peter: One girl said that she did -- she like got really drunk and was standing in like a doorway just smiling and talking to it. And it's like, well, what would happen if they did drugs then, cos that would have been worse.[17]

These judgements usually went hand in hand with participants pointing out that they did sometimes drink, and they did go to parties or gatherings; just not like that.

> Christina: Yeah I mean sometimes there's alcohol there. But I mean I play football so like for example my friend Kat just had her party recently [...] there was like some alcohol there and I did have, but I had to play football the next day at like 8 o clock.

In this extract, Christina's construction of her own identity foregrounds her positive choice (to play football, to be physically active), rewriting the negative implications of her choosing not to drink (and thus not be "fun").

Girls who did go to parties and drink at them similarly negotiated the balance between respectability and fun/desirability, as I have touched on in the previous section. They walked a delicate line; stories of alcoholic excess were allowable with certain caveats.

> Natalie: and I was adamant to have a really freezing cold glass of cranberry juice with ice and then I was like falling down and I fell down the stairs and

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[17] Drugs were not very widely discussed. Some participants talked about themselves or their friends smoking cannabis, but only at parties. 'Harder' drugs were not mentioned, and a "druggie" identity was only spoken of in terms of an abject other (it was not clear whether "druggie" implied use of harder drugs or just a frequency of cannabis smoking that was seen as excessive).

> my sister was there, and I like looked back to see if anyone had seen me and
> she was like, yeah, I did see that. And I sat down in the living room and just
> like chundered all over the [cream-carpeted] floor
> NH: Oh no
> Natalie: And it was all pink, cos I'd just had the cranberry juice, and it had
> kind of curdled all along with the alcohol.

In this narrative (which was significantly longer than the extract) Natalie occupies the subject position of a discerning and demanding daughter with specific tastes, trying to maintain a façade of sobriety among her (even more "battered") friends and sober family, and then describes the irruption of the physical after-effects of alcohol into the scene. Again, her ability to recount this tale of embodied loss of control depends on a particular construction of her heterosexual femininity in order to remain acceptable. It could again, as in her narrative above, be described as a "controlled loss of control", a frequent discursive construction in women's stories of intoxication (Measham 2002; Cullen 2010a). In both this and the above extract, though, it is notable how Natalie draws on resources linked to her class positioning in constructing her version of sophisticatedly-inebriated femininity.

Natalie told this story after I had asked both girls in the interview what was the stupidest thing they'd done when they were drunk. They understood the question at first in the context of sexual activity, and under that understanding they held back:

> Natalie: I actually haven't –
> Rachel: I can't really remember, so –
> [I clarify that my question was more general]
> Natalie: Oh, there's quite a lot of general stupid things, but not with people
> stupid things.

So it seems that while some tales of embodied excess are commensurate with a desirable and respectable heterofemininity, the discussion of unwise or "stupid" sexual activity did not seem to form an appropriate topic for storytelling (at least that they would recount to me). This was despite the fact that Natalie and Rachel did talk during the interview about sexual encounters (or at least 'pulling') at parties, and implied, as we saw above, that this was a mainstay of all their party experiences.

Laura spoke of her own enjoyment of parties and physical enjoyment of alcohol, but constructed her enjoyment in opposition to those who saw parties as a place for sex:

> Laura: Yeah, I enjoy them for being with my friends [NH: yeah] and getting a bit tiddly and getting all silly, I like that bit, I don't, you know, don't feel the need for anything else

This theme of balance and moderation even through extremes takes us into the next section, which focusses more specifically on the policing of sexuality.

Going too far: sexual regulations and gendered judgement

I have already mentioned the importance of the circulation of gossip, and this was very often focussed around parties. There were some very definite divisions and boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable sexual behavior at parties.

> Natalie: No one has sex at parties when they're drunk [...] that's just too far, um but I think quite a lot of people give head in bushes and get fingered and that kind of stuff.
>
> Katie: People are quite chilled and relaxed about things like that [NH: yeah] and a lot of the time people do go further, it's not re-a-a-lly a big deal, as long as they don't have sex with someone at someone else's house [NH: yeah], that's a bit odd and a bit creepy.

We see here regulation of particular actions but also particular spaces ("someone's house). Natalie reiterated this stark delineation between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour later in this conversation, maintaining that nobody in their year would have sex outside of a relationship:

> Natalie: Yeah, like no-one would go that far, even if they were absolutely battered you wouldn't

Again she implicitly emphasises the vital nature of (self-)control in sexuality. She contrasts permissible excess ("absolutely battered") with impermissible excess, going "that far" in sexual terms. Her certainty about the adherence to this implies a confidence and certainty in young people's control over their bodies and desires, and highlights the power she imparts to the social imperative. This is interesting in its

departure from much research on young women's sexuality in relation to intoxication, in which alcohol is seen as providing a space for greater leeway in sexual behaviour and an "excuse" that can mitigate judgement by others: as Deborah Tolman says in relation to one participant, "Blaming 'it' on the alcohol muddies the question of responsibility and thus excuses her from culpability, for others and for herself" (Tolman 2005, p. 140) (see also Montemurro and McClure 2005; Griffin et al. 2009; Beres and Farvid 2010). In contrast, while some of my participants did talk about the disinhibiting effects of alcohol, this did not seem to provide any space for diminished culpability, although in the following chapter I talk about a discussion of alcohol as easing the anxiety of sexual activity within relationships.

Regulation was focussed on the girls. The judgements made about the popular group – which as we have seen were highly gendered – often blended into their actions and appearance at parties. James, who spoke of himself both as a reformed drinker and a protective figure towards his female friends (I discuss this further in chapter seven), spoke of the differing effects of alcohol on girls and boys.

> James: a girl will get completely...drunk, wasted and like she'll be wearing something that is ridiculous <James laughs> [NH: yeah] and kind of literally then *throw* themselves [NH: right, OK] at guys [...] I know guys that get completely wasted and are kind of a similar, kind of point as the girls are but, um, I'm not, I'm trying not to be sexist but [NH: <laughs> yeah, it's alright] um it's definite that guys can take in a lot more [NH: OK] in alcohol than girls can, and so I think, I think that makes some guys feel like they're invincible [NH: right, really?] and then I think especially in younger years, the girls don't really, really know which are their kinda limits.

Here James constructs a masculinity which is strong and resilient, able to handle alcohol, in line with the traditional connection between masculinity and intoxication. He sets this against a vulnerable and naive femininity, and depicts drunk girls as problematically sexually active ("literally then *throw* themselves at guys"): the very fact that they take initiative in a sexual interaction is represented as evidence they have gone past their "limits".

One interesting aspect of judgement around alcohol consumption related to the perception that people, particularly girls, would often fake being drunk.

Lucy: Cos, I think quite a few people kind of pretend to be drunk [Adrienne: yeah] to look, to look cool, but they don't… I'm just like… why?

Alex: Yeah it is, a lot, er, half the time they don't even, you don't even think that they [girls] are drunk – they like to act it cos they think that gets them somewhere.
NH: Why do they think it gets them somewhere?
Alex: Cos then some guys might take advantage, think they're easy, it's not like they're complaining about it, they want it to happen.
[...]
Steve: Guys don't put it on, not really.
Alex: They'd rather just feel the effects than fake it, cos it's fun – what's the point in faking it?

The boys' distinction between girls' and boys' attitudes to alcohol suggests that boys enjoy the embodied effects of alcohol in a straightforward way, while girls use it as a tool of manipulation. Steve and Alex's perception of girls belies a wealth of fairly regressive gendered assumptions: "Cos then some guys might take advantage, think they're easy, it's not like they're complaining about it, they want it to happen." There is here no conception that girls might take the initiative; their only means of attracting someone is to look "easy". The identity of the guys in question is unexamined, implying that one would be as good as another. And the use of "take advantage" to describe the hypothetical boy's action seems blind to the idea of consent or mutuality. James' quote above has a slightly different tone in that he clearly sees the girls in question as targeting particular guys ("literally then *throw* themselves at guys"). Again, though, they are not seen as being active sexual decision-makers, but leaving themselves open for guys to take up or set down as desired. The traditional heteronormative discourses whereby acceptable male sexuality is represented as active, and acceptable female sexuality as passive, are upheld.

Of course, faking being drunk (if indeed this was a practice and not merely a perception) might well have been used by girls as a method of protection from the loss of control that can accompany being drunk, and from potential sexual assault (which I will look at further in chapter six). This way they might have been able to sustain a performance of hedonistic and carefree desirability without the dangers that

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they might feel go with it. However, as no girls spoke directly of feigning intoxication, it is not possible to do more than speculate.

Not surprisingly, the gossip and rumours that went round were also very gendered. It was clear, as I have already suggested, that parties were the talk of the school year and that sexuality as performed at parties spiralled out into wider social networks.

> NH: I guess if something does happen at a party then everyone knows
> Steve: Yeah, *everyone* in the year knows the next day

Many participants stressed that rumours and gossip were not particularly damaging, which again seemed to me to act as a defence against potential judgements of their "teenage" behaviour, and particularly against a conclusion that this would constitute "bullying". Despite this assertion of harmlessness, many did admit their lasting effect.

> Natalie: They'll get stick a lot for the rest of their school life [in relation to those who "give head in bushes and get fingered and stuff"]

> Steve: It also depends what they did – if it's something quite bad, you always remember it, you always look at them
> Alex: No-one ever forgets, it'll always be, if you're talking about them, "they did this".

> Lucy: You kind of get labelled.

But the effects were not the same for girls and boys.

> Steve: Girls get it much worse I'd admit. Guys sort of get away with it, pat on the back sort of thing. A lot of girls get much worse for it.

> Christina: Like if a guy has sex with loads of different people, then they get like a *good* reputation for it? But if a girl does, they get such a bad reputation.

This double standard, whereby a girl who has a lot of sex (or too much sex, or the wrong sort of sex) is a slut, and a boy who has a lot of sex is a stud, recalls the findings of a vast range of research, the classic being Sue Lees and Celia Cowie's article, *Slags or Drags* (1981). It has been suggested that this is no longer as relevant a problem. Certainly girls and young women do face new and different pressures to perform a "sexy" femininity, which is open to sexual activity and experimentation

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(Gill 2009b; Evans et al. 2010; Gill and Scharff 2011). Claire Maxwell (2007; Maxwell and Aggleton 2010a, 2012b) has argued that upper middle-class girls and young women, in particular, have more avenues open to them to enact "alternative" narratives of heterosexuality, which are not so restricted by these gendered double standards But my findings suggest that for some middle-class girls, specifically in the younger teenage years, restraints and punishment for transgressing traditional heterogendered norms remain, and the double standard is still very much present, often in an unreconstructed form (see also Powell 2008, 2010, Allen 2005). Natalie's comment below indicates that even when boys are punished for their sexuality, this relies on shaming them for being with insufficiently desirable girls, by extension denigrating the girl.

> NH: Is that like, is that girls who are embarrassed or basically guys?
> Natalie: I think guys love it
> Rachel: But some guys
> Natalie: Some guys are quite embarrassed about who it's with

As well as telling me about gossip and rumours, participants actively engaged in the regulation of girls' sexualities in interviews, as has been evident throughout many of the quotes I have already highlighted. They often spoke of particular people who were well known for their sexual behaviour.

> Natalie: It's every party they'll get drunk and do something with a guy [Rachel: yeah], a different guy [NH: different guy every time?], yeah
> Rachel: Several guys at the same party!
> [...]
> Natalie: They've sort of come from each group and make their own little group […] so basically they all realised they had this one thing in common, so all got together and kind of have separated themselves from everyone else [NH: OK] and then they feel like they're doing nothing wrong so –
> Rachel: They love it –
> Natalie: So makes themselves feel better, they take pictures of themselves in their underwear

Natalie and Rachel are clearly dissociating themselves from these girls' hypersexual femininities, and they see the formation of a new social group as a way for these girls to evade appropriate regulation of their sexualities – "then they feel like they're doing nothing wrong". This again is an illustration of the collective nature of

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negotiating sexual subjectivities, although this collectivity is presented as a problem and a moral failing, and attributed to *others*, never to the self. Throughout my research, young people consistently validated individuality, particularly in relation to sexuality, taking up the discourse of the autonomous, agentic self discussed in chapter two. I explore the complications and downsides of this dominant discourse further in chapter six.

Friendship networks and sexualities

We have already seen many of the ways that friendships and social networks interacted with sexuality. Participants drew on their friends as well as people in other social groups as resources for their own identity creation in interviews. Katie's discussion of her friend Faith drew on a range of classed and heterosexualised discourses.

> Katie: one of my friends, Faith, she's very - promiscuous, she won't sleep around [NH: yeah] but she does *get* around […] she hangs out with a different crowd, that are quite… I don't really like them, there's lots of people from different schools, schools I've never heard of, all older boys […] um, she's *really* good-looking [NH: OK] she's really, she's got like the most fabulous body ever, and guys, she's very easy to talk to, [NH: yeah] guys find her, she's not intimidating, she's a bit stupid, so - well she's actually quite clever, but she comes across as very stupid, like she'll talk about shoes and be like <highpitched> "Oh my God!" you know, I mean obviously when you connect with her, she's great, but to boys, she probably just seems like she's easy, she'll get with whoever, she'll go as far as they want, [NH: yeah, yeah] so that's probably why guys like her! <laughing> […] It's not just older guys, it's older guys that smoke and do drugs [NH: yeah sure] and that wear tracksuits in town and, that's very <Katie laughing> stereotypical of me! But, and that swear a lot and vandalise things, and that's just, I don't get along with that at all.

Again a particular form of heterosexualised femininity is connected with "looking stupid", and the idea that some form of deception is often beneficial for sexual attraction is reiterated. Faith's depicted sexual excess and lack of respectability is connected with her association with 'unsuitable' boys, who are discussed in terms of classed signifiers (tracksuits, drugs, vandalism). In disidentifying herself from Faith's association with this group, and in expressing her own distance from the culture of

the boys in question ("schools I've never heard of"), Katie enacts her own middle class identity (something that is, perhaps, a particular source of anxiety given her relationship with a very wealthy boy). This association of problematic sexuality, risk and danger with class was also apparent in the encounters Katie had previously had at parties and regretted:

> Katie: There were a huge group of people there, and they were all chavvy. I mean, he was very nice, the guy I got off with! But I wasn't about to start anything.

Katie remained good friends with Faith, but she did not appear to want to influence her sexual choices. Many participants, however, saw discussion of sexuality and vetting of potential partners as important aspects of friendship, in a departure from the focus on individual decision-making I highlighted above. Some of the more problematic aspects of this have already been discussed above, where Zelda, Link and Christina resented friends' curiosity about their relationships. But there were also ways in which involvement with friends' sexuality was seen more positively, or as a positive obligation. As Korobov and Thorne state, "[young women's close friendships] are vital sites where heterosexual romantic identities develop" (2009, p. 50).

> Christina: There was my friend who was, this is going to sound mean cos it sounds like she's desperate, but like she does really want a boyfriend, so I think she can come across as quite easy? [NH: OK] And she was texting this guy who was like 18, and like we were all just telling her just to stop [NH: yeah] cos he was just, he was just wanting to meet up with her just for sex, and we were like you, you just can't do that [NH: yeah] that's just sooo wrong cos like she, hasn't done that with a guy I don't think.

Christina sees it as essential here to protect her friend from a relationship that she deems inappropriate. It appeared as if the friend might have been aware that she would be meeting up with the guy in question "just for sex", and that this was a relationship she wanted to embark upon. But this type of sexual initiative was not seen as acceptable; Christina and her friends saw their role as to safeguard their friend's sexual respectability (especially as they thought the friend had not previously had sex) and to save her from herself, as it were. Christina took this role in relation

to her friends in other ways, too: "But none of my close friends take drugs, cos I just wouldn't let them".

James talked of himself playing a similar role of guardian, but in a specifically gendered way. He had a lot of friends who were girls, and said:

> James: We now have a group of friends and I'm kind of daddy of the group [NH: OK <laughs>] um and yeah, um, some, most of the girls come and talk to me about a guy before they go out with him and ask for my permission [...] Yeah, and I feel quite powerful [NH: yeah!] um, no I mean I mean they're not kinda really asking my permission it's just kinda [NH: yeah], and I literally just give the advice of like it's kinda your choice [...] And there are some guys which I don't like [OK] cos they're those stereotypical guys.
> NH: And you tell them that maybe it's not that good an idea to do that?
> James: Well yeah, I use the excuse like, if you want to be pregnant by the time you're 16, go on.

This extract came after a narrative where James described himself as having become more "sensible" after a period of frequent drinking, which I discuss further in chapter seven. Again, femininity is associated with naivety, and James positions himself as having access to deeper and more genuine knowledge about men and masculinity than girls can access. (He also spoke about the "sexist stuff" some boys said about women, especially when with other boys; he thought that girls often assumed they were just joking but that there was a grain of truth in these attitudes.) Again, the "stereotypical guys" are seen as risky and dangerous, and implicitly associated with working class cultures: he warns his friends against certain guys using the spectre of the teenage mother, a cultural stereotype very much associated with working class women (see chapters two and seven).

The protective duty of friends in regard to sexuality and relationships was particularly important after relationships broke up. Laura spoke about her friends' support the day after her boyfriend broke up with her.

> Laura: Yeah, everyone was so supportive the next day with school, and it was kind of like, do I wanna get up? but I did, you know, it was a horrible day but they were all there and you know took me out of class <laughs> yeah, it was nice to have everybody there and I guess if I didn't I dunno what I would have done.

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This support often extended to friends' expressions of dislike for ex-boy or girlfriends.

> Link: I mean I met [Zelda's ex-boyfriend], I'm the only one that met him, oh actually he talked to me on Facebook recently and I was just like – ha ha, no. [...] um, so, I really don't like him so I don't want to like reply… I like my friend Zelda more than you!

Link indicates the complications of navigating existent social networks (and the ways this is exacerbated by technology, as I explore further below), while upholding loyalties to friends through exclusion of ex-partners. Such imperatives could prove problematic in the long term; many participants said that boys or girls who had gone out with friends were "off limits". Natalie put it perhaps a little melodramatically:

> Natalie: So unfortunately for the guys, they're like literally if you're in a relationship a girl won't touch you for at least a year
> NH: Wow, OK.
> Natalie: Because there are too, like I think there've been a lot of times where people have been in a relationship, like had sex then a couple of months later they've broken up, and literally if any girl talks to that guy they might as well kill themselves, like that's how bad it is, you'll get so much, in the sense that just, you'll get penalised and it'll be like, you're talking to him, you're supposed to be my friend.

Whether or not this was always the case (other participants talked about the insularity and incestuousness of friendship groups, in particular the popular group, maintaining that every guy had been out with every girl), clearly this exerted a strong moral hold over some young people. Natalie's emphasis illustrates the intensive, acute force of these social rules: "they might as well kill themselves". "Betrayal" of friends by associating with their ex-boyfriends was a violation of the regulations of femininity: by seeming to prioritise sex or boys over the bonds of female friendship, one was committing an unacceptable expression of feminine sexuality (Hey 1997).

Breaking the rules

Of course, these "rules", along with various other forms of regulation and surveillance, were not always obeyed and could be negotiated in different ways. I

have discussed the ways Christina and Link kept aspects of their relationships secret in order to evade the pressure of the regulatory gaze. And as we have seen throughout, many girls negotiated their sexualities in ways that were not seen as appropriate by many of my participants. One rule that has already been mentioned, and was viewed as fundamental, was about the monogamous relationship as the only appropriate site for sexual intercourse:

> Natalie: No-one has sex unless they're in a relationship, that's the only thing
> Rachel: Yeah
> Natalie: Like I don't think there's anyone in our year group that has had sex unless they're in a relationship
> NH: OK, so it's just stuff before that then?
> Natalie: Yeah, like no-one would go that far, even if they were absolutely battered you wouldn't

Again, Natalie presents this rule as unquestioned and unquestionable, and adherence to it as total. Notably, they went on to clarify that this was a "rule" specific to their school:

> Rachel: I think it's sort of just our school though, cos like at St Andrews and the High [other state schools in the area] they tend to think it's sort of like –
> Both: Alright[…]
> Rachel: Like we have our own little rules, we don't go that far

This is an indication of the paramount importance of localised contexts in shaping teen social regulation of sexuality, which I discuss further in chapter seven. Natalie and Rachel contrast their own school with others where they see the regulation as more lax. Despite Natalie and Rachel's certainty, however, there was at least talk of people who did not adhere to this rule. Peter, who seemed quite inexperienced in terms of relationships, spoke in hushed and shocked tones about someone he knew:

> Peter: Yeah. Like one girl who sits next to me in business studies was talking about how she has a *<whispering>* am I allowed to say it on the recorder?
> NH: Yes. Yes.
> Peter: A fuck buddy.

He talked about this, sexual encounters at parties, and similar relations, as pointless. His surprise and shock at his business studies' partner's casual relationship, although

perhaps on the more extreme end of the scale, was not entirely unique. I have described how several participants spoke of encounters at parties as repellent or unenticing to them, and although this undoubtedly served as a way of maintaining an identity, as mature and disinterested in parties they weren't invited to, nevertheless their talk also constructed these relations as inappropriate for others.

Zelda and Link told me about a friend of theirs who negotiated her sexual relationships in an unusual way, apparently having casual sex regularly.[18]

> Link: And one of our friends is just insane.
> NH: One is just insane?
> Link: Abigail – she's more like a guy than a girl sort of in the sense of relationships, just going out with anyone. [...]
> Zelda: I think she just meets them in town, and then they go off and they have sex or something

I was interested in this story, and in the reactions other people had to Abigail, given my understanding of the majority of participants' attitude to sex that was not in relationships. Their gendered description of her sexuality as masculine also intrigued me. I asked if she was talked about a lot, and they answered:

> Zelda: Mm, not really, they just think she's a bit mad.
> Link: I think quite a lot of boys in our year are scared of her.
> [...]
> Zelda: I'm a bit scared of her.
> Link: Yeah, I think everyone's a bit intimidated by her.

Abigail seemed to be viewed as existing outside the normal rules and regulations of heterofemininity. Despite her unconventional behaviour, she was not seen as a significant threat to the sexual order. Instead, the extent of her transgression othered her the point that she was viewed as an eccentricity, perhaps in order to suppress the possibility that her example of transgressive femininity might be spread further. The extreme terms ("mad", "scared") speak to the power of emotion this transgressive

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[18] I tried to convince them to persuade her to come and see me, and at their second interview, they said she had just been in town with them and had been thinking of coming along, but to my disappointment she did not.

female sexuality is able to arouse, as well as resonating with historical discourses of female sexuality as bound up with madness (Ussher 1997). The discomfort that she engenders is fended off with humour.

The ways in which her sexuality was ignored and downplayed indicate the limitations of one individual doing sexuality and gender differently, as I discussed in chapter two. While Abigail herself may well have experienced a greater freedom of movement in relation to sexuality (although my speculation on this is very limited, as I have only second-hand accounts), the impact of this on other people, and on broader gendered discourses, was limited. Adrienne and Lucy spoke about a girl in their year who told people herself about a sexual encounter:

> Adrienne: Yeah, one girl in our year did something and then she um, she kind of just told everyone straight out about it
> Lucy: As if she was proud about it, and then we were just like, bad idea
> Adrienne: But then, I'm not sure whether that was like, the right thing to do, because it could have got round than like, a worse thing than it was. But then, I guess everyone knew like, exactly what happened.

While the girl in question may have been proud of her sexual expression, or not seen it as a problem, in spreading the rumour her actions are reincorporated within the norm (Youdell 2004). Adrienne and Lucy told me this story in response to a question of mine on whether they knew of anybody's having had "bad experiences in relationships". Their answers were notable in refocussing the question not on experiences within relationships, but on the circulation of experiences beyond the relationship: the *readings* of experiences. Again, we see the centrality of social surveillance to the understanding of the pleasures and pains of teen sexuality. These girls may have been trying to redraw their own borders of femininity, to do things differently, but their resignification was read by others within the dominant paradigm.

Cybersexuality: the panoptic gaze of new technologies

In many ways, choosing to devote a separate section to social network sites and the internet is inappropriate. The use of social network sites such as Facebook,

Formspring and Twitter by my participants was not seen as another level of reality, or one divorced from offline experience, but was embedded in their everyday experience of sociality – as danah boyd (2008) stresses, teenagers' engagement with social network sites is as "an extension of everyday life" (see also Ito et al. 2008; Gray 2009). Nevertheless, the ubiquity of these technologies did play an important part in negotiating sexuality and relationships. I did not have access to participants' social network profiles, and so my analysis of their role is limited to offline talk about them, My analysis of the role they played, therefore, is limited to offline talk about them, but I do want to spend some time discussing the role they played in social networks (in the broader sense).

Almost all, if not all, participants had a Facebook profile, and they were "friends" with everybody they knew. This can sometimes be awkward; boyd discusses the problems that arise when "teens are forced to navigate social situations with people they do not want to interact with, namely those they do not like, those who hold power over them, and those who have malicious intentions" (2008, p. 109). As Alice Marwick (2012) illustrates, SNSs become a space of "social surveillance", through which young people watch each other and are watched in return. Facebook photos functioned as a site for overt display of sexuality and desirability, much as Jessica Ringrose discusses in her analyses of teen girls' gendered and sexualised negotiations of SNSs (Ringrose 2010, 2011; Ringrose and Eriksson Barajas 2011). This was frequently spoken of in disparaging terms, and often related to parties, especially girls at parties.

> Christina: Yeah and like they [go out and get drunk] mainly for like the attention? [NH: OK] And take pictures and put them on like Facebook, it's like, you don't look that cool!
>
> Lucy: And there are lots of photos of like, all the girls, like, lots of make-up, small amounts of clothes, and at the parties.

In this way, Facebook served as a way in which the party was set free of the confines of a singular chronological event, and extended its reach into everyday sociality in

school and among wider social networks. In this way the female body in particular was looked upon, policed and scrutinised in perpetuity.

Facebook also provided an opportunity for young people to interact with people they knew slightly, or friends of friends, and in this way to flirt and move from friendships to more-than-friendships, in a similar way to the teenagers C.J. Pascoe (2010) studied. This was how Laura began her relationship with her ex-boyfriend, which was based in a mutual interest:

> Laura: I met him on Facebook because he does photography and I really like photography so it's kind of like shared interest, I just said I like his pictures and then we got speaking for ages, like the whole night.

The relative ease of speaking online, however, and the amount of information that "friends" could access, was sometimes seen as problematic.

> Link: I think Facebook is a bit of a problem, well not a problem
> Zelda: It is.
> Link: I think people that like, like people follow them on Facebook, like I mean a guy in year 11 [...] he was talking to my friend and he was like 'What's your curly haired friend's name?' or something, and then my friend told him and then she was like 'oh, someone's stalking you!" and it was like, he started saying , she's really fit... lovely. [...] It worries me. I think Facebook simplifies things too much [Zelda: yeah] … it gives people the opportunity to find out things easily and also it sort of, I dunno –
> Zelda: They can just look on your wall and see your life

They talked about a friend of Link's who often posted song lyrics on her wall and talked to her on Facebook chat.[19] She was unsure if this friend had romantic feelings for her, a status which was complicated by his officially being "in a relationship" on Facebook. Although Link did appreciate the ways in which Facebook made some forms of discussion more accessible, she was uneasy about the relationship between Facebook friendships and 'real' friendships, pointing out that it could sometimes be awkward to speak in real life after talking on Facebook, as there is no delay offline

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[19] At time of writing, Facebook chat is a private instant messaging system; only the recipient can see the messages. The wall is a public space, so a message left for somebody on their wall is also visible to all the recipients' friends.

in which to think of interesting responses. Zelda had also been broken up with in a "rather impolite manner", as Link put it, over an offline message.

It is clear, then, that SNSs worked as ambivalent sites for relating, offering new opportunities for intimacy as well as new complications, while recirculating and intensifying certain old forms of gendered judgement. We shall see in the next chapter some ways in which young people negotiated communication technologies within their intimate relationships, and an instance of harassment through technology after the end of a relationship.

Conclusions

This chapter has focussed primarily on my second main research question: how middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities are shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts. I have also addressed aspects of my first research question: how young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities are negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships. Through the chapter, I have highlighted the collective, interconnected nature of sexuality as experienced by my participants. I have explored ways in which participants negotiated and constructed their own sexualities, ways in which they discussed and denigrated others', and ways these intersected and connected.

Sexuality and relationships were embedded in wider social networks. Under a perpetual gaze of circulating rumour and gossip, a gaze intensified by social network technologies, sexuality was frequently played out in public. It was extremely difficult to keep any sort of sexual encounter private, and some young people went to significant personal lengths to do so, building high barriers between themselves and their friends. But it is crucial to emphasise that the social surveillance and networks were not merely backdrops or backgrounds for doing heterosexuality, obstacles in the way of intimacy (although they were experienced as such by some young people). Rather, they too formed sites and situations for heterosexualised gender

performances, and ways for young people to make and experience themselves as heterosexual subjects.

We saw the power of the "popular group" as a resource through which young people outside as well as inside it negotiated their own subjectivities. Within these contexts, sexual behaviour was rigorously policed, with strict lines drawn around "acceptable" forms of sexuality, and this policing was taken up by young people to work upon their own selves. In spite of changing cultural discourses around young women's sexuality, inciting a sexy, knowledgeable, up-for-it, hyperfeminine sexual subject, (Attwood 2006; 2009{McNair, 2002 #502)}, my young female participants still endured a particularly heavy burden of policing, suffering from a sexual double standard regulating female sexuality. As Sara McClelland and Michelle Fine argue:

> Although adult women have been somewhat successful in resuscitating a discourse of sexual excess for them/ourselves, the sexuality of teen women has remained more securely locked within a judgmental box that treats female teenage sexuality as dangerous, risky and excessive - or as victimisation (McClelland and Fine 2008, p. 85)

I have looked in this chapter at how young people skirted the edges of "excess" in relation to alcohol, and the social complications, dangers and pleasures this caused. Yet at the same time I have argued that young women in particular needed to maintain strict control over their bodies in order to avoid social punishment. As I argue in more detail in chapter seven, the contradictions of current discourses of female sexuality are difficult in a particular way for younger middle-class teen girls like my participants, who, while expected to embody a heterofeminine sexuality, can only engage in sexual activity at the risk of losing their classed identity.

This chapter, then, has illustrated the interconnected networks of heterosexualised relationships within and through which young people experienced their subjectivities. It has focussed on the "public" side of heterosexuality, setting out the social contexts and cultures negotiated by my participants. In the next chapter, I go on to discuss the more "private" side of heterosexuality, looking at intimate partner relationships in greater detail. In it, I take up the question of young people's gendered

subjectivities as they are negotiated within and through heterosexual relationships. The interconnections and tensions between sexual relationships and other social relationships remain key.

Chapter five
All you need is love? Negotiating power, emotion and heterosexuality within partner relationships

This chapter investigates young people's negotiation of heterosexual subjectivities within the setting of partner relationships, that is, as boyfriends or girlfriends. It looks at how the subtleties of gendered power flow within intimate, sustained relationships, and how young people did gender and sexuality in the day-to-day ups and downs of intimacy: what Donna Chung calls "the micro-practices of heterosexuality" (2005, p. 445). Through the chapter, I expand upon themes explored in the previous chapter, looking into the details of how partner relationships were influenced by wider social networks and enmeshed with other forms of relationship. I present relationships which were, in many ways, positive, supportive and pleasurable. Yet, without diminishing these positive aspects, I want to highlight the tensions and inequalities which continue to fall along traditional gendered lines, existing even in these "good" relationships, that have been foregrounded in recent research on teen intimate relationships in Australia (Powell 2010) and New Zealand (Allen passim.). Research on teenage relationships has often concentrated primarily (although not exclusively) on young people's negotiation of sexual encounters within relationships (Maxwell 2007; Powell 2008a; Maxwell and Aggleton 2010a; Schalet 2010). This forms an important part of my own research, but I also work to illuminate the relationship in broader terms, looking at how gender and heterosexuality flow through everyday social practices within a partner relationship.

I first present two fairly long-term and stable relationships as case studies, in order to explore in depth how particular young people's relationships were situated in the context of their lives and shaped (and were shaped by) their wider social identities. In this, I take inspiration from the biographical approach of Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomson (2007) (although, of course, as my focus remained on relationships, and my project was not longitudinal, my insights into participants' wider identities are narrower). Both case studies explore the complications and

ambivalences of sustaining a close intimate relationship as middle-class teenagers, while juggling this relationship with other aspects of their lives, both educational and social. First I talk about Christina's relationship with her boyfriend Matt (whom I did not interview). I then go on to discuss Katie and Alex. I interviewed Katie individually, and Alex with his friend Steve, and later interviewed Katie and Alex together. Both couples were also talked about by other participants. Christina and Matt's case illustrates in particular the tensions of constant communication and the role of technology in building these expectations, and the negotiation of a relationship where emotional attachment is felt to be imbalanced. Katie and Alex's case explores the entanglements of the participants within the broader social network, and the negotiation of jealousy and conflict, within a relationship which was viewed by both participants and friends as unusually close and "mature". I go on to explore some further themes around beginnings, sex and break-ups that emerged from participants more generally, exploring the persistence of traditional gendered norms through the beginning, experience, and end of relationships.

This chapter is focussed particularly on what young people called "serious" relationships. There was no precise definition of what constituted such a relationship, but several participants said that relationships became serious after about four months. By no means all of my participants were in, or had ever been in, such relationships, but my survey data indicated that they were not uncommon: of the 207 participants who said they had ever had a relationship, 17% said their longest relationship had lasted more than a year, 22% that it had lasted between six months and a year, and 29% between two and six months. The specificities and details of heterosexual relationships form a vital site in which some young people's sexual subjectivities are produced, and can have a deep impact on their negotiation of relationships and sexuality: as Amy Schalet argues, it is necessary to investigate the "different relationship contexts in which sexual subjectivity and agency are attained or hindered" (2010, p. 308). Although the two case studies I analyse here were relatively unusual in their length and intimacy, through investigating the details of lives becoming entangled with relationships, I hope to present a picture of how certain young people lived their gendered, classed sexual subjectivities through and

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with relationships, and how they negotiated the different pulls and complications of friends, emotion, education and love.

Christina and Matt

Christina had been going out with her boyfriend, Matt, for six months when I interviewed her. She wasn't one of the "popular" girls, distancing herself from that group, but was fairly "alternative" in terms of music taste, and was very involved in sport and extra-curricular activities. Her account of her and Matt's relationship was threaded through with themes of privacy, compartmentalisation and balance. Like many of the girls I talked to, she was very self-aware in her identity work, open in many ways to talking about personal topics but keen to anticipate and head off potentially negative interpretations. She and Matt were in the same year at school and had been best friends before they started going out after kissing at a New Year's party. In common with several other participants, she said that before the relationship she was unsure sure whether or not she liked him romantically:

> Christina: It's weird, cos I didn't know if I did or not? Cos we were so close as best friends I wasn't sure if it was just, like, I like him as a friend [NH: yeah] or more? But then like we kissed and then I was like, OK, I do like you! <*Christina laughs*>

This uncertainty is interesting to consider in the context of debates over female desire. There is a long history of women being discouraged from feeling and expressing their own sexual desire, as discussed in Michelle Fine's famous (1988) article in relation to sex education – the conclusions of which she still saw as relevant twenty years later (Fine 2005; see also Tolman 2005). But in a special issue of Feminism and Psychology debating the landscape of female adolescent sexuality in relation to Fine's original article, Charlene Muehlenhard and Zoë Peterson highlight "the missing discourse of ambivalence" in regard to wanting or not wanting sex: many discussions of sexuality, particularly teen sexuality, draw a strict line between unwanted and wanted sex (2005). Although this is often useful and necessary, and highlights experiences of coercive sex and the degree to which (young) women experience not-very-pleasurable sex, it can also hide the

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complexities and ambivalences of everyday embodied practice. There can be many different types of "wanting". In the same issue, Lisa Diamond discusses the ways in which developing attractions to women caused young women to "critically interrogate their subjective experiences of sexual arousal, pleasure, disgust, disinterest, affection, infatuation, and love, as well as the social meaning of these experiences" (2005, p. 10). As she points out, researchers investigating (same-sex) sexual attraction very rarely define what attraction *is*, assuming it to be uniform and obvious. But it is not always so obvious, so all-or-nothing.

Christina's account illustrates this uncertainty: she was aware of an intensity of emotional attachment, but unsure as to whether this was close friendship, or sexual attraction. Within the heteronormative social relationship – unlike for the same-sex attractions that Diamond discusses – it was acceptable and, indeed, expected that she test her uncertain desires through sexual interaction. Christina also talked about how other friends assumed they were together, or attracted to each other, before they went out, which increased the complexity of her own exploration of her feelings. Again, this highlights the ways in which sexual subjectivity is produced intersubjectively: Christina and Matt's feelings for each other are a ghostly presence between them, imagined and projected by others before they acknowledge them themselves. Interestingly, Christina mentioned that she and Matt had hidden their relationship from their friends at the beginning: fitting with her desire for privacy that is explored below, and also the need to create a space between the two of them that is less inflected with the expectations and readings of others. But through this uncertainty, her talk about the first kiss – "and then I was like, OK, I do like you!" – implies the importance of physicality at the centre of the "decision" to be attracted: that embodied act transformed her doubt into decided desire. The brief moment can be read as one of the "laminated utterances" of desire that McClelland (2008) encourages researchers to seek out in girls' talk, and calls to mind the "transformative moments" of sexually embodied practice explored by Joanne Bryant and Toni Schofield's (2007, p. 331) research with women, which the authors argue can be influential in increasing women's agency within intimate relationships (see

also Maxwell and Aggleton 2012a). I will explore Christina and Matt's sexual negotiation and themes of ambivalence and desire further below.

"He can be really clingy, but sometimes he can not be clingy at all": ambivalent closeness

Christina talked quite a bit about the closeness between her and Matt: closeness which, again, could be ambivalent. This manifested both in emotional closeness and in physical time spent together, as well as constant communication. Very early on in our discussion, when talking about what she liked about Matt, she brought this up as a problem:

> Christina: he's just really sweet and I can tell that he likes me, and he makes me feel better about myself and stuff [NH: sure] – he's quite clingy though!

We went on to talk more about what she meant by this, and she complained about him "constantly hugging" her, and, she said:

> he thinks that he *has* to see me at least two days out of three at the weekend [NH: OK], I mean, not that I mind, it's not like - but he just makes me feel quite bad if I don't see him that often.

The backtrackings and qualifications Christina displays in this quote were typical of her talk about Matt throughout the interview, suggesting the work she was doing to reconcile the conflicts and difficulties with the continuation of their relationship, and her presentation (and experience) of the relationship as positive, healthy and good for her. Again there is an ambivalence about whether she sees Matt's behaviour as the 'problem' in this situation: it is the emotion that she internalises ("makes me feel quite bad") that (she sees as) the cause of the change in her social practices to accommodate his wishes – to make *him* feel better. Here we can see Christina employing "emotion work" – managing her own feelings and those of her partner, in order to maintain the relationship's even keel (Hochschild 1979, 2003[1983]). It can also be described as what Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester, discussing violence in same-sex relationships, call "practices of love": survivors discussing past relationships constructed themselves as the stronger partner in the relationship, and as such felt responsible for the wellbeing of their violent partner (2010, p. 283). Such

practices have been shown to often be highly gendered, especially in the context of heterosexual relationships, with the girl or woman taking on the "management" of the relationship and emotions within it (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; 1998).

The closeness between them was also produced through use of technology – mobile phones and Twitter. I explored in the previous chapter some of the difficulties and problems related to online communication, but Christina found the different modalities of talk that online communication offered to be very positive. The closeness of Matt and Christina's friendship had begun partially through use of Twitter, a social network site where users post 140-character messages and can "follow" other users (thereby seeing what they post) and reply. Although Twitter is often seen as a very public medium (the vast majority of users' accounts are "open", meaning that anybody who knows someone's username can see whatever they post), this was not the way in which it was constructed and understood by Christina. As danah boyd and Alice Marwick point out, teens using social network sites have nuanced perceptions of privacy and communication practices which do not necessarily correspond with a traditional idea where privacy means "hidden from view" (boyd and Marwick 2011). Christina said that she and Matt were "like the only people in the school who have it" – so it formed a space where they could interact outside of the surveillance of other friends and peers at school. This particular way of communicating was mediated by the constraints and possibilities of the technologies available – they almost always used Twitter from their mobile phones, so it was constantly at hand – but also by the communities and social practices that they were engaging with at the time. Interestingly, Christina spoke of technology as a way in which she felt more comfortable and free with broaching difficult interactions, relating back to the discussion of communication online in the previous chapter:

> Christina: but I just, I really hate it when it's awkward, so I, I find it much
> easier to approach people cyberly?

This resonates with the findings of Julie Cupples and Lee Thompson, who found that teenagers often saw texting as a less threatening form of communication with potential romantic partners (2010). Christina and Matt's use of Twitter was accompanied by a near-constant stream of mobile phone text messages, which Christina referenced as a proof of their bond.

> Christina: I mean we're so close, I mean he texts me a lot [NH: yeah], I mean we text each other *so* much, like 200 texts a day.

This served both as a way to keep in touch, and as a reassurance that each knew what the other was doing. One specific example of this took place within the narration of an episode that illustrates themes of jealousy, conflict and emotion work in the relationship.

Christina told me that one of the reasons she and Matt argued was over other girls that he spoke to online. Tellingly, she began the story by downplaying the validity of her emotional responses:

> Christina: It's going to sound so pathetic now!

Matt was a member of a website, DailyBooth, where users upload a picture of themselves every day and others can comment. Through this he had met (online) a lot of girls (who were all, according to Christina, "really pretty") and they were texting each other frequently. This led to arguments between Matt and Christina in which she was frustrated with his response to her voicing of discontent, when she had asked him not to text them so much, and when he was considering meeting up with them offline.

> Christina: And he was like, ok, I promise I won't text them? And I was like, I didn't really want him to make that promise [sure] cos I knew he wouldn't keep it? and so basically he kept on texting them again and every time he promised he wouldn't do it again and I was like, [NH: just don't promise] yeah, just say you won't text them as much, like that's just what I wanted from the beginning […]
> NH: Mm. So does he not, he doesn't try and like fight his corner, if you see what I mean, I mean you say, look –
> Christina: Yeah, it's weird, he just says, oh I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry and it's like, well, why do you keep on doing it then?

She found this behaviour difficult to deal with, as it seemed that he was not engaging with her feelings on the issue. She felt that his promises and apologies are insincere, and since she realised this to be the case ("cos I knew he wouldn't keep it"), his continuing placation was especially unsatisfactory. Although he seemed to be accepting her feelings of jealousy as valid (rather than arguing, say, that the texting was harmless and she should not be worried), he did not seem to be acting on them. This was particularly interesting given the ways in which, as we have seen, Christina *did* sometimes change her own practices based on what Matt wanted to do – such as seeing him at the weekend more than she might choose to – and also reconfigured her own emotional approaches in relation to his practices (as we saw above, she qualified her response to his wanting to see her frequently with "I mean, it's not that I mind").

But Christina was not worried that Matt was meeting up with these girls behind her back (although he had lied to her about texting them), because he would not be able to do so without her knowing, as their texting was so frequent:

> Christina: I mean we text each other *so* much, like 200 texts a day […] And um so I sort of always know what he's doing.

We can see here how mobile phones and social network sites work together to facilitate an "always-on communication" between Christina and her boyfriend, like that described by Mizuko Ito and colleagues – young people using new media "to hang out with each other as much and as often as possible" (2008, p. 15), and as also found in Jessica Ringrose, Ros Gill, Sonia Livingstone and Laura Harvey's NSPCC research into "sexting" (2012). It is clearly seen as a positive enactment of their relationship (Christina clarifies that it's "Yeah, like in a nice [way]"), and Christina did not regard this frequent communication as being an aspect of Matt's "clinginess", but more as a mutual, casual, normal and positive form of communication. This was not a feature unusual to them, but was quite common in participants' partner relationships. As such, they were constantly connected and their social lives entangled, even when out of each other's physical presence (and with friends or family) – as Cupples and Thompson put it, these technologies "enabl[e]

the creation of new time-spaces and the hybridisation of distance and proximity"
(2010, p. 9). I explore further in chapter six the ways in which this "always-on
communication" relates to conceptualising violent and controlling relationships
between teenagers.

"There's always someone that likes the other person more": Emotional imbalances and gender

The communication discussed in the previous section formed a way of enacting their
romantic intimacy, and this intense performance of intimacy was apparently echoed
by their physical intimacy in public – as we saw above, Christina maintained that
Matt was "constantly hugging" her. In emotional terms, though, they were not
necessarily quite so intimate; or, perhaps more accurately, the imbalance whereby
Matt wanted to be more affectionate than Christina was reflected in their emotional
intimacy. She constructed a narrative around their relationship that positioned her as
the more detached, independent partner.

> Christina: I think I keep more from him cos some stuff, I just don't tell
> people loads of stuff anyway [NH: yeah], and sometimes I'd rather go to one
> of my, like, best friends […]
> I reckon in relationships there's always someone that likes the other person
> more? I just get that impression with people.

She saw Matt as more dependent on her and on the relationship: the one who "liked
the other person more". Tying in with this, although she talked (as we have seen)
about their having arguments, she said that he rarely got angry with her:

> Christina: He never really gets that annoyed at me. He says he can't get
> annoyed at me, so, that's quite good!

While she portrays this as a positive, here, it also resonates with her portrayal of
Matt's desire to avoid conflict in their arguments about other girls. And at this point
in the interview, she had just told me about a time Matt found out that she self-
harmed:

> Christina: And he was annoyed at me, it was quite horrible [NH: mm], cos he
> just found out, like he saw and he had a massive go at me, and it was really
> horrible for me [NH: yeah] cos it's not as if I, well, do it to annoy you

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The intensifiers in her speech here ("quite horrible", "massive go", "really horrible") speak to the distress that this incident evidently caused her. His reaction to finding out about her self-harming might well have reinforced her determination to keep her emotional self separate from the relationship. Christina's presentation of herself as the more independent partner is interesting for how it plays into gendered narratives of relationships. "Traditional" forms of masculinity are often associated with lack of emotional expression or commitment, but heterosexual relationships can be portrayed as a site for men to express their emotional vulnerability (Allen 2003; Korobov and Thorne 2006; Maxwell 2007). This was a theme that arose frequently from both my male and female participants. In Claire Maxwell's discussion of young men and women's attitudes towards gender roles in heterosexual relationships, she shows her participants negotiating between "traditional" gendered narratives (for instance, male=active vs. woman=passive, themes of male jealousy and possession), and "alternative" narratives, including men expressing desire for equal and emotional relationships. She explores how different narratives could co-exist, and how "ideals" of relationships often differed from actual experiences (2007). But I would suggest that the "traditional" and "alternative" narratives themselves are not as far from each other as she suggests.

For instance, Maxwell highlights women who "described pursuing more active roles within these more emotionally connected romantic relationships, in which they invested energy and commitment to supporting their partner to change and/or reach their potential" (2007: 546). This "active" role, though, fits very well with the construction of the romantic relationship as a place where a young woman cares for a supposedly emotionally-underdeveloped man. The doing of gendered emotion work that was discussed earlier often relies on the presentation of men who are vulnerable and "soft" in heterosexual relationships *because* of their need to perform a "harder" masculinity elsewhere, and of more emotionally-skilled women who can "fix" them. Donna Chung (2005) shows how young women talked about their emotional competence and relationship work as a discursive strategy in interviews to account for their relationships with boyfriends as equal. And we saw above how in Donovan and Hester's work, women who had been in abusive relationships had constructed

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themselves as the stronger, more resilient partner (2010). Christina's performance of independence and emotional resilience defends against an interpretation of their relationship as overly involved and "clingy". Such an interpretation could be read as disruptive of normative discourses of gender equality and female autonomy (whereby girls ought to be independent, not defined by their position in a relationship) and of age (whereby teenagers shouldn't be involved in relationships that are 'too serious'). Both these strands are tied in with a normative figuration of the middle-class teen girl, as I explore further in chapter seven. Christina's discursive construction of herself as emotionally independent, then, can be read as a strategy to position herself within the boundaries of acceptable gendered, aged and classed relationship behaviour.

"It's hard to balance it sometimes": friendships and privacy

In the previous chapter, we saw how intense and claustrophobic the school-based networks of social surveillance could be. For Christina, although (as we have seen) her relationship with Matt could be similarly claustrophobic at times, it also worked as a space to withdraw from the scrutiny of school and friends. Her negotiations of the interpenetrations of her relationship and friendships were changing and sometimes difficult to manage.

The development and deepening of her relationship with Matt had brought significant changes in the social relations of both partners. Many researchers have explored how in heterosexual relationships, women or girls often end up losing more of their social connections and friendships than do men or boys (Chung 2005; Powell 2010). Christina and Matt's relationship was intertwined with their friendships, in particular with her group of friends. She said that he had friends out of school, but she wasn't sure who he had spent time with in school before they got together:

> Christina: it was really confusing, cos we weren't friends and then we got *really* close [yeah] and then he just sort of, he would just sort of hang out with me, I don't really know who he like hung out with that much before we got so close [ok]
> NH: So he's kind of, not taken over, but he's kind of come into your -
> Christina: Yeah, but he doesn't really – like that many people in our group

So in order to spend more time with Christina, and because he didn't have many friends he wanted to hang out with in school, it seemed that Matt encroached on her friendship circle, despite the fact that he did not particularly like her friends (and some of them didn't like him). She painted a picture of their spending a lot of time together in school and out, which annoyed her friends. The amount of time they spent together, and physical intimacy discussed above, caused problems with her friends, who avoided spending time with them as a couple: "cos other people don't like being around us cos he is so clingy!" This point was reiterated by some of her friends in another interview, who said Christina and Matt were "a bit too comfortable with each other" and this "scare[d] everyone else".

> Link: So I think I'm probably less friends with them now cos they spend all their time together
> Zelda: Like all of our friends, they liked him before, but now they don't cos he takes her away

(I didn't ask them to talk about Christina, but they started discussing the two as an example of a very close couple.) Zelda and Link's quotation here focusses on Christina's physical absence from her friends, but their discussion slipped between the time Christina and Matt spent together, and their emotional/physical closeness. Their feelings about the interruption to their friendship can be read also on a symbolic level: they see Christina and Matt as becoming more intertwined, as Christina's individual identity becomes partially subsumed within the Christina-Matt couple identity. This (in both their interpretations and Christina's) relates to Chung's point that partners' commitment to a relationship creates "a level of interdependence in their identities" (2005, p. 448).

Christina found this friendship situation difficult.

> Christina: But, um, because he's been so clingy I've sort of spent less time with my friends, so they sort of feel a bit left out [NH: yeah], and I feel quite bad about that

As we have seen her do earlier in the context of her relationship, she takes the responsibility for the friendship problems upon herself. Although both her friends

and Matt could be framed as at fault, she feels that the failure is hers, and the impossibility of pleasing both "sides" causes her emotional strain.

But although (or because) the interpenetrations of friendship and relationship caused difficulties for Christina, she was determined to keep some aspects of her relationship separate from (some of) her friendships. She told me that she and Matt had had sex, but:

> Christina: Like no-one at this school knows, cos we didn't want, like, rumours going around or anything.

We saw in the previous chapter that gossip could go around very quickly and be very personally damaging, so her decision to keep this secret is understandable. She scrupulously maintained this compartmentalisation of her sexual and social lives, often staying silent or lying when sex was being talked about.

> Christina: Oh, there was a rumour going round a while ago that I'd given Matt a blowjob [NH: right] which was sort of true! But I just, like, was denying it. I was just like, "No, that's *not true*". Cos I didn't want anyone to know.
>
> [later:] We're just like, "ooh, who's had sex?" and I just, I just stay quiet *<Christina laughs>*!

The vehemence of her denials are testament to the strength of her determination to maintain the façade. Her friends seemed to fully believe this, and, indeed, find it strange, as Link said:

> Link: I don't think they've done anything? Cos [Christina's] not really that way minded. But I think that's why [we find their relationship strange], because they don't seem to be that way, but they're just so – glued.

As I discuss later on, it was generally considered usual for couples to have sex after a certain amount of time in a relationship, and Link sees Christina and Matt's public physical and emotional intimacy as incongruous with their apparent lack of private physical intimacy. It seems likely that Christina's secret would have had a far-reaching effect on her interactions with her friends, distancing her further and keeping her constantly a little on edge. It is important to note here that Christina had

told her friends at other schools. It was not a question of maintaining absolute secrecy about her sex life, but rather of an interaction with the particular attributes of the communities formed within the school, the impact that a betrayal of trust would have, and the wide-ranging entanglements of those social networks. This is a particularly important point given the role of friends in providing informal support and advice around sexual relationships and sexual health (Powell 2008b), and in considering the possibilities for peer education around sex and relationships within schools (Forrest et al. 2004; Allen 2005c, 2009).

For Christina, then, her relationship with Matt was both a space of freedom and ease, where they could escape together from social surveillance, and a space where she sometimes felt stifled, uncomfortable, and alienated from her friends. Their emotional intimacy could be a source of tension, as she experienced herself as more autonomous than him. Christina's negotiation of her own and Matt's needs involved considerable work on her own and his emotions. We will return later to another aspect of Christina and Matt's relationships, in the context of sexual negotiations. For now, I will move on to Katie and Alex.

Katie and Alex

Katie and her boyfriend Alex had been together for eight months to the day when I first interviewed her. Katie was vivacious, smiley and forthcoming. She said that Alex would be talking to me, but would be coming with a friend because "he doesn't like talking about his feelings […] typical boys!" I interviewed Alex a few weeks later with his friend Steve. He was, indeed, less forthcoming than she (and than Steve). Alex was witty and laconic. As we saw in the previous chapter, both Katie and Alex placed themselves as somewhere in the second circle when it came to "popularity" at school. Like Christina and Matt, they were drawn on by other participants as an exemplar of a close relationship.

The two had been friends before starting the relationship. Alex's account of why he was attracted to Katie, tempered initially by some laughter and awkwardness

between him, Steve and myself, spoke to the regard he showed for her – "She's quite good-looking. We get on really well, she's really smart, really funny, it's never awkward". Katie's account of the start of their relationship echoed some of the themes that Christina talked about, with similar ambivalence and uncertainty:

> Katie: we were at a party, and I hadn't seen him all week cos he'd been, he was really upset with me because he'd <mock-serious tone> proclaimed his love to me, and I'd completely knocked him down and said oh no, I don't want to, but anyway a week later I'd really missed him cos he hadn't talked to me all week and he, not answered my calls and I said, I'm really sorry, I think I'm ready to have a relationship.

Several girls seemed to display a caution and hesitation when it came to entering into relationships, mediated by an uncertainty about their own attractions to men before they discovered the men's attractions to them. As I argued above, this hesitation and ambivalence is particularly important to take into account when understanding young women's relationships to their own bodies and sexualities, and it relates to wider theorization of girls' and women's hesitant relationship with their own bodies, as discussed in chapter two (Young 1980).

In the joint interview, however, the relationship's origin story was expanded upon and told slightly differently, in a way that highlighted Katie's assertiveness within the relationship.

> Katie: and it was awkward but then we got over that after Christmas really, when you plucked up the courage to ask me out, well I rang him up and was like "Ask me out, now!"

The discrepancy between these two accounts is interesting, as Katie foregrounds her hesitation and uncertainty in the individual interview account, as against her active assertion of her wishes in the couple interview account. The narrative she and he constructed together of their relationship was one whereby she was the active decisionmaker, planner and motivator of the pair, and the account in the couple interview of their beginning helps to build this up. As we shall see later in this chapter and through the next, though, this narrative obscured some of the power that Alex's emotions and desires held over the relationship and Katie's actions. Katie and

Alex were very close, but again, negotiated various problems and anxieties. Perhaps the most significant coalesced around Alex's relationship with a female friend.

"She obviously thinks she owns him": jealousy and rivalry

We met Natalie in the last chapter: blonde, self-assured, attractive and popular. She had been very good friends with Alex for a long time, and their families were close. Katie was extremely unhappy with Alex's intimate friendship with Natalie. Natalie and Rachel (who was Katie's best friend) talked fairly extensively about Katie and Alex, some of which I go into further below. But in keeping with the ostentatious performance of "niceness" that Natalie displayed throughout her interview – often backtracking after making seemingly-negative comments about anybody – she maintained that Katie was "generally like a really lovely person", despite some comments which might be read as critical and undermining of Katie and Alex's relationships (of course, I could not say how she would have spoken if I had not been interviewing her with Katie's best friend). In contrast, Katie was very outspoken about how much she disliked Natalie. She tempered her outspoken hostility to some extent when I later talked to her and Alex together, but still made her feelings clear.

Katie's jealousy of Natalie and her relationship with Alex had many facets. She described Natalie as possessing many of the prizes of successful heterofemininity: "she's very very rich", "she's very pretty, she's a model", "she's very good-looking, she's perfect, skinny". These all intertwined with her close relationship with Alex's family, and related to Katie's own subject positions. Alex, discussing Katie's feelings about Natalie in his interview with Steve, played up the bodily aspect of Katie's insecurity, referring to a recent incident where he had lifted Natalie up onto his shoulders:

> Alex: I've got this friend who's really little […] I put her on my shoulders, and Katie was upset cos she thinks, like, she's too big.

Katie only mentioned Natalie's size once, although as quoted above, it did appear in the context of an explanation of why she was "perfect". This could indicate that Alex was choosing to focus on the aspects of Katie's jealousy that could be easily

attributed to her individualised (and archetypally feminine) insecurities, as opposed to the relationship between himself and Natalie. Of course, it could also suggest that Katie was unwilling to talk about her bodily anxieties to me, or merely that the recent incident in question had spotlighted this particular aspect.

Natalie's attractiveness, then, worried Katie: she felt that the relationship between her and Alex was precariously close. She said that Natalie maintained they were only friends, and like brother and sister, but that this was disingenuous, because of the "sexual" way that she acted with him.

> Katie: I know what Natalie's like, she's very – sexual
>
> [later in the interview:] She's a very hard person to get on with when you're a boy [NH: really?] cos she'll be all over you, like I've been there when she's just put his hands, her hands up his top, and just started feeling him, like been 'Oh, muscles!' and she'll be like 'oh lovely'

Katie viewed Natalie's sexuality as dangerous, deceitful and manipulative, and the vast majority of her talk about Natalie's relationship with Alex revolved around Natalie's actions and attitudes. This is understandable in the context of a relationship, where she wants to believe in and argue for Alex's propriety and loyalty to her. However, it also resonates with a wider tendency for hostility towards girls and women, rather than boys and men, in situations of "inappropriate" sexual relations, and the double standard of denigrating women for their "excessive" sexuality, as discussed in the previous chapter (Chambers et al. 2004a).

The shape of her jealousy spoke to a view of Alex's masculinity as helpless in the face of feminine sexual power:

> Katie: um, I don't think that he can reaaally resist to be honest, when she, you know…

This representation resonates with the discourse of the male sex drive as irrepressible (Hollway 1984a), as I discussed in chapter two, and will go into further in chapter six. Natalie had once kissed Alex at a party and invited him to have a threesome in a shed with another girl, "and I was standing there like, I know we've only been going

out two months, but –". She said, though, that Alex dismissed her worries about this – "cos he says that it's only a joke, it's only funny". This was spoken in a weary tone of resignation – indeed, she seemed resigned to the problems in general, not expecting Alex to do anything to assuage her feelings. As she said after trying to articulate all the reasons she *shouldn't* be worried:

> Katie: I don't really, I can't really have that much of a problem about it because it's fine

Her re-framing of "don't" to "can't" seems to reflect her subjective experience of being immobilised, unable to change anything about the situation.

Katie's feelings about Natalie, and about her relationship with Alex and his family, also played into anxieties around class fractions, which I discuss in detail in chapter seven. Natalie and Alex's families were close, which was a source of discomfort for Katie. Natalie, her mother, Alex's mother and several of Alex's (step)sisters were portrayed as being close friends, passing gossip and rumours between them – and in this way transgressions that would normally be kept within the younger generation and the school social circle could spill out to wider audiences. Katie viewed these other women in Alex's life as causes of many of the problems between them, and as a very significant factor keeping Alex from breaking away from his friendship with Natalie.

> NH: So I mean he's obviously not willing to, give [Katie: no] to change anything about his relationship with [Natalie]
> Katie: Er, she's a very scary girl, she gets very angry, she is very bitchy, she can really hurt somebody and she would definitely hurt Alex, because Texas, who's Alex's big sister [NH: right], the druggie, the one who's living with her boyfriend in the house, um, is also Natalie's good friend, they would both turn against Alex, and both hurt, like really abuse him about stuff like me and say horrible things about me, they have done before, um, and then he, so he can't be in a fight with her, he's got to keep her on his good side, that's what he's said to me.

Here again we see Katie downplaying Alex's capacity for choice in this web of relationships, positioning him as a victim and as constrained by circumstance. In this case, though, she also sees acquiescence to the status quo as necessary for her own

self-preservation: Natalie and Texas would not only hurt Alex, but hurt Katie by extension. In both her interview and Alex's, it seemed that this was not an unreasonable assumption to make. Although Natalie and Katie were superficially reconciled at the time we spoke, Katie said that when they were fighting, Natalie had been very vicious:

> Katie: she'd, people would mention me in a class and she'd say 'what a dog' and 'she's such a slag, she's such a bitch, [NH: yeah] she's messing Alex about'.

Alex was more circumspect in his interview with Steve, presenting the two as fairly reconciled and downplaying the conflict a little, although he recognised their lack of mutual admiration:

> Alex: They're alright like, they're quite good friends but I think it's mostly fake, I don't think they really like each other that much

He admitted that sometimes Natalie could be hostile, saying "Sometimes Natalie does say stuff that's really against Katie and I will stick up for her, say you can't say that, but she's alright most of the time". In my interview with both of them, they told stories together about Natalie, although Katie took the lead. Alex sometimes demurred from her assertions, but also put forth his own points criticising Natalie: "I think she just makes up a lot of stuff before she tells it to Texas". Having something in common with Christina's portrayal of Matt, Alex seemed often to work to avoid conflict (this was true in both his own and Katie's individual accounts, and observable in the paired interview).

This section, then, has served as a detailed illustration of how one intimate relationship intersected with other networks and people "outside" the relationship. While Alex's close relationship with Natalie, and/or Katie's jealousy, could be regarded as obstacles to the smooth running of the relationship, they are evidence of how young partners' heterosexual subjectivities were negotiated not within the intimate relationship, but were constructed in relation to others, and intertwined with other relationships. The strength and intensity of Katie's emotion towards Natalie is

also notable: acute feelings of homosocial enmity seem more speakable than acute feelings of heterosexual intimacy.

"He doesn't like talking, it's hard for him": conflict and control

Alex and Katie had a close, open and comfortable relationship. Interviewing them together, they were at ease in conversation and physically, sitting close to each other on one sofa, sometimes touching, but casually. They spoke of their relationship as mature and positive.

> Alex: I think that we're, like, we're sort of better than every other couple – well, it's true! It's just it's never awkward, there's always something to talk about even if there isn't, we don't need to talk, we don't feel the need to fill that gap of silence

They often teased each other during the interview and spoke about this teasing as a staple of their relationship, which for the most part was enjoyable although occasionally caused misunderstandings, usually when Katie thought Alex was being serious. Within the relationship, she spoke of herself as someone who was very open and honest and wanted to air problems when they arose (consonant with the image of their relationship set out above in relation to their origin). In contrast, she felt that Alex was unwilling to engage in arguments. This, she said, often led to arguments that were "one-sided":

> Alex: You always do that after arguments –
> Katie: – We'd just had a massive argument –
> Alex: *<mimics Katie>* So, what are you thinking, Lexy? *<they laugh>*
> Katie: well, it's because -
> Alex: *<stubborn tone>* Well I'm watching Friends, so I'm thinking about Friends
> Katie: Well, we weren't watching Friends at that point earlier, I said, what are you thinking and you were like, "Nothing", cos I always think, I say I talk about what's upsetting me, and then he'll not say anything, and then I'm like, I don't know what to say, it really annoys me cos I really wish you could say what you're thinking, you must be thinking something, you're just not very good at telling me

These arguments, then, could progress from being less about the issues they began with, which would begin with Katie raising something, and become more about the

state of communication between them. She found it especially irritating that Alex usually refused to apologise or engage, and often dismissed issues that she raised as being jokes: "and I get really angry, cos he says he's joking, but I say well that's just not funny" (couple interview), and this often resulted in her "giving up" arguing although she felt the issue had not been resolved. But, she said, there were other times that the arguments lasted longer: "You never really get angry with me – oh no, you do. Those arguments have lasted overnight."

In narrating the relationship, they spoke of Katie as the one who got angry and Alex as the one who was more at ease with situations. Clearly, though, there were times when Alex did get angry. In contrast to the light-hearted discussion around Katie's issues, in which they seemed to work together on reproducing the mythology of their relationship, talk of these past events brought up some tension in the interview. In relation to "those arguments" referenced above:

> Alex: Yeah, those arguments, yeah. But they're –
> Katie: – they're what?
> Alex: They're proper arguments […]
> Katie: wait, so what, you're saying the things that I get upset about are pointless, but the things that you get upset about –
> Alex: I don't really get upset about stuff.
> *<Pause>*
> Katie: Really?
> Alex: Not really.
> Katie: I think you do.
> *<Pause>*
> Katie: Okay! You get upset about stuff.
> Alex: I do kinda.

Katie here is not happy that Alex elevates "his" arguments above "hers", and tries to put them on a more equal footing, but Alex tries to maintain the roles that they play, arguing that he doesn't "get upset". Katie inhabits the emotional role, and so, if he does not take her problems seriously, he is unwilling to inhabit a similar role, which would imply that the issues which cause "proper arguments" are, similarly, a product of his emotional (over)reactions. When Alex is "upset" (a term he never wholly accepts, but one which Katie imposes on him), he "just hides it and goes all funny and silent".

These less-spoken tensions between them influenced aspects of Katie's life that she did not talk about in the paired interview, but did in her (earlier) individual interview. Given the oft-rehearsed narrative of their roles, whereby she was emotional and he was not, his anger was disruptive and frightening:

> Katie: Yeah, but when he is angry that's the scariest bit, cos he's never angry, he's always, everything's always a little bit of a joke [NH: OK] and he's always making the jokes – even when I'm upset, he'll make jokes and er and that'll make me more angry, but when he is angry, that's a really scary time, when he's, when I've managed to make him that angry.

The locus of responsibility shifts in her description; she seems uncomfortable with placing the responsibility for her fear solely on him, so she shifts from talking just about his anger to recalling that she "made him" angry. This is reminiscent of the emotion work we explored in relation to Christina's case; Katie is taking on responsibility for Alex's anger.

His anger usually focussed on other boys. When he was away on holiday, she said, "I'll go with my friends to parties [NH: yeah] and that's when he gets annoyed because I'm with other boys". She said she knew she had to remain faithful to Alex, so she didn't drink too much, and when I asked if she thought she would remain faithful even if she was drinking, she told me about a time that a "really close friend" of hers had kissed her when she was asleep:

> Katie: Yeah I think guys get quite confident when they're drunk so, I have actually, when I've been with Alex I've been kissed by somebody [NH: really?] and um, I was actually asleep at the time

But this non-consensual encounter had led to serious repercussions within her relationship.

> Katie: I had to tell Alex, I can't lie to him [NH: sure] but he was – very upset, but I convinced him I didn't cheat on him [NH: yeah] and that he'd rather know than not know, and I said that it would never happen again, I guess I'll just have to be quite careful not to fall asleep near any guys! [NH: yeah! Absolutely] And, but obviously he will use that against me now, every argument [NH: really?] we have he'll be like, but you cheated on me, even though I didn't, I fell asleep on the floor […] not provocative at all

While she was clearly angry and distressed that her friend had done this to her, and spoke of it as "really disgusting", her honest approach to the relationship (and, perhaps, the fear that others would tell Alex and misrepresent the incident) meant that she wanted to share what had happened with Alex. However, he reacted with anger and felt that she was to blame, and continued to use this against her in arguments. Given her sarcastic retelling of her defence ("I'll just have to be quite careful not to fall asleep near any guys") she seemed to be confident in not feeling any responsibility for the incident, and she considered Alex's response wrong. However, she did now monitor her behaviour very closely when it came to parties because of his feelings about them, which might well have been tied up with his anger about her "cheating"/assault.

> Katie: Actually when he goes to his dad's [at weekends], I won't go to a party [NH: OK] because I don't, he's a bit worried that I'm going to be drunk and get off with people, so I won't go to parties if he's not with me

This is particularly telling in highlighting certain imbalances in their conflict. As we saw above, Katie was unhappy with Alex's friendship with Natalie, but he did not end their friendship, and frequently associated with Natalie in ways that Katie found upsetting. Although Katie was dissatisfied with this situation, she was resigned to it, and discursively mitigated Alex's responsibility for the situation. In contrast, Alex's unhappiness with Katie's actions at parties (including a non-consensual incident) led to Katie minimising her participation in social life when Alex was absent. This supports previous findings, particularly from research into experiences of and attitudes towards gendered violence, that men exerting control over their girlfriend's actions within a relationship (particularly for reasons of jealousy) is often tacitly considered acceptable by young people (Barter et al. 2009; Barter 2010; McCarry 2010), as I explore further in chapter six.

Alex spent every other weekend with his dad. Like Christina, she had also had issues with her friendships since starting to spend so much time with her boyfriend, so I wondered if she saw her friends on these weekends, but, she said, "that's the weekends I revise and do homework". She did not voice resentment at this control of

her activities. Indeed, although she did experience problems with her friends, who felt that she had become distant since her relationship began, she saw her relationship with Alex as having brought a deeper and closer emotional bond than any she had with her friends, who she represented as unreliable and disloyal – and some of whom Alex disliked. Her negotiation of these friendships and her relationship was complicated, and she felt that she was under an obligation to spend time with her friends not only for their sake, but also for her own:

> Katie: and I guess I do need to spend time with my friends, as well as [NH: yeah] cos also when it ends, which it inevitably will be, will do, I will be left on my own.

This ties in with the ways that Katie and Alex negotiated the idea of the future, which I explore further in chapter seven.

Alex and Katie, then, shared a relationship which was deeply based in friendship and a feeling of mutual ease, and which they saw as very mature in comparison with others' relationships. They had routines and roles that they reproduced which constructed them in gendered terms, with Katie as emotional and Alex as stoical and silent. As with Christina and Matt, though, the discursive representation of their relationship which constructed the girl as the more powerful partner obscured some of the more uncomfortable undercurrents between them, as Chung found in her research with young women (2005, 2007).

While these two case studies may not be representative of young people's relationship experiences more widely, analysing their dynamics and interactions in detail has allowed for a closer investigation of the complications and contradictions of young heterosexual subjectivities as negotiated in relationships. The previous sections have illustrated how particular young people experience and balance the pleasures and pains of intimacy, the tensions of heterosexual relationships as situated within the wider social context, and the complex flows of gendered power within relationships. In the following sections, Katie and Alex, and Christina and Matt, will reappear, but I will take a step back from the depths of individual relationships to explore broader themes. This will also give me an opportunity to discuss the many

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relationships that were shorter-term and less involved than the two we have seen so far, which remained nevertheless sites for anxieties, tensions, and negotiations of gender and heterosexuality.

Beginnings and attractions

We have already seen how two couples went from friends to partners, and found common themes of ambivalence in their beginnings. This ambivalence was frequently found, and often related to the idea of relationships as something to do, to stave off boredom. Alex and Steve (who were both in long-term relationships) felt that they were unusual:

> Steve: Most of the people like, I don't wanna stereotype people but there is a lot of people who just have short term relationships and it doesn't really work out at this age, I know we're quite young and people don't really last […]
> Alex: Yeah just like with random people, "do you wanna go out?" and then the next week they're like "Nah".
> Steve: Yeah, that's just a bit of a waste of time – like if you're bored.

Participants also portrayed (other) people as entering into relationships because they wanted the cachet of a boyfriend/girlfriend. This was especially the case when girls had not yet been out with anyone, as this meant one would not be considered as a potential partner.

> Link: People that feel like they actually need to go out with someone to feel accepted […]
> Zelda: Yeah, if you've been out with someone it's just, like, guys can feel more secure in asking, but if they haven't been out with anyone they're just like, I dunno, not mature enough […] You kind of have to go out with someone when you're young so you get accepted later.

As this quote suggests, the beginnings of relationships tended to be traditionally gendered, with boys taking the initiative to ask girls out. James had an interesting take on this, talking about the first time he 'properly' kissed a girl.

> James: Um well yeah – this is where I'm kind of a dick […] we kinda got off with each other and that was kind of my first kind of proper, [NH: mm] and –

makes me sounds terrible! But I kind of felt, a bit - guilty?
NH: Right, how come?
James: Like just cos... I dunno, I thought that if we didn't go out, [NH: ah] she would feel really bad? So I thought, so I thought [NH: OK], I mean I did like her but –
NH: Not that much?
James: No [laughs]
N: So I mean what did you say, what happened afterwards, after you got off with her, like the first time
James: Yeah so I was just like do you wanna, like, go out

I asked why he had felt he should do this, and he said,

James: I don't know *<laughing>* I just felt guilty, and I didn't really know how to [NH: mm] to kind of react, I knew she liked me, so…

This episode highlights some of the complex ways in which heterogendered norms are taken up and negotiated. Viewing the relationship without James' commentary, one might see it as a demonstration of male "activity" versus female "passivity", with James taking the initiative to ask the girl out and she saying yes. But it seems inadequate and inaccurate to view this as an example of male agency. Clearly he is not *forced*, or coerced in the usual senses of the word, into entering this relationship. Nor is it quite a case of seeking social or peer group approval through performing heteromasculinity (Richardson 2010). But he is constrained by the forms of masculinity that are available to him, which urge him into taking compulsory action. This masculinity is a combination of 'traditional' gendered roles (he asks her out, as he feels that she is waiting, and that she would be damaged and distressed by a singular romantic incident which did not turn into a relationship) and 'softer' masculinities – he does not want to be the "stereotypical guy" (as he referred to them elsewhere) who acts callously towards women. His relationship with his father also shaped his subjectivity: he saw his father very rarely and felt that this meant he did not know "how a guy should behave himself", but had worked on changing his drinking habits and violent behaviour because he did not want to end up like his dad. Yet, of course, the fact that James is aware of and reflexive about his problematic reasons for entering the relationship does not change the effect of his actions on his partner.

The other side of this coin was the girls who accepted propositions because they felt they should. Link talked about a boy who she had gone out with, in a sense.

> Link: This was only cos I felt really guilty because he said, "Oh, I really like you, will you go out with me?" and I felt really guilty cos, like, I didn't want to say no, so I said yes, but then I ignored him […]
> NH: Why did you say yes?
> Link: cos I felt bad! He was going on about how depressed he was […] he told me he was depressed and stuff and I was like, I can't say no!

This resulted in a period of time over the summer holidays when she ignored his phone calls, pretended her parents were making her stay at home, avoided contact with him, and tried to hide his existence from her friends, causing her significant inconvenience and, presumably, causing him significant confusion and distress. This is, again, an illustration of particular gendered discourses and ways of relating shaping action, without one particular participant coercing another, and with Link clearly aware that her actions are problematic.

We can also see in this example a very different relationship experience to the intimacy of Katie and Alex, and Christina and Matt. It is impossible to make very many generalisations about the subjective experiences and negotiations of relationships of teenagers even within the confines of one specific school, and it is important to recall the very varying levels of sexual experience.

The two previous examples illustrate relationships that began against one partner's will, although with their consent. But, as we saw with Christina and Katie, relationships often began with ambiguous feelings. Ellie talked about the beginnings of her relationship with a friend of a friend:

> Ellie: To be honest with you when I first started talking to him I didn't have any interest in him whatsoever, I was like you're boring me, go away but he didn't give up and I like that, the fact that he just didn't give up so I was like I'm gonna give it a shot because he just didn't give up, did he?

Ellie at first found her pursuer frustrating and boring, yet simultaneously appreciated his persistence and found it validating. She later went into more detail on her approach to relationships, which she had passed on to her friend Amy:

Ellie: I've always told Amy to never look for guys but let them look for you. 'Cause I used to look for guys all the time and when I did I found people like Dom [ex-boyfriend who cheated on her], people that would just go for anybody because they want to be with somebody but it's different when a guy looks for you and you can say no the first time but if they don't give up then you know they're interested in a way, do you know what I mean. So there's many other people they could be chasing but if they're chasing you it's saying something so that's why I went out with Scott. The fact that he didn't give up and I kind of liked that because that's what my dad told me to look for, let them find you.

Her narrative of development highlights some of the struggles and disappointments that she experienced when defying heterogendered expectations and ending up with men treating her badly. In making guys come to her, she feels in control, and if they continue to pursue her after one refusal, she sees that as a positive validation which can overcome previous feelings of indifference. She and Amy situated this within a discourse of self-confidence, resonant with the assertive neoliberal femininity I discussed in chapter two.

Amy: And basically…and ever since I met Ellie she's just given me the confidence to be who I want to be kind of thing. She just basically said to me right just be who you are and if the guys don't like you then stuff them, you can just find another one.

This focus on self-confidence resonates with other participants' disparaging comments about girls who were "desperate" for boyfriends or relationships. Ellie and Amy represented their friendship as a source of great strength through which they could withstand and fight back against ill-treatment from boys (as well as from other girls). In this way, it contrasts with Katie's experience (and, to a lesser extent, Christina's) of mistrusting girls as friends, and of the thinly-veiled heterosexualised competition. Ellie, who (as we saw in the previous chapter) had once been part of the "popular" group, explicitly made this comparison between what she saw as their superficial and disloyal networks, and the friendship she had found with Amy. There are class dynamics at work here, too, as I discuss further in chapter seven: Amy had previously been at a nearby school with a (relatively) negative reputation, and had been mocked as a "chav", and Ellie and Amy lived near to each other in a more deprived area than most of my participants. The closeness of their friendship could

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be read as providing an escape/protection from the dominant middle-class cultures of the school, as found in Fletcher, Bonell and Rhodes' research on drug cultures, which explored the importance of friendship, bonding and escape as a coping mechanism for young women from disadvantaged families at a high-achieving school (Fletcher et al. 2009).

Ellie and Amy's narrative of their independence from men creates a space to resist heterogendered norms, to not care about finding boyfriends. They dismiss the position of boys as arbiters of girls' value, and argue the potential for positive decision-making – "if the guys don't like you then stuff them, you can just find another one". Yet at the same time, their resistance is bound up within the heterosexual matrix; their active reframing paradoxically reinscribes them within a discourse of female passivity, as they resignify waiting and gatekeeping within heterofemininity as a source of strength. The complexity of this narrative of resistance recalls Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose's analyses of "regulation and rupture" in the lives of working-class young women (2008; 2012). At the same time they both resist the heteronormative discourses that circulate within the middle-class contexts of their school culture, and uphold the power of the male-as-pursuer model. In a different way to Natalie and Rachel and the popular girls in chapter four, they enjoy pleasure in heterodesirability, and the power that it brings them to reject.

"No-one has sex unless they're in a relationship": negotiating sexual desire and practice

We saw in the previous chapter that the cardinal rule of sexuality was to not have sex outside a relationship. Within a relationship, sex was something to be worked up to. It was not assumed that someone would be having sex as soon as they entered a relationship, but as we saw earlier in Zelda and Link's opinion of Christina and Matt, it was considered somewhat odd if people were in a relationship for a significant amount of time without doing anything sexual. In one of the later interviews I carried out, when participants had gone into year 11, Laura spoke of sex as being

"acceptable" within long-term relationships, and said that a lot of her friends had had sex, but they had been in relationships for one to two years.

> Laura: But I think the period, the short time that you're with someone, it's getting shorter and shorter
> NH: Right
> Laura: Like two years, one year, and then it's getting to like months to weeks

It is not really surprising if the balance between sexual practice as forbidden and sexual practice as expected was beginning to tip over as they got older. Laura felt that a particular set of her friends had all started to have sex close in time to each other.

> Laura: um you know, one does it and then the others have done it the next week cos they've all done it, so they've like, the whole group have done it by now

Laura represented herself as separate from these girls, saying that she was not the type of person to be affected by what her friends did, although she did not seem hostile or deprecatory towards them. Of course, it is unlikely that any of the girls in question would have directly said they had sex because their friends did. But the shifting boundaries of acceptability seemed to affect girls' practices (or at least the practices they reported to their friends). Laura did not represent this in a negative context of "peer pressure", as some other participants mentioned (in an abstract sense, as I discuss further in the next chapter). Rather, it seemed more that one friend's action opened up a space of possibility for the others. Again, this speaks to the collective and social nature of changing heterosexual subjectivities, and how decisions and possibilities within relationships were shaped by those outside it.

The most commonly spoken of prerequisites for sex were being in love and being "ready", and there was much talk about "waiting" for "the right time". These only seemed to be salient or discussed in relation to sexual intercourse, as opposed to any other form of sexual activity, (some of) which was expected in a relationship: the heteronormative primacy of vaginal intercourse remained. But the "right time", for girls at least, was not necessarily a moment that was chosen; rather, it was a state of

being, and once you were in that state, it could "happen". Laura talked about her relationship with a recent ex-boyfriend:

> Laura: I mean I, at the time, I would have [had sex with him], if it came to it [NH: yeah] I mean you're in love, you would, um but we didn't, and I'm glad for that now [NH: OK] because obviously it would have made things such a lot worse.

So her decision that she was "ready" (or ready enough) was made independently from any partners (although with one in mind), but without a strong desire and/or the resources to initiate sex. She represents sex as the expected next stage from being "in love", but as deepening a relationship, such that a break-up would be much more painful. Her retrospective judgement is notable as it highlights an inherent problem with the concept of "readiness", as discussed by Catherine Ashcraft (2006): while it is understood as a state attached to the individual, the ultimate test of whether an individual was "ready" for her first sexual encounter often depends on the aftermath, and specifically the actions of the other party. That is, Laura implies that she would have regretted her first sexual intercourse, although she was in love and willing to experience it, because of the impossible-to-predict later actions of her sexual partner.

A similar kind of ambivalent readiness could be seen in Christina's discussion of her sexual relationship with Matt:

> Christina: we did sort of um move quite fast *<laughs>* I suppose considering cos it was like, in December we were basically going out [yeah] and cos we were so close anyway and um but yeah.
> NH: So I mean you were both kind of, you both wanted to move that fast then
> Christina: Yeah, well I mean I don't know if I wanted to move, like, *that* fast, it's not as if I was completely against it [NH: yeah, sure] but I trust him, and he trusts me [...]
> And I did know he wasn't using me cos we'd been going out like four or five months, and we're still together

From the beginning of this quote Christina seems to be defending against judgements of her sexual decisions as violating age- and gender-appropriate norms, much as we saw earlier in relation to their emotional intimacy. She constructs her relationship as one that is mutually trusting and close, and her own identity as

discerning and knowledgeable ("I did know he wasn't using me"), unable to be duped and seduced by a predatory man. But when I try and confirm that the decision was mutual, she disclaims full ownership of the sexual progression – "I don't know if I wanted to move *that* fast" – indicating a certain reluctance, ambivalence, or at least a desire to not appear too sexually eager in the interview. Once again, the issue of retrospective readiness is central: the decision to have sex is justified by the fact that they are still together. Despite the prevalence of the discourse of individual responsibility and individual choice in sexual decision-making, it is in fact implicitly constructed as impossible to be fully in control of a sexual choice, since the "correctness" or otherwise is determined by another person.

Through this section, then, we have seen the "missing discourse of ambivalence" (Muehlenhard and Peterson 2005) speak loudly. I will end it with another quote from Laura, on sexual activity with her ex-boyfriend:

> Laura: it kind of just happened, it was never, like, we never spoke about it, it was just that moment

It is this "just happened" that Deborah Tolman argues we must get beyond in understanding teenage girls' sexuality, and in enabling them to get beyond (Tolman 2005). My analysis indicates that, for these young girls, bodies and desires were still often unspoken and uncertain. Unlike some of the upper middle-class 16-18 year old girls in Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton's research (Maxwell and Aggleton 2012a), these mostly upper middle-class girls had not (yet?) found sources of embodied pleasure and power within their sexual practice – or, at least, had not become able to speak it in an interview.

The final section of this chapter explores the practices and aftermath of ending relationships, and the lasting effects that could linger.

Breaking up is hard to do

Almost universal among participants' discussions of breaking up, whether they were the initiator of the split or not, was some measure of deception or dissimulation,

whether meant kindly or otherwise. (Of course, this is hardly specific to teenage relationships.) As we have seen, young people fairly often entered into relationships with people they were not particularly interested in. Sometimes they grew closer over time, but often the lack of enthusiasm proved fatal for the relationship. James ended his relationship with Jessie, the beginning of which we saw above.

> James: Eventually I just kinda... sent her a message [NH: mm] saying – yeah i didn't even do it face to face, that's how bad I was – it's not going great, I just, I've got, and then I used the excuse of home troubles which I was having at that time but it wasn't a reason [NH: OK yeah] I just used that as a reason

This, however, did not end the troubles the relationship caused for James. She and her friends all stopped talking to him, and he also ended up telling her about the problems he was having at home, even though he had not felt close enough in the relationship to want to share these.

> James: Yeah, I did feel a bit weird, because even though even though we had been going out and stuff I didn't like, I mean it was kind of one of those things that you tell to someone you've known for years, like a *really* good friend, and she, yeah we went out and she was a 'mate' [NH: yeah] but she, I hadn't really known her for that long

"Troubles at home" was a frequently-used rationale for ending a relationship. People in short-term relationships might not necessarily have met their girlfriend or boyfriend's family (and, indeed, Link had a boyfriend for a year without telling her mother about it), so this could be a low-risk strategy as it was difficult to argue. Rachel's ex-boyfriend had sent her a long message: "I don't know he just said a lot about his family and that it wasn't the right time and stuff". However, she and her friends thought that this was not the real reason he had split up with her, and rumours had gone round about the reason he had given others for the split.

> Rachel: Um apparently! <*she and Natalie laugh*> He broke up with me cos I wanted to have sex with him and he didn't
> NH: Oh! Really?
> Natalie: and he's really religious, so

Rachel strongly denied that this was the case – "No! I didn't want to *<laughter>* " – representing as outrageous and ridiculous the suggestion that she might have been the sexual pursuer in the relationship. She said, instead, that he was the one who had tried to "push it":

> Rachel: Yeah he brought it up all the time [NH: OK] like not sex but like going further and stuff [yeah sure] um, don't really understand those rumours

His rumours constituted her as violating femininity through being sexually voracious. This was an enactment of a gossip tactic several participants mentioned, whereby boys would break up with girls and then spread rumours about their sexual practices (true or otherwise) within the relationship. Despite the acceptability of sexual activity within relationships, after breaking up, girls could still be reconstituted as "slags" for having engaged in sexual activity. Again, aspects of relationships could be rewritten retrospectively. Rachel suggested in the interview that "I think he got – scared […] that I would want to [have sex]", constituting his persistence and thus his masculinity as a hollow performance.

Ending a relationship, then, did not necessarily put an end to problems rooted within the relationship, and the entanglements of broader social networks with the intimate relationship could become even more salient. In the following chapter, I investigate gendered harassment within social networks after a break-up in more detail. As we have seen in this section, sexual activity that had been acceptable when bounded by the safe space of the relationship could be reinterpreted, with the single girl now again in danger of occupying the "slut" position. Embodying femininity correctly is impossible, not only because the limits on what is acceptable are so slippery, but because a hitherto acceptable activity may be retrospectively reinterpreted.

Conclusions

This chapter has built on the insights from chapter four, analysing in detail how my participants negotiated their heterosexual subjectivities in the contexts of intimate

partner relationships. Through the chapter, I have addressed three of my four research questions: how young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities are negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships; how middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities are shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts; and how power dynamics are experienced, enacted and gendered in middle-class teenage sexual and intimate relationships.

My findings on sexual negotiation within relationships broadly fit in the work of Louisa Allen, Anastasia Powell, and Deborah Tolman, emphasising the uncertainty and ambivalence of young female desire even for these confident middle-class subjects. In building on this work, though, I have looked more broadly at the intimate relationship, investigating how gender and heterosexuality are performed through everyday aspects of relating. The young people I spoke with ranged from those who had never had a relationship at all, to those who were engaged in serious, meaningful long-term relationships. Relationships varied widely in intensity. Many young people who were in relationships found them a source of support, friendship and enjoyment, and as a place of welcome escape from the pressures of school and from the social surveillance of their friends and peers. But they also had difficulties negotiating the competing pulls of other friendships, dealing with feelings of jealousy and inadequacy, and working with their partners' emotions and changes.

Through my analysis of conflict and negotiation, I have argued that young people constructed narratives of their relationships as equal, but that these narratives obscured the subtle undercurrents of gendered power relations that tended to put girls at a disadvantage. Girls took on the responsibility for keeping relationships on an even keel, shaping their own behaviour to fit in with their partners' desires. While young women's emotion work has been previously discussed in the context of relationship violence (Chung 2005), my analysis looks at the intricacies of how it functions within broadly positive intimate relationships, yet contributes to gendered practices that leave the girl responsible for regulating her own actions and feelings as well as those of her partner.

In the next chapter, we go on to see how these gendered narratives could take darker turns, creating conditions of possibility for violence, control and coercion.

CHAPTER SIX
LOVE HURTS? CONFLICT, COERCION, CONTROL AND VIOLENCE IN TEEN HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONS(HIPS)

If you don't cry, it isn't love. If you don't cry, then you just don't feel it deep enough.
– The Magnetic Fields, *If You Don't Cry.*

This chapter looks at the darker side of relationships and sexuality in middle-class teen relationship cultures. It situates experiences and understandings of what might be called abuse or violence, or might not, within the context of a middle-class teen subjectivity – of what it means to be a middle-class teen girl/boy. It explores the uncertainties, ambivalences and confusions of sexual violence, sexuality, pleasure and danger. In it I blur the dividing lines between "violence" and "normality", and see how they are blurred. I ask what it is about classed teen society and teen culture, that creates the possibility for violence, unhappiness, and (gendered) power causing trouble; and/or the possibility for compassion, ethical relations(hips) and equality. The chapter builds upon and expands themes from the two previous chapters, exploring the 'darker side' of both 'public' and 'private' relations(hips), at people causing each other pain and hurt.

As we see throughout this chapter, these experiences and understandings are not divorced or separate from the other ways in which relationships are negotiated. We have already seen hurtful and distressing ways of relating. Here I explore the ways that the social environment shaping teen sexualities, as presented in chapter two, influences young people's experiences, understandings and narratives of gendered conflict, violence, coercion and control within their heterosexual relationships both long-term and short-term. I also explore in more detail how particular experiences and inequalities were often disavowed and downplayed by young people. This is, of course, a sensitive balance to attend to. By including particular experiences and discussions in this chapter, I do not intend to pathologise them or the people involved. "Abuse" and "violence" are terms that invoke a heavy weight of "otherness", and as such, may be unrecognisable and unhelpful to young people

themselves as descriptors of everyday relations. I do not mean to negate the understandings and beliefs of participants. Yet at the same time, (young) people – especially young women – frequently downplayed and reinterpreted experiences of harm and power differentials, in ways that often reinforced existing lines of power. These disavowals, which will be highlighted throughout the chapter, were entwined with gendered, classed and aged identifications: the desire to produce particular constructions of the self in particular contexts.

Violence in teenage relationships

Previous research with teenagers (Burton et al. 1998; McCarry 2009; McCarry 2010), as discussed in chapter two, indicates a social context whereby, although relationship and sexual violence are professed to be unacceptable, underlying assumptions and justifications are often not so condemnatory. Building on the gendered norms and individualised expectations for identity explored in the previous two chapters, we will see how these expectations can create conditions of possibility for abusive, coercive and unequal ways of relating, and also create difficulties for escaping these relations. Christine Barter, Melanie McCarry, David Berridge and Kathy Evans carried out a significant study for the NSPCC into young people's experiences of partner violence, involving a self-completion questionnaire with 1377 young people in eight secondary schools across England, Scotland and Wales, and a further stage of interviews focussing on experiences, interpretations and meanings of partner violence (Barter et al. 2009). The questionnaire asked young people about their experiences of emotional, sexual and physical violence from partners, and found that 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported having experienced some form of physical partner violence, 33% of girls and 16% of boys reported some form of sexual partner violence, and 75% of girls and 50% of boys reported some form of emotional partner violence. Participants were also asked about the impact of these experiences; girls reported much higher levels of negative impact than boys. These figures, of course, do not tell the whole story. As I explore further in relation to my own findings, it is often difficult to isolate particular incidents and label them as

"violent" or otherwise – particularly, though not exclusively, in relation to emotional violence.

Importantly, the interview data in the NSPCC's study highlighted the ways in which these experiences were intertwined with everyday relationships, and the ways in which young women minimised and downplayed many experiences of controlling and coercive behaviour from partners. This is consonant with much other research on both gendered violence in general, and violence, coercion and control in young people's relationships in particular. As Donna Chung (2005, 2007) found in her interviews with young women, romantic love is often seen as incompatible with power, so experiences of controlling behaviour, jealousy, assumptions of 'ownership', are often read as signs of love. Women were reluctant to position themselves as 'victims': choosing the 'wrong' boyfriend was seen as representing a personal failing (Chung 2005, p. 452). Women in this study also frequently spoke of their own "emotion work" as a strength in the relationship, using this as a strategy to narrate their relationships as equal. We have seen in the previous chapter the ways that young women employed such emotion work in their relationships with boyfriends. The role of emotion work in violent relationships has been highlighted in much research, with evidence suggesting that victims in abusive relationships often take responsibility for the emotional care of their partners (Donovan and Hester 2010; Enander 2011).

The rest of this chapter explores the incidence, experiences and understandings of abusive, coercive, and controlling behaviour, and the unequal workings of gendered power within relationships. It draws on qualitative data from my interviews as well as quantitative data from my survey research, a primary focus of which was to gain a picture of the overall incidence of experiences that might be seen as abusive across the population of the year group, as well as gaining some indication of the impact of these experiences on participants. Through the chapter, I work with both forms of data to produce the most accurate and nuanced version of reality available in the circumstances. I also highlight the complexities and interpretations involved in making that reality, and discuss the advantages and limitations of particular

perspectives created by differing ways of exploring "abuse".

Sexual harassment, coercion and violence

Sexual violence within wider society is disturbingly frequent, and beset by assumptions and prejudices surrounding those who commit violence as well as those who endure it. Because of these assumptions and prejudices (which are entangled with wider norms gender and sexuality) it is often very difficult to challenge, and sometimes, even to identify. Within teenage relationships, these assumptions and prejudices are no less present, but the identification and challenge of sexual violence is complicated further by fraught perceptions of teenage sexuality, as I explored in chapter two. Teen sexuality is viewed as inherently undesirable, problematic and risky. Therefore, the distinctions between consensual and non-consensual sexual activity are often, implicitly, regarded as a secondary problem; as teenagers *should not* be consenting to sex, whether or not they *are* consenting is of lesser importance. This is not merely a question of adult perceptions; young people negotiate and position themselves in relation to these prevalent discourses even as they may be flouting the "rules". While narrating their own sexual experiences and those of friends, or when discussing the topic of sexuality in general, they often conflated consensual and non-consensual experiences, considering both to be "bad" in the eyes of adults.

Within my research, experiences of sexual coercion, harassment and abuse, as well as ambivalent and uncertain sexual experiences, varied considerably depending on whether they took place within or outside of partner relationships. As the previous chapters have illustrated, the partner relationship formed a legitimating space for sexual activity, particularly sexual intercourse. The bulk of discussion of interview data, therefore, explores these areas separately (while examining the overlaps and commonalities between them). Discussion of the survey results, however, will not be so explicitly divided, as there was some overlap and the numbers within each category would not be sufficient for useful analysis. While questionnaire sections covering emotional and physical experiences of abuse asked questions only in

relation to experiences from "partners", the questions covering experiences of sexual abuse began "Has anybody ever…?" This was a deliberate design feature to ensure that experiences both within and outside partner relationships could be covered, (and not to suggest that a relationship between assaulter and victim was one of "partners").

Eleven questions were asked in the questionnaire to investigate the incidence of sexual violence in young people's relationships. The resulting figures can be seen in table 6.1 on the following page. These figures were combined to form a scale (internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.93), the mean of which was 1.69. Gender was significantly associated with experience of sexual violence, with the mean for young men 1.14 and that for young women 2.21. Participants' race, religion and household makeup were not significantly associated with experience of sexual violence.

Of those 57 young people who had experience of one or more of these incidents, 61% had only experienced them from one person, but 32% had experienced them from two or three people, and 8% from more than four people. 44% had experienced sexual abuse from a previous boyfriend or girlfriend, while 17% experienced it from a one-off partner, 15% from a casual partner and 15% from their current boyfriend or girlfriend. This last 15% also happens to represent 15% of all those participants who reported being in a relationship at the time of the survey. This indicates, then, that while a monogamous relationship was considered to be the most legitimate and respectable space for sexual activity (as discussed in chapters four and five), it was also the space where coercion and violence were the most likely to occur. Potentially, it suggests that the existence of that legitimating space may sometimes mean that *not* engaging in sexual activity is seen as less legitimate (I will discuss this further below).

The questionnaire also asked whether participants' friends had experienced any of the sexually coercive/violent behaviours above. 46% of participants said they didn't know whether their friends had experienced sexual abuse, while 31% said none of

Table 6.1: Experiences of sexual violence

Has anybody ever…	never	once	few times	often
pressured you into kissing, touching or something else sexual with them…	**176 (75%)**	**33 (14%)**	**19 (8%)**	**7 (3%)**
Male	95 (82%)	11 (10%)	9 (8%)	1 (1%)
Female	81 (68%)	22 (19%)	10 (8%)	6 (5%)
…by threatening to break up with you if you didn't do what they wanted you to	216 (92%)	14 (6%)	2 (1%)	3 (1%)
Male	108 (93%)	7 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Female	108 (91%)	7 (6%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
...by asking you repeatedly until you agreed to do it (although you didn't want to)	197 (84%)	20 (9%)	12 (5%)	6 (3%)
Male	108 (83%)	4 (3%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)
Female	89 (75%)	16 (13%)	8 (7%)	6 (5%)
…by saying you would do it if you loved them	197 (84%)	21 (9%)	11 (5%)	6 (3%)
Male	102 (88%)	8 (7%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)
Female	95 (80%)	13 (11%)	7 (6%)	6 (3%)
pressured you into having sexual intercourse…	**221 (94%)**	**8 (3%)**	**3 (1%)**	**3 (1%)**
Male	113 (97%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Female	108 (91%)	7 6%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
…by threatening to break up with you if you didn't do something sexual they wanted you to	226 (96%)	2 (1%)	6 (3%)	1 (0%)
Male	113 (97%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Female	113 (95%)	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)
...by asking you repeatedly until you agreed to it (although you didn't want to)	228 (97%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Male	114 (98%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Female	114 (96%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
… by saying you would do it if you loved them	223 (95%)	8 (3%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Male	110 (98%)	6 (4%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Female	113 (95%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
physically forced you into kissing, touching or something else sexual	**212 (90%)**	**14 (6%)**	**7 (3%)**	**2 (1%)**
Male	106 (91%)	8 (7%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Female	106 (89%)	6 (5%)	6 (5%)	1 (1%)
physically forced you into having sexual intercourse	**230 (98%)**	**3 (1%)**	**2 (1%)**	**0 (0%)**
Male	114 (98%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Female	116 (98%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
had sex (or done other sexual things) with you when you were so drunk you didn't know what you were doing	**207 (88%)**	**20 (9%)**	**5 (2%)**	**4 (2%)**
Male	104 (89%)	8 (7%)	3 (3%)	2 (2%)
Female	103 (87%)	12 (10%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)

them had. However, 11% said one of their friends had experienced some of these behaviours, while 10% said more than one of their friends had, and 1% that most of their friends had. Within the free text option offered to provide details on these experiences, several participants clarified that they were specifically referring to the item regarding sexual activity when very drunk. This was a difficult question to formulate, and responses difficult to analyse, since, as we have seen in chapter four, a good deal of teenage (not to mention adult) sexual activity takes place under the influence of alcohol. In formulating the question I did not wish to imply that all sexual activity under the influence of alcohol is by definition non-consensual, but nor did I wish to negate the role of alcohol as a tool for those who wish to take advantage of others' incapacitation, nor the ways in which intoxication may make people less conscientious about determining consent. I have discussed the role of alcohol in participants' sexual experience, and their often ambivalent perceptions of its role, in chapter four. It was clear from some of these text responses that not all of the experiences referred to would have been considered non-consensual by participants (though some of them might well have been). The complexities (impossibilities?) of determining consent in encounters involving significant amounts of alcohol will be discussed further below.

I will return below to responses to survey items which sought to discover the impact of experiences of sexual violence on respondents, and their perceptions of the reasons for sexual abuse. I turn now first of all to discuss sexual violence, harassment and coercion in the context of public sexuality (most notably, at parties), and then go on to discuss sexual violence, harassment, coercion and ambivalence in the context of relationships (while exploring their overlaps).

Public sexuality and the spectre of abuse

The context of the very visible and closely surveilled nature of sexuality in these teenagers' social lives has been covered in chapter four. For those in the "popular group", in particular, a bright spotlight was focussed on their sexual activity and relationships, and this was intensified in relation to their parties. These parties provided a heightened space for attraction to coalesce into sexual intimacy, but they

also formed a space where sexual activity of some sort was "expected" in order to retain a status as desirable (this was true for both boys and girls, although they negotiated it very differently). To recall Natalie and Rachel's characterisation of parties:

> NH: Um, so obviously you said that some people go really far [sexually] at parties, do you think other people feel pressure to do that?
> Natalie: I think everyone feels pressure to pull at a party –
> Rachel: yeah –
> Natalie: – just because I think, I dunno, it's kind of like accepted, but I don't really think there's any pressure to do anything else

These girls downplay the existence of "pressure" that might exist to engage in sexual activity beyond kissing at parties. This is consonant with their presentation of themselves – as well as others in the broad "popular" friendship group they were part of – as individually agentic, confident in themselves and not susceptible to external influence. In general, participants were keen to deny any suggestion that they might be influenced, and notably often interpreted interview questions about "pressure" or coercion as referring to pressure from friends or peers, rather than partners. This can be read in the context of prevalent discourses around the dangers of "peer pressure", whereby children and young people are viewed as vulnerable and susceptible to the corrupting influence of their peers. The concept of "peer pressure" has been critiqued, particularly in the context of young people's substance use, as assuming a "deficit" model of young people and children, seeing them as inherently passive and corruptible (Coggans and McKellar 1994; Arnett 2007; Cullen 2010b). Fin Cullen argues that the concept risks "flattening and over-simplifying the complexities" of girls' tobacco use (2010b, p. 492), and I would argue the same in relation to sexual activity. As I have emphasised throughout chapters four and five, the social relations shaping sexuality are inescapable and powerful, but not simplistically negative, causal, or unidirectional. But the model of peer pressure is prevalent as an understanding of teenage social relations. It is unsurprising, then, that my participants were so keen to downplay dependence and influence: where the discourses of individualism position the self as agentic and active in choice-making, the discourses of peer pressure position the self as naïve, lacking and ignorant. I

pursue this argument further later in this chapter, and in chapter seven. Despite this denial of "pressure", Natalie and Rachel do highlight the existence of expectations when attending parties, that those attending expect to "pull" (this referring to kissing).

In this atmosphere, then, although sexual experiences might be (often mutually) casual, they would in general be interpreted as consensual. But parties were also the setting for unambiguous sexual assault. Katie, whose relationship we saw in detail in chapter five, told me of a time when a male friend kissed her when she was asleep; the repercussions of this assault on herself and her existing relationship were explored in the previous chapter. After recounting this, she went on to tell the following story about a friend of hers (perhaps functioning in her narrative as a way of diminishing the impact of her own experience in the interview).

> Katie: Yeah well I've had, I've had friends who've actually <Katie laughs in disbelief> been fingered when they've been passed out [NH: oh, shit] and that's awful, isn't it? [NH: yeah] and one of the guys goes to this school, and he got so much shit for that from all the girls, they were all saying how disgusting it was! […] and she woke up the next morning, um, and one of the guy's friends said "oh yeah, Max fingered you when you were passed out" […] she's like Little Miss – Perfect, and um not so much recently [NH: ok], but she'd never been further [NH: yeah] and I guess he thought he wanted to tell all his friends he'd fingered Elizabeth Thomas [NH: right] and she's like the most amazing and popular girl in the school so [NH: OK] that was what he wanted, I guess, a bit of a sick person. He's also, he was probably incredibly stoned at the time [NH: yeah], he's one of the druggies [NH: ok] so he was probably completely out of it.

In this passage we can see many of the circulating tensions and contradictions surrounding sexual abuse. Katie narrates the story with indignation, highlighting her own and others' negative perception of the young man who committed the assault. She positions him as a deviant other ("a bit of a sick person"), thereby distancing herself and her social group from his actions; she continued this further a little later in the interview:

> He's got very little friends [NH: OK] and he still hangs with [Elizabeth], she's, they have a little group, and they're all the group that hang out with a

lot of the other school [NH: OK] a lot of St Andrew's [another school in the area], all older years, all year 11, and this guy's just a complete wanker.

She specifically here associates Max with a social group that she views as undesirable; her othering also carries an implicit judgement of class status, as elsewhere in the interview (and other interviews) it is made clear that this group is considered to be more working class. So Katie plays up the social regulation of Max's actions, but simultaneously we can see that in some circles his assault may have not had a serious effect on his relationships with others. And, indeed, Katie suggests that his intent may have been to gain social status through this expression of sexually violent masculinity:

Katie: I guess he thought he wanted to tell all his friends he'd fingered Elizabeth Thomas [NH: right] and she's like the most amazing and popular girl in the school

This tactic – of "bragging" to male friends over sexual achievements, including sexual assaults – is one that has been widely discussed in literature (e.g. Pascoe 2007; Richardson 2010). Of course, we cannot know for sure whether this was an interpretation Max would place on his own actions. But Katie's attribution of these reasons suggests that they would have been read as a valid interpretation, not only by Katie but by myself and by others;=, as it is clear that this assault was widely discussed. It indicates the complications of social status and its entanglements with gendered power. We have already seen in chapter four that being "popular" did not necessarily entail being widely well-liked. Katie's interpretation of this assault suggests that the very success of Elizabeth's embodiment of desirable heterofemininity – a success that is also tied to her class position – might have been a trigger for Max's violent assertion of masculine power through assault. Importantly, then, this illustrates the ways that gendered, and heterosexualised, power, does not merely work between heterosexual "partners" (or, in this case, assaulter and victim), but within broader flows of socialised heterosexuality. The experience of sexual assault, like the experience of sexuality, is not individual, but also social, for both parties.

Lasting impacts

The very fact that I am discussing the above episode here, as related to me by a third party, is testament to the transference of the assault from embodied violation to circulation in social networks of narration and re-narration. Indeed, Katie's version of the incident indicates that Elizabeth only knows the identity of her assaulter because of the actions of his friends; again, the social nature of gendered power is foregrounded. But the retelling of this as a story, the appropriation by others, repeatedly recentres Elizabeth's violation and status as a victim, revictimising through its removal of her own ability to decide her own path, and speculation around her sexuality.

While Max is represented as a villain and Elizabeth as an innocent victim, the assault is nonetheless seen to taint her.

> Katie: she's like Little Miss – Perfect, and um not so much recently [NH: OK], but she'd never been further.

Elizabeth's sexually "innocent" status is highlighted, with the sexual assault implicitly represented as corrupting her: a discourse bound up with the feminised and classed ideal of childhood innocence, as discussed in chapter two. We have seen in chapter four the ways in which girls could be denigrated for their (perceived) sexual experience, and it appears that non-consensual experience is not an exception to this. Later in the interview, Katie spoke more about her own views of Elizabeth.

> N: OK. So I mean is there, kind of, one person or like a couple of people who are really popular?
> Katie: I think it would have to be Elizabeth [NH: OK] but recently everyone's just been, you know – she's turned into a bit of a slag [right] since, <Katie laughs> she just gets off, she's very easy, she really is very stuck-up, she's a compl – personally I'm not entirely keen on her [NH: OK] but I have lessons with her, I sit next to her in lots of lessons and she's perfectly nice [NH: mm], but I just don't appreciate the way she treats life, really.

I cannot, of course, know whether this perceived change in Elizabeth's status and behaviour was a causal result of her experience of sexual assault. Nevertheless, it is indicated that Katie and others ("everyone") have altered perceptions of Elizabeth

and now view her as "a bit of a slag". She is presented as no longer in appropriate control of her own sexual respectability, after control has forcibly been taken from her. Katie seemingly has personal feelings of dislike towards Elizabeth, and employs her "easy" sexuality as a resource with which to validate this dislike. She also presents her judgement within a discourse of individualised responsibility, which I go on to discuss in more detail: "I just don't appreciate the way she treats life, really", she says, implying that Elizabeth is letting herself down by not continuing to inhabit her respectable, popular, desirable yet not too sexual subject position. Katie's disapproval of Elizabeth relates, too, to her social circle, a point I touched on earlier which brings my discussion of this experience of sexual assault to a depressing semi-conclusion.

> Katie: And [Max] still hangs with her, she's, they have a little group, and they're all the group that hang out with a lot of the other school... this guy's just a complete wanker, no-one really likes him

While, according to Katie, "no-one really likes" Max – he is portrayed as aberrant – she mentions, almost as an aside, that Elizabeth continues to hang out with him and his friends. It is impossible to know all the reasons behind this; we are not privy to Elizabeth's thoughts or emotions. But the very knowledge that Elizabeth and Max remain in the same social circle, and that this connection contributes to her social marginalisation, speaks to the embeddedness and interconnection of gendered power, social status and sexual violence.

This, then, gives some illustration of the lasting impressions and reverberations an incident of sexual violence can produce; an insight into the details, emotions and complications behind one incident. While in-depth exploration of impacts was beyond the scope of the survey, it did gather some impression of the effect of sexual violence and coercion on those who experienced them. The respondents who reported having experienced one or more of the events in table 6.1 reported the following in response to the question: "How did this make you feel?" (They could choose as many options as they wanted, and had an opportunity to provide free text under "other".)

no effect 13
desired/fancied 12
loved 2
bad about.. 16
humiliated 9
annoyed 17
upset 11
angry 12
scared 6

0   5   10   15   20
Number of participants (n=57)
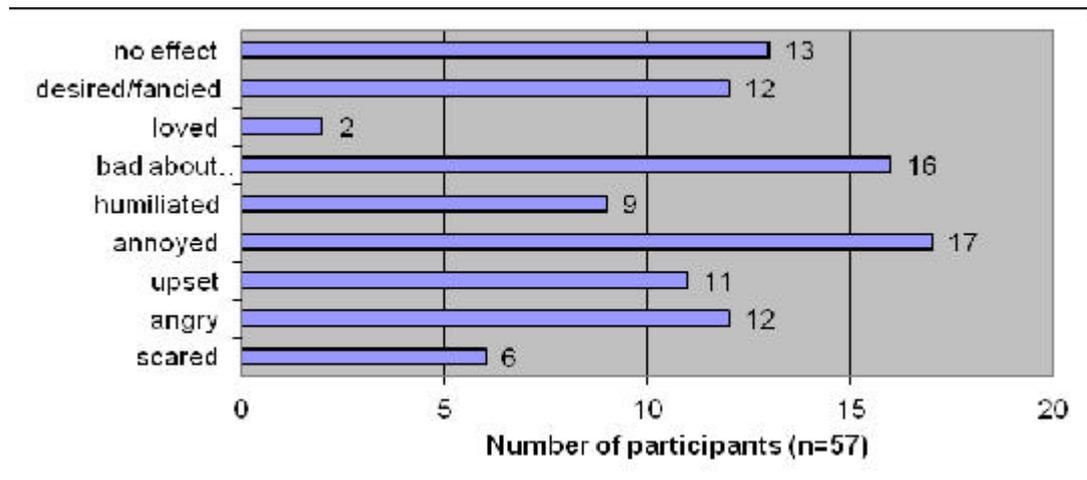
Figure 6.1: Impact of sexual violence on participants

Some participants reported feeling no effects, an indication, perhaps, that they were resigned to harassment and coercion as a part of life. Several participants also indicated that these experiences made them feel desired or fancied. This is not, perhaps, surprising, given the persistent (usually gendered) divisions in their sexual cultures between pursuer and pursued, whereby pursuit is an almost-necessary display of masculinity, and young women are usually cast in the role of gatekeeper, of giving in (as discussed in chapters two, four and five). To be chased, therefore, to be pursued, even if it is unwanted, can engender a feeling of desirability – as we saw in the relationship context in chapter five. But we have already seen in this and previous chapters the traps and pitfalls of being an object of desire. Those who felt desired or fancied by unwanted attention also often indicated that they found it annoying: there were clearly mixed feelings about the seemingly inevitable chase and pursuit. Others felt the impacts less ambiguously, with other people's acts of pressure, coercion and force engendering shame and distress in those who suffered them. "Feeling bad about yourself" was a common negative effect that chimes with much literature on the aftermath of sexual violence, and is consonant with the culture of surveillance and negative judgement we discussed in relation to Elizabeth's case. But perhaps the most revealing term is the most frequently reported effect: "annoyed"; a feeling that is undeniably negative yet does not provide the impetus to react, or the validation, of anger or fear; a judgement that indicates resignation,

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inevitability, and lack of possibility to move. In the next section, I will discuss further this burden of seeming inevitability around sexual violence, and the gendered norms and appeals to "nature" and the status quo that reinforced the conditions of possibility for sexual violence.

"Guys are too horny": sexual violence and gendered inevitability

In addition to asking participants how they felt after experiences of sexual coercion or violence, the questionnaire also asked them to attribute reasons for the incidents. The figures in response to the question "Why do you think they did this?" can be seen in figure 6.2 below. Again, they could tick several boxes and were given a space to add reasons.
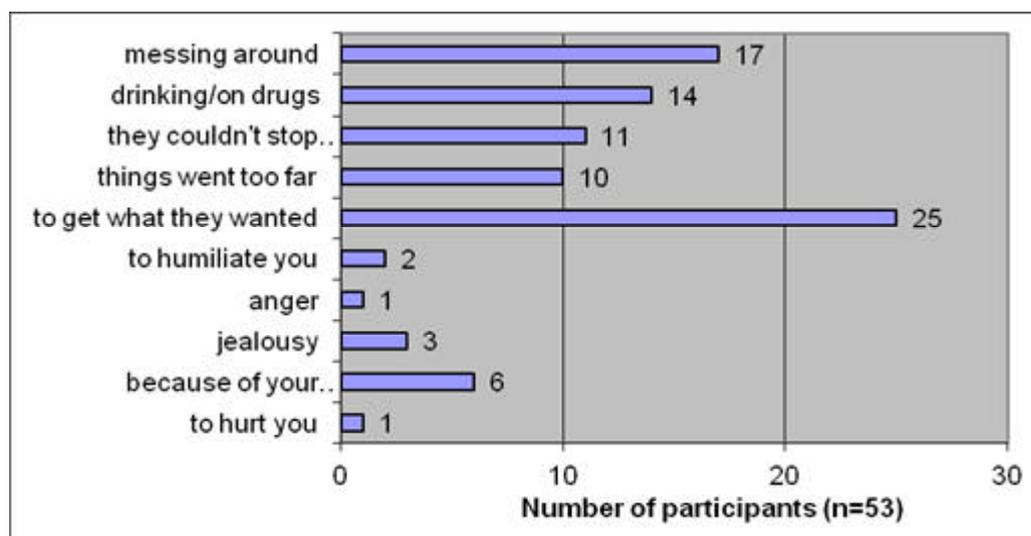
Figure 6.2: Perceived reasons for sexual violence

The most common perceived reason for sexual violence and pressure was an instrumentalist one: "to get what they wanted", indicating that the young people in question were seeking their own pleasure (if pleasure is an adequate term) regardless of the consent of the other party. But a significant number of participants also thought that those who had pressured or forced them "couldn't stop themselves", or that "things went too far". This speaks to a widespread perception, discussed in chapter two, that sexual drives are biological, innate and irresistible; that men, especially teen young men, are naturally prone to desire sex at all times, whereas

women's desire for sex is less; and, perhaps most importantly, that women are thus responsible for "provoking" and/or taming the male sexual drive, since men cannot repress their natural instincts (Hollway 1984a; Potts 2001). This view of masculine sexuality as automatic and inevitable was represented in one of the free-text responses to this question: "Guys are too horny".

These perceptions were implicit in some of the discussion of parties and sexual activity in interviews, intertwined with complex attributions and denials of agency. Katie discussed her boyfriend Alex's relationship with his best friend Natalie (explored in detail in chapter five), telling me that Natalie had kissed him at parties (in Katie's presence), asked him to have a threesome with herself and another girl, and was generally tactile towards him. She expressed the following opinions about his reactions to Natalie's behaviour, after wearily reporting that Alex maintained it was "just a joke":

> Katie: um, I don't think that he can re-a-a-lly resist to be honest, when she, you know – [...] she's a very hard person to get on with when you're a boy cos she'll be all over you [...] even though he may seem like he physically wants her [...] mm, mentally he probably doesn't

Here, while she is frustrated with Alex's reaction (or lack of reaction) to Natalie, she seems to deny him responsibility over his own sexual response. She considers that he must enjoy the attention because she considers Natalie attractive, and that he is incapable of resistance. She extends this judgement to boys more generally, maintaining that "she's a very hard person to get on with when you're a boy", because she is physically tactile and thus automatically produces desire that boys must fight against. Throughout her discussions she seems to attribute responsibility to Natalie to control the desires and feelings not only of herself, but also of the boys that she interacts with. It is notable that both the incidents of sexual assault that Katie narrated in her interview with indignation were committed against young women who were asleep; and thus, constructed as unproblematic victims, with no room for dispute over their "provocation" of sexual assault (although even this, as we have seen, did not stop others from shaming these victims).

Alex, Katie's boyfriend, and his friend Steve, indicated similar perceptions in their interview. We were discussing girls who were known to have been sexually active, who had been talked about and gained a "reputation" for their sexual experience.

> Alex: they do look like they're trying to –
> Steve: – yeah, yeah
> Alex: – trying too hard to get a guy, like at parties if they're wearing like hardly anything and they're just trying to, yeah, it's quite obvious
> NH: I guess it's quite influenced by drink as well?
> Alex: Yeah it is, a lot, er, half the time they don't even, you don't even think that they [girls] are drunk – they like to act it cos they think that gets them somewhere.
> NH: Why do they think it gets them somewhere?
> Alex: Cos then some guys might take advantage, think they're easy, it's not like they're complaining about it, they want it to happen.
> [...]
> Steve: Guys don't put it on, not really.
> Alex: They'd rather just feel the effects than fake it, cos it's fun – what's the point in faking it?

This conversation illustrates some of the complexities and contradictions around female sexuality and heterosexual expectations. It is clear that Steve and Alex view these young women (negatively) as responsible for their own sexuality, and demonise them for being excessively sexual. This demonisation is closely linked not only with their sexual behaviour *per se*, but the intensity of their desire for sexual contact ("trying too hard to get a guy") and thus their (perceived) subversion of the traditional pattern whereby the man is the subject and the woman the object of desire. Yet they are simultaneously portrayed as incapable of acting on their own desire. Alex and Steve view them as actively passive, manipulating men into desiring them. Alex's phraseology is particularly notable: "then some guys might take advantage... they want it to happen". It is a seeming contradiction in terms, but indicates the deeply rooted discourses whereby a girl is only able to signify her desire through signifying desire to be desired. And it also indicates the construction of a situation where "taking advantage" sexually is rendered logically impossible; sexual violence, non-consensual sexual activity, is rendered logically impossible. The vulnerability that intoxication can produce – a vulnerability that features widely in anti-rape campaigns aimed at changing women's (but not men's) behaviour

(Carmody 2005; Brooks 2009; 2009) – is cast as a deliberate strategy of engendering attraction.

It is not possible, of course, to determine whether or not girls really did fake drunkenness (none of the girls I talked to said they had) nor, if they did, what reasons they might have given for doing so. But we have seen already in chapter four that drinking was a normal and expected part of attending parties; perhaps, then, it was precisely to *avoid* vulnerability, yet still appear "fun", that girls might pretend to be more intoxicated than they were. Indeed, it is notable how many of the attributes and behaviour for which girls were disparaged were remarkably close to the prerequisites and expectations of attributes and behaviour at parties: putting pictures up later on Facebook, wearing limited amounts of clothing, getting drunk. It illustrates the narrow and perilously shifting space of "acceptability" when it comes to femininity and, particularly, female sexuality. The construction and denigration of the "easy" girl – a figure who desires and deserves to be "taken advantage" of – and the discourses of the male sex drive as natural and irrepressible (Hollway 1984b, 2001; Powell 2008a) combine to create conditions of possibility for coerced or forced sexual activity against these imagined "easy" girls which is not read as problematic, but as instigated by the girls themselves.

The dark side of individualisation and blame

These heteronorms that conceive of male sexuality as natural, and girls as inflaming or taming boys' natural sex drives, work to diminish young men's responsibility and heighten young women's responsibility for the sexual activity that takes place. This is the case even – we could argue especially – when they might be viewed as vulnerable to force or coercion. In chapter two, I discussed the power of neoliberal discourses of compulsory individuality, and throughout the previous chapters I have highlighted the way these function in young people's negotiations of their own relations and subjectivities, as they emphasise their independence and downplay dependence. But these discourses also strongly influence young people's understanding of *others'* identities, often giving rise to deeply unsympathetic and hostile attitudes (in combination with the gendered heteronorms I have discussed).

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The sense that girls were individually responsible for their actions – and the ways that they were acted upon – within the context especially of parties and drinking, was emphasised in a discussion in an interview with Ellie and Amy. Ellie and Amy were best friends; Ellie had previously been a member of the "popular group" (which she defined as "bitchy"), but no longer felt comfortable among them. The excerpt illustrates the fact that this attribution of responsibility, and abjection of those who were seen to be "out of control", was not limited to boys' judgement of girls but also circulated through girls' judgement of other girls.

> Ellie: She basically drunk so much... she was wearing like nothing […] and I was there and she drunk so much she just got paralytic.
> Amy: She put four good shots in her eyes too.
> Ellie: Her eyes were really bad, smoking weed and stuff like that. She just drunk so much that she was like naked. She was in her bra and knickers and most of us had gone home but the people that were left there, her friends put her in a ditch and left her paralytic because they didn't know what to do 'cause they heard the police were coming. And when the police came and took Sophie to hospital, and she was all sorted out and everything, but the fact that she was in her bra and knickers when the police come, it was like, *<sarcastic tone>* great. Well not like indecent exposure, she was just paralytic on a floor in the ditch so her parents didn't ground her or anything.
> Amy: She was blue when they found her.
> Ellie: But the parents didn't do anything about it, they were like, it's Sophie's life... and then all over [class] they were like, how could you do that, they [the paramedics] could have been saving someone else's life instead of wasting time on yours when you clearly don't respect your life, and she was like "Shut up you prick, I almost died". She was so ungrateful and they were like, "What the hell, don't turn on us, Sophie. You're the one that was drunk".
> [...]
> Ellie: I used to be friends with her until it all happened and I was like I've lost a lot of respect for you for doing that, Sophie. The fact that she didn't care about anyone else that night [...]

Throughout the narration of this incident, Ellie's tone of voice was often incredulous and disparaging. Both girls, while discussing Sophie and this incident in particular, seemed to demonstrate a high level of negative feeling towards her. There was no sympathy extended to Sophie for her experience of serious illness and extreme vulnerability. The reaction of her friends and peers renders her life itself as worthless – "they [the paramedics] could have been saving someone else's life instead of

wasting time on yours when you clearly don't respect your life". Their justification for this remarkably harsh judgment is another illustration of the way in which perceived lack of responsibility for the self becomes a moral failing within the circulation of neoliberal values: as Joanne Baker puts it, there is a "chilling lack of empathy" towards those who cannot "triumph" over challenges (2008, p. 60). Self-care, self-control and complete individual responsibility become imperatives, as bonds between individuals are minimised; the dilemma of the friends who left Sophie alone, "paralytic in a ditch", is briefly considered, but they are not represented negatively for not staying with her. Indeed, Ellie represents them as justifiably angry with Sophie – "She was so ungrateful and they were like, 'What the hell, don't turn on us, Sophie. You're the one that was drunk'." Of course, this could also be read as a strategy by Sophie's friends and peers to hold any guilt at bay by constructing Sophie as fully (ir)responsible – Ellie distances herself from events by clarifying her own absence ("most of us had gone home"). Yet despite this downplaying of friendship or social responsibility, Sophie's perceived lack of self-care is transposed into a lack of care for others: "[t]he fact that she didn't care about anyone else that night".

Ellie begins this story by focussing on Sophie's appearance, specifically her lack of clothing – "She basically drunk so much... she was wearing like nothing", and she returns to this point frequently throughout her narrative. This highlights the subtext of sexual judgement to the girls' antipathy, and emphasises the close entanglings of "self-control" and "respectability" in relation to alcohol (and, in this case, other drugs) and sexuality, both converging on the female body. The events which led up to Sophie's being in her bra and knickers – for instance, whether the rest of her clothes were removed by Sophie herself, or by others – are irrelevant; the excess of alcohol is sufficient rationale and process. Sophie's semi-naked, near-unconscious, vulnerable, abject body, as found by the police, is not seen as a source of concern but a source of distaste and derision: "but the fact that she was in her bra and knickers when the police come, it was like, *<sarcastic tone>* great". The narrative constructs vulnerability as individual failing for which a girl can unequivocally and viciously be blamed. This is in notable contrast to the discursive construction of the "poor girl" in

Chris Griffin and colleagues' research on drinking narratives with 18-25 year olds, in which a girl who had passed out during Freshers' week at university (traditionally a period of heavy alcohol consumption) "abnegated all responsibility for her welfare'"; responsibility for her was perceived as passing to her flatmates (2009, p. 464). This difference perhaps relates to the contexts: while drinking at university is both legal and expected, drinking as a teenager, although common and expected, is illicit.

The power of this individualist discourse of blame, together with discourses of appropriate feminine respectability and bodily containment as discussed in chapter four, works to create a space where girls who exceed the nebulous limits are all but discarded. Given the extremely social construction of sexuality, it is perhaps particularly important for transgressive girls to be constructed as abject – lest they contaminate the identity of the group. Anything that happens to these girls is deserved; their individual responsibility is conceived of as so all-encompassing that it obliterates others' responsibility in relating to them. Perceived (as in the "fake drunk" girls) or actual (as in Ellie and Amy's story of Sophie) vulnerability or incapacitation is viewed as attracting deserving consequences, including (for the "fake drunk" girls) sexual activity. Consent is not considered; but the girls who engage in (or are coerced or forced into) sexual activity at parties are likely to be widely discussed and potentially shamed (as we saw in chapter four). The space of the party, then, is one where sexual expression is expected but frequently despised.

In the next section, I will move on to discussing sexual coercion and violence within relationships. As my first extract will indicate, though, partner relationships and parties are of course not entirely separate spheres. Many of the same people move through both, relationships may be formed (or broken) at parties, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, young people's negotiations of their relationships are deeply embedded in social cultures.

"Sex obsessed": silences, ambivalence and sexual coercion within relationships

As I set out above, survey responses indicated that the most common situation within which young people experienced sexual violence or coercion was within a partner relationship. Of those reported experiencing some form of sexual violence, 44% said this was from a previous boyfriend or girlfriend, while 15% reported experiencing it from their current boyfriend or girlfriend. This last 15% comprised 15% of the participants who reported being in a relationship at the time of the survey. So the "safe" space of the relationship can be viewed as a potentially dangerous space. Reports and discussions of these issues in interviews, perhaps not surprisingly, were frequently scattered with ambiguity, defences and disavowals. They indicate the depth of complexity in determining the incidence, severity, or impact, of instances that we might call sexual violence. As I explore here (and have already touched upon in the previous chapter), young people's negotiation of sexuality, desires and pleasures, is rife with uncertainties and ambivalences.

This section of the chapter continues some themes explored in the previous sections: the impact of heterogendered norms, and of the powerful discourse of the autonomous individual, run through the discussion. The interaction between alcohol and sexuality could also be an important factor in navigating relationships. The following lengthy extract is of Katie discussing a friend of hers, as well as her own relationship.

> Katie: it's kind of something that you should do when you're comfortable and not drunk, I really don't, don't like it when girls get drunk and then have sex with people [yeah], because I think it's ridiculous, cos the idea is that you remember it! and that it's a nice experience for you [NH: mm] not an experience where you're trying hard not to pass out [yeah] and remain conscious –
> NH: yeah, that's not what you really want to be concentrating on, is it
> Katie: No, *<Katie laughs>*
> NH: like, especially if you don't remember it the next morning
> Katie: yeah, that's the worst I mean, I have a friend, she's just started going out with someone, and they went to a family barbecue […] but, she did everything *but* having sex [yeah] outside, in a little tree, and she says she remembers 3-second clips from each act, and I'm thinking that's just, not

nice, and that's the first time she's ever – gone further with him [mm] um, that's just not a very nice way to lose it, is it <Katie laughs> –
NH: –Not really, no –
Katie: especially if you don't remember it! <Katie laughing>
NH: Yeah exactly –
Katie: –Yeah but –
NH: –Yeah. And do you reckon she's like bothered about that?
Katie: Um she says she doesn't entirely regret it because she says she'd be very nervous otherwise, now they've got it out of the way, I mean I remember the first time with Alex [Katie's current boyfriend] [NH: yeah], like just doing anything a little bit further than kissing, was a little bit, I wouldn't say it's awkward but it's obviously unsure [NH: yeah], you're not you don't know each other so well, you're not familiar with [mm] you know, things! so maybe being a little bit tipsy helps along the way [NH: yeah, yeah] but I just don't like it that it was outside at someone else's house!

This extract hints at many of the complications and contradictions around young women's experience of sexuality. The story Katie tells about her friend illustrates the kind of story that might have made the girl the subject of the sort of intense gossip discussed in chapter four (many people seemed to reserve particular scorn for others who engaged in sexual activity outside). It would likely have corresponded to the survey item asking "Has anyone ever had sex (or done other sexual things) with you when you were so drunk you didn't know what you were doing?" Katie herself does not, in this case, seem to judge her friend as harshly as in some instances we have seen. But she stresses her disapproval of (and, perhaps, disappointment in) her friend's actions: "that's just – not nice", "I just don't like it that it was outside at someone else's house!" She also emphasises her own perspectives on the "right" way to do sex and relationships, consonant with the prevalent discourses of love and commitment discussed in the previous chapter, and the discourse of "healthy relationships" common in current UK policy, media and practice (DCSF 2009b). She believes that that sexual activity should be a "nice experience" – a positive baseline.

But Katie also recognises, and to some extent empathises with, the ambivalence here, and the appeal of the embodied (and psychological) effects that alcohol can produce: its possibilities for taking someone out of their body, for softening anxieties, and blurring experiences. Her friend "says she doesn't entirely regret it because she says she'd be very nervous otherwise, now they've got it out of the

way". Alcohol can thus be a resource that girls (and boys?) draw on in order to negotiate the embodied anxieties of sexual activity (Tolman 2005; Cullen 2010a). It is impossible to say whether this particular encounter was "consensual" – by some measures Katie's friend was drunk enough to render consent impossible, and we do not know anything about how intoxicated her boyfriend was. But this perhaps illustrates the limitations of consent – as a concept with which to understand teenagers' current sexual activity, if not as a concept to strive for. Sara McClelland speaks of teen girls' desire as "wrapped in a kind of collective discursive cellophane". She sees female sexual desire as *"an absence we know to be present"* [emphasis in original] (233) – something that is both difficult to excavate methodologically, and difficult for young women to articulate and enact. Alcohol, in this case, can be seen either (or both?) as another layer of cellophane, thickening the barrier between young women and their bodies; or as a means of unwrapping some of that cellophane, enabling young women to live in their bodies and experience sexual desire without shame in the moment. So it is perhaps unhelpful to view alcohol as always and only a problem and a source of risk and danger – as Katie says, "maybe being a little bit tipsy helps along the way". Yet, at the same time, it seems that for some people, intoxication may have to be extreme in order to "help". And the way in which Katie phrases her friend's representation of her feelings about the incident – "now they've got it out of the way" – suggests that sexual activity may sometimes be seen as an inevitable hurdle within a relationship, rather than a welcome event. This can be viewed, then, as the other side of the coin when it comes to the privileging of monogamous relationships as the acceptable site for sex, as discussed in chapters four and five. Within a relationship, sex of some kind is expected, although the precise timings may be negotiated (particular types of sex may be delayed). We saw one instance of the negotiation of these norms in the previous chapter, in Christina and Matt's relationship. Christina seemed ambivalent about how soon she and Matt had had sex:

> Christina: Yeah, well I mean I don't know if I wanted to move, like, *that* fast, it's not as if I was completely against it.

As discussed in chapter five, this again speaks to the difficulty of "unwrapping" desire, especially in an interview context where Christina is working at a reflexive, self-aware, mature self. It hints at the uncertainty of desire and the complications of "wanting".

Sexual coercion in relationships and social surveillance

The expectation of sex within a relationship, and its effects, are also an illustration of the ways in which intimate heterosexual relationships are mediated by social cultures and wider relations as well as the relationship between partners. In Zelda and Link's interview, Link talked about a previous boyfriend, saying she had hidden the relationship from her parents and also, for a long time, from her friends (even Zelda, who was her best friend). I asked why, and she said:

> Link: I don't like the attention you get from going out with someone
> Zelda: And loads of pressure you get to do stuff when people know, people are like, "Have you done that yet, oh, have you done this yet?"
> NH: So is that from, like, other people?
> Zelda: Yeah, other people
> Link: Yeah it's really annoying, I think other people who aren't in relationships get really, "Oh, you've been going out with them for 6 months and you haven't done anything".

In this conversation Zelda and Link discuss more of the downsides of the culture of surveillance and the sociality of sexuality, as discussed in chapter four. We saw in chapter five that relationships were sometimes viewed as an escape from the claustrophobia of peer surveillance, but as we can see here, for other people relationships might also have the opposite effect, intensifying friends' interest in someone's sex life. This might be especially true in particular friendship groups (like Link and Zelda's) which were not part of the culture of parties I have discussed in this and previous chapters: in these groups, essentially, people in relationships might provide the only focus for gossip and speculation.

It might be argued that such forms of "pressure", from external cultural norms, do not constitute heterosexualised coercion, pressure or abuse within relationships. Sometimes young people, discussing these issues in interviews, would refer to "peer

pressure" – a discourse that I have discussed above. But as I have demonstrated, teen heterosexual relationships do not exist in a vacuum containing only a boy and a girl. Rather, they involve overlapping and shifting social relations, and the individuals within them negotiate their own heterosexual subjectivities within these relationships. So in a particular instance of sexual activity where a young woman (or man) might be uncertain and reluctant, yet nevertheless "give in", her actions might be shaped by a range of lingering anxieties, social orientations and emotions, influenced by her interactions within the relationship but also outside it.

These forms of social "pressure" seemed easier for young people to talk about than pressure from (or towards) partners, although participants tended only to speak directly of this pressure as affecting other people, as Laura does below.

> Laura: I'm not the sort of person that's sort of like, "Well, my friends have done it so I'm" – [NH: yeah] I don't, I don't need it. *<Laura laughs>*
> NH: Sure.
> Laura: I'm willing to wait, yeah.

As we have seen in previous chapters as well as this one, Laura's discussion here works to sustain a presentation of identity as autonomous and independent (while simultaneously disidentifying from the stigma of being a girl who "needs" sex). While expectations or pressure from friends/peers, then, was rarely claimed by participants as affecting their behaviour, they seemed readier to explore this than expectations or pressure from partners.

Many participants (male and female) spoke in the abstract of young men who were "obsessed with sex", framing this as a negative. Some of these discussions were of groups or individuals that participants avoided or disliked (and had not had sexual/romantic contact with), but some of them were of previous partners. However, this "obsession" was framed firmly as an individual character trait; in participants' reports, these traits might negatively influence their opinions of a boy, but not because his "obsession" had influenced his interaction with them.

> Zelda: The guy I went out with, he was kind of a bit obsessed with sex and stuff? But I didn't have sex with him. We only went out for like two weeks or

something but we were kind of like together before.
NH: So I guess you probably got rid of him cos he was too obsessed with sex?
Zelda: Oh no, he dumped me for another girl!
<Zelda laughs. Zelda, Link and I discuss this further.>
NH: So I mean, like, did he try and like get you to do stuff that you didn't want to do?
Zelda: Oh no.
NH: Oh OK. Only saying that cos you said he was obsessed with sex, I'm not like –
Zelda: Yeah he was but, he didn't try and make me do anything.

In this extract I attempt to probe Zelda further on her interpretation of being "obsessed" with sex, questioning whether she experienced any coercion from her boyfriend. She is adamant that this was not the case, repeating firm denials that his attitudes towards sex affected their relationship. I am not, here, asserting that sexual coercion existed in the relationship despite Zelda's statements to the contrary. Rather, I am interested in how strongly she dissociates herself from any suggestion that he might have pressured or coerced her into sexual activity, although she is no longer in a relationship with the boy in question and she speaks negatively about him in the interview (thus it does not appear to be a question of preserving his image). This needs also to be read in the methodological context; in the knowledge that I am interested in exploring relationship abuse, she may be particularly keen to avoid that association. Nevertheless, she is reluctant to inhabit the position of actual or potential "victim" – a finding that resonates with Joanne Baker's discussions of young women's interpretation of relationship violence and other hardships in their biographies (2008, 2010a), as well as other research into intimate violence (e.g. Donovan and Hester 2010).

Zelda's presentation as independent and autonomous, downplaying the possibility that she might have been entangled in a relationship that could be read as problematic, is consonant with the discourse of independence that we have seen running through young people's constructions of identity so far. I continue to pursue this theme in the next section, which moves from focussing on sexual violence and

coercion to emotional violence.

Emotions running high: coercion, control and restrictions in relationships

If "sexual violence" is difficult to define and determine, then "emotional violence" is perhaps even more so. However, it almost always underpins other forms of violence within intimate relationships, and as usually understood, takes the form of "coercive control" (Stark 2007): a pattern of behaviour from one partner towards another that tries to control and restrict their activities. As such, a wide variety of activities can form part of this pattern, which might not necessarily by themselves constitute a serious problem. Survey results are presented here to give an indication of what kinds of (potentially) emotionally hurtful behaviour participants reported experiencing, but the results are interpreted with caution as to the lack of context.

Participants' responses to the survey items exploring aspects of emotional violence can be seen in table 6.2 on the following page. Participants' responses to all the questions were combined to provide an overall scale for experience of emotional abuse (internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.85), which indicated that 33% of participants said they had not experienced any of the behaviours in question, whereas 66% had experienced at least one. The overall incidence was low: the mean value was 3.4, so this 66% will include many participants who had only experienced one or very few of the items once. The combined results for all experience of emotional abuse did not show a significant difference between the experience of young men and young women. Nor was there an apparent association between race or religion, and experience of emotional abuse.

It is, of course, impossible from simply looking at these results to fully understand the dynamics of relationships within which these occur. Not all the items are necessarily, in isolation, signs of emotional violence. Several participants qualified their responses by writing in "joke" or similar by their ticks. This was especially the case with regard to the first item, whether partners had ever made fun of them in

Table 6.2: Experiences of Emotional Violence

Have any of your partners ever…	never	once	few times	often
made fun of you in front of other people	**122 (53%)**	**42 (18%)**	**59 (26%)**	**7 (3%)**
Male	*70 (70%)*	*19 (17%)*	*24 (21%)*	*2 (2%)*
Female	*52 (45%)*	*23 (20%)*	*35 (30%)*	*7 (3%)*
shouted at you/screamed in your face/called you hurtful names	**182 (80%)**	**20 (9%)**	**25 (11%)**	**2 (-)**
Male	*91 (80%)*	*9 (8%)*	*13 (11%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*91 (80%)*	*11 (10%)*	*12 (10%)*	*1 (-)*
said negative things about your appearance/body/ sexual experience/friends/family	**173 (76%)**	**36 (16%)**	**19 (8%)**	**1 (-)**
Male	*93 (81%)*	*10 (9%)*	*10 (9%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*80 (70%)*	*26 (23%)*	*9 (8%)*	*0 (0)*
threatened to hurt you physically unless you did what they wanted	**217 (79%)**	**10 (4%)**	**1 (-)**	**1 (-)**
Male	*109 (96%)*	*4 (4%)*	*0 (0%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*108 (94%)*	*6 (5%)*	*1 (-)*	*0 (0%)*
threatened to break up with you unless you did what they wanted	**198 (87%)**	**19 (8%)**	**11 (5%)**	**1 (-)**
Male	*99 (87%)*	*8 (7%)*	*6 (5%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*99 (86%)*	*11 (10%)*	*5 (4%)*	*0 (0%)*
threatened to hurt themselves unless you did what they wanted	**212 (93%)**	**8 (4%)**	**6 (3%)**	**3 (1%)**
Male	*110 (97%)*	*1 (-)*	*2 (2%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*102 (89%)*	*7 (6%)*	*4 (4%)*	*2 (2%)*
told you who you could see and where you could go	**190(83%)**	**22 (10%)**	**13 (6%)**	**4 (2%)**
Male	*93 (82%)*	*9 (8%)*	*9 (9%)*	*3 (3%)*
Female	*97 (84%)*	*13 (11%)*	*4 (4%)*	*1(-)*
constantly checked up on what you were doing e.g. by phone or texts	**150 (66%)**	**33 (14%)**	**30 (13%)**	**16 (7%)**
Male	*73 (64%)*	*16 (14%)*	*13 (11%)*	*12 (11%)*
Female	*77 (67%)*	*17 (15%)*	*17 (15%)*	*4 (4%)*
got their friends to check up on what you were doing	**172 (75%)**	**36 (16%)**	**13 (6%)**	**8 (4%)**
Male	*84 (74%)*	*17 (15%)*	*7 (6%)*	*6 (5%)*
Female	*88 (77%)*	*19 (17%)*	*6 (5%)*	*2 (2%)*
threatened to reveal personal information unless you did what they wanted	**211 (93%)**	**8 (4%)**	**7 (3%)**	**2 (-)**
Male	*103 (90%)*	*5 (4%)*	*5 (4%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*108 (95%)*	*3 (3%)*	*2 (2%)*	*1 (-)*
shared private information or photos of you with other people (e.g. on the internet/by mobile phone)/spread rumours about you	**195 (85%)**	**25 (11%)**	**6 (3%)**	**3 (1%)**
Male	*100 (88%)*	*9 (8%)*	*4 (4%)*	*1 (-)*
Female	*95 (83%)*	*16 (14%)*	*2 (2%)*	*2 (2%)*

front of other people; this was clearly a common occurrence in teenage relationships, and one would probably find a similar result in adult relationships. Of course, just because something is couched as a joke does not mean it cannot be hurtful, or form part of a dynamic in which a person is constantly belittled in a 'jokey' way. But it should be taken into account, considering that this behaviour was by some way the most commonly reported of those asked about, that it may not always be productive to view this as problematic when it may be experienced and interpreted as a sign of affection. Similarly, several participants responded that partners had constantly checked up on what they were doing by phone or texts. As we have seen in chapter five, however, "always-on" communication was a standard feature of relationships. While I tried to word the question in such a way as to imply deliberate monitoring, clearly the line here is blurred. The fact that this sort of communication is available and expected may create new possibilities for monitoring of partners' activities, but at the same time, as we have seen, it is not necessarily problematic within its context. Exploring the nuances of particular contexts can illuminate some of the complications.

Jealousy, control and the subtleties of gendered norms

In the previous chapter, I explored many of the ways in which jealousy works within relationships, and the tensions caused by working out these conflicts. These showed that both boys and girls felt, and expressed to their partners, jealousy within their relationships. However, when it came to negotiating these feelings, there were some subtle but important gendered differences. Although boys were willing to listen to their girlfriends' concerns about their relationships with other girls, they did not often make changes to their patterns of behaviour because of these concerns. Sometimes this was accompanied by overt declarations or continuations – as when Alex, Katie's boyfriend, remained close friends with Natalie. Other times, it was more covert, as with Christina's boyfriend, Matt, who continued to talking to girls he met online although he'd said that he wouldn't:

> Christina: Yeah, it's weird, he just says, oh I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry and it's like, well, why do you keep on doing it then?

In contrast, the girls in these relationships, despite their narratives of being self-confident and *"in charge"* of their relationships, were more likely to change their behaviour and patterns to fit with their partners' desires (see page refs). As I have discussed, Katie no longer went to parties without Alex, because he was worried that she might get drunk and kiss other boys; although, in fact, she maintained that she no longer drank as much as she used to, partially because of her relationship.

> Katie: and also because obviously I've got to remain faithful to Alex [NH: Yeah] it would be silly for me to go and *<Katie laughs>* get drunk and –
> NH: Yeah, sure. [yeah] Are you, do you think you would, like… if you were that drunk, I guess it's hard to know what you would do
> Katie: Yeah I think guys get quite confident when they're drunk so, I have actually when I've been with Alex I've been kissed by somebody

I have explored the repercussions of this incident for Katie and her relationships in the previous chapter. Her reasonings for not getting drunk speak back to the heterosexualised norms discussed previously in this chapter. While I attempt to ask if she would be likely to cheat on Alex with another boy, she implies that it would not be a choice of hers, but rather might be an unavoidable approach of his; but that this would not influence Alex's reaction. Therefore, her negotiation of Alex's expectations for her is situated within a web of gendered heteronorms that render Katie responsible for managing and negotiating men's emotions and actions towards her.

These norms were also visible in my interview with Alex and Steve, which illuminated a co-construction of heterosexualised ideas of sexuality within a masculine peer context, as well as the impact of wider socialized masculinities on the workings of partner relationships. Steve said that he was very close friends with Katie, and that this had been an issue at the start of his relationship with his girlfriend, Jo.

> Steve: Originally I did have to talk to her about it [...] but we talked about it and you have to understand that we're just really good friends. She says she

> does feel a tiny bit jealous but she does know that I would never do anything and we're just really good friends.

Again, here, we hear of Jo talking down her feelings of jealousy and accepting that her boyfriend will have other girl friends. But later on in the interview, Steve and Alex are discussing the friendship group that they are part of. They are both unhappy with its culture of "taking the mickey", whereby their friends mock each other without limits – "they'll just take the mickey out of absolutely everything even if it's the harshest thing". One way in which this manifests is mocking Steve about Jo's relations with other boys.

> Steve: They know I'm really [...] insecure about Jo talking to other guys and that makes them carry on and do it [take the mickey]
> NH: Are you worried about the guys who talk to Jo?
> Steve: It's, I know that they fancy her and I don't think any of them have probably made a move but I'm just scared that eventually they will. [He tells a story about one particular boy, which involves Jo concealing some events.] She was trying to reassure me that he doesn't fancy her and he's alright with us going out but I know full well that he isn't, he'd take any opportunity to get with her, but she didn't give him any opportunity so I'm fine with it now, it's just those are the sort of things you sort of need to know.

Here Steve and Alex's friends deliberately exacerbate his insecurity about Jo's friendships, which, in turn, shapes his own perception of his heterosexual masculinity as able to retain and control his girlfriend, and his subsequent attempts to influence her. While he is critically aware that his friends' mockery is aimed purely at angering him, this does not render it ineffective. Importantly, Steve and Alex admitted that they too participated in similar practices:

> Steve: Yeah, it gets really annoying [when friends "take the mick"] but you can't really stop it, cos if you say can you stop it then it gets worse, or if you react in an angry way
> Alex: Then everyone will say you're overreacting
> Steve: "Overreacting police", and that's so annoying
> NH: I guess you do it as well though?
> Steve: Yeah I join in, cos I get it a lot, and I used to get it more than anyone else so I started to feel sorry for people who were in the same situation, but if I didn't join in cos I don't join in sometimes, and I'm like "Yeah, you shouldn't really", and then they turn on me, and then the person I defended

turns on me – it's their only opportunity to get out of it.

Their discussion illustrates how circulations of particular forms of social cruelty and discourses of "laddish" masculinity can be actively reproduced without any of the actors necessarily being invested in that form of masculinity. Steve and Alex are reflexive and nuanced in their discussions both of their own and others' actions and potential motivations: in many ways, their performances in the interview context might be read as opening up new spaces of "alternative" (Allen 2007b) or "non-hegemonic" (de Visser 2009) masculinity. But, as they are aware, this reflection and complexity does not result in these discourses being rewritten through altered practices, and the difficulty of occupying a changed masculine subject position within his friendship group has effects on Steve's interactions with his girlfriend

In common with Alex's attitude to Katie's interactions at parties, Steve does not seem to attribute very much choice to Jo, except in the extent to which she spends time with these boys. His fear is mostly over the boys' desire for Jo; her reassurance to Steve is not that she doesn't fancy them, but that they don't fancy her. He maintains that "he'd take any opportunity to get with her, but she didn't give him any opportunity": constructing her as passive in the interaction. On the basis of this construction of Jo as vulnerable and the boys as predatory, he justifies his desire to control her friendships in order to preserve his relationship. She is simultaneously constructed as incapable and as responsible for the management of her male friends' behaviour. This attitude is consistent with many of the findings of previous research into understandings of teen partner violence (McCarry 2009, Burton et al 1998), as well as wider attitudes towards gendered violence.

We can see, then, that while both boys and girls report (in the survey and in interviews) that boyfriends and girlfriends have attempted to control their behaviour, the impacts of these attempts seem to be gendered. Consistent with girls' greater sense of responsibility for maintaining relationships, they tend to alter their own behaviours in response to their boyfriends' complaints or expectations, to a greater extent than boys do. As with many of my young women, they frequently constructed

themselves as the stronger and more capable partner in the relationship, as I have discussed in chapter five; and the more "mature" partner, which I discuss further in chapter seven. This is a dynamic that is historically resonant, but in the twenty-first century takes on a slightly different form. The neoliberal imperative for young women to be independent and agentic renders girls unwilling and/or unable to synthesise an interpretation of their boyfriend as influencing or controlling their behaviour with a coherent sense of their own successful femininity.

Entanglements and escapes

The majority of the cases I have explored in this section thus far have been instances occurring within fairly "serious" relationships (to varying degrees). As we saw in the previous chapter, the distinction between "serious" and other relationships was well accepted and largely based simply on the length the relationship lasted. Not surprisingly, it is of significant importance when discussing relationship dynamics; the stakes are higher, and desire to stay together greater, within more serious relationships. I want now to present an instance from a relationship that was seen (at least by one party) as less serious, exploring the workings of gendered power in a different relationship context.

During an interview with Link and Zelda, Link admitted to a relationship that she had not previously told Zelda much about (although the two were very close friends). I introduced this relationship in the previous chapter, which she had entered into despite not wanting to.

> Link: This was only cos I felt really guilty because he said, "Oh I really like you, will you go out with me?" and I felt really guilty cos like I didn't want to say no, so I said yes, but then I ignored him [NH: Ah OK] and so I –
> Zelda: I can't believe you had to hide from him!
> Link: – and so I hid from him […]but it was a bit annoying cos like he called me every day… and I set my ringtone, and it was a song, and every time it comes on my iPod I get really scared!
> *<they laugh>*
> Link: And actually, he still sort of follows me, well not follows me […] but I don't, I think it's cause I just avoid him, but I saw him on Tuesday playing cricket and he just texted me like "I see you!" *<they laugh>*
> NH: Oh my God, that's a bit scary

Zelda: You don't realise how scary it was
Link: Yeah it was the most awkward thing, cos I was helping at Brownies and in a cricket pitch and he was standing like 20 feet away. It was awful but I felt really guilty, probably the reason I don't talk to him now is cos I felt so guilty
 [...]
Link: I just got on my conscience, well actually every day, I felt so bad but I just, I didn't want to tell him cos I knew he'd get even more depressed than he really was, I would just hide.

This situation encompasses many of the themes that have been explored in this and previous chapters. Much of Link's anxiety about the situation stems from wishing to keep the existence of the "relationship" from her friends, a desire for privacy that fits with her general negotiation of relationships and sexuality in the context of the surveillance of peers. Link clearly carries a significant burden of guilt (as well as embarrassment) over her actions in relation to this boy. While she does not feel close to him or wish to present him in a positive light (she is clear in the interview that he is "weird"), her feelings are still conflicted. She feels responsible for managing his emotions, and for his desire towards her. She represents him as having pursued her persistently throughout the time they were supposedly seeing each other, and as continuing with this pursuit after she had broken off the relationship, but she downplays the impact that this has had on her ("sort of follows me, well not follows me"). In our conversation she said that avoiding this boy had meant staying away from places that she would normally go during the summer holidays, and that during that time, "well actually every day, I felt so bad but I just, I didn't want to tell him cos I knew he'd get even more depressed than he really was". The episode is a glimpse into the ways that gendered narratives of relationships can negatively influence both girls' and boys' experiences, and illustrates some of the difficulties with distinguishing what is abusive or coercive.

Link: It was never right. No, I do have to admit I think he maybe should have got the idea [that Link wasn't interested] a bit sooner.
NH: Yeah it sounds like he really should have
Link: I never really told him I liked him or anything, that was the problem, I didn't understand how he sort of thought I liked him [NH: yeah] so I was just like replying [on Facebook?] when I just sort of knew him, like if he was talking to me I'd just be like, "yeah"*<tone of voice indicating disinterest>*

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In her narrative of this relationship, she undoubtedly consented to going out with the boy. But the underlying norms of masculinity and pursuit meant that the boy seems to have taken lack of overt dissent as indication that Link was interested in a relationship. In tandem with Link's sense of responsibility for the boy's emotions, this leads to a relationship which causes nothing but difficulty and distress on both sides.

The ways in which these difficulties continued to affect her after she finally told him that she did not want to be in a relationship with him speak to the ways in which relationships might have repercussions beyond their official endpoint. This is particularly acute in the social context that has been explored throughout this chapter and the last. Geographical, technological and educational proximity meant that often it was not possible to completely break ties with an ex-partner; a difficult relationship, much like incidents of sexual assault that were discussed earlier in this chapter, was not something easily put in the past and forgotten about. The ways in which break-ups affected young people's negotiations of their social and sexual lives are also testament to the necessity of conceptualising abusive, coercive, controlling or distressing relations within their wider social network. After breakups, young people might be targeted by their ex-partner's friends, rather than the ex-partner themselves, for ostracism or abuse. James spoke of this treatment from his ex-girlfriend, Jessie, whom he had asked out after kissing her because he felt he should (as discussed in chapter five). The two were in the same friendship circle as they both frequently attended a drama group, but after he broke up with her, many of these friends became hostile towards him.

> NH: Was she, was she upset about [the breakup]?
> James: Yes. Very upset.
> NH: How do you know?
> James: Well, she didn't, <laughs> she didn't talk to me for a couple of months.
> NH: OK!
> James: Um, her friends hated me.

James then told me that she had continued to ask him why he'd broken up with her, and he had felt compelled to tell her about the "troubles at home" that he had used as an excuse for the breakup, although he would have preferred to keep these private.

> James: I think – I don't think she [told other people], no. Yeah cos when her friends started talking to me again, she [another friend] was like "Yeah listen, look, I still don't really like you, but Jessie says lay off you for a bit".

Jessie tries and manages to mitigate some of her friends' hostility towards James, based on her perception of his emotional vulnerability. A similar case of friends becoming hostile towards their friends' ex-partners was experienced by Laura, whose ex-boyfriend's friends started harassing her on Formspring (a social network website where users can post anonymous questions/messages to others).

> Laura: Um, I'm getting a lot of things like "Get over Will!" like "Man up" and all of this and it's kind of like, you obviously don't know me and how I take things, so his friends are a bit mean about that, so we kind of argued about that [NH: yeah] um, like saying, make your friends leave me alone cos it's not fair [...] Yeah I was like the last one to get [Formspring] cos I was *so* against it, I was like, "Look at the messages you're getting", but mine were, I was so, I didn't get so bad ones except from up till now when his friends were like, "Get over him", but you know, they're silly comments, and I think, you obviously don't like me, so.

Here Will's friends – who are a year older than Laura, and whom she does not know well – attack Laura online, despite the fact that (at least according to her) Will ended the relationship and there was little suggestion she behaved "badly" within the relationship. They seem to be the instigators of this harassment, but Will seems unable or unwilling to stop them from doing it. We have seen above how circulations of masculinity within friendship groups might encourage mockery of young men for particular aspects of their heterosexual relationships, which may contribute to this pattern of harassment. It is notable again how Laura talks down the impact of the comments on her, disidentifying from the status of victim ("his friends are a bit mean", "they're silly comments"). This was consistent with her presentation of self throughout the interview as independent and sensible, rejecting many of peer norms she viewed as problematic (discussed further in the next chapter). She discussed her feelings of sadness over Will breaking up with her, accepting them while

simultaneously asserting that she would get over them, and talked of trying to negotiate the post-breakup friendship:

> Laura: if [Will] doesn't want to be friends then I can't make him be friends with me, like the same way I couldn't make him be in a relationship with me, so, um, if he doesn't want to then, just have to get over it I guess.

These narratives illustrate that the violences and cruelties of teen relationships were not strictly bounded by time nor by the individuals within them, but indicate their embeddedness in everyday contexts and other social relationships, and the ways in which they continued to exert influence after the relationship is officially over.

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the fourth of my research questions: in what ways, and to what extent, young middle-class people experience violent, controlling and coercive behaviour in their relationships, and how they understand these experiences, and has situated these in relation to to normative discourses of heterosexual relationship cultures more widely. My work has built on recent research on attitudes towards and experiences of teenage partner violence, which has emphasised the importance of broader discourses of heterosexuality (Jackson et al. 2000; Barter et al. 2009; McCarry and Wood 2009; McCarry 2009; Barter 2010; McCarry 2010; Wood et al. 2011). My analysis, though, has looked further into the intricacies of how conceptions and experiences of violence are deeply caught up within social networks and interactions. The reasons behind particular acts of control or assault (as with Steve's attitude towards his girlfriend's male friends, or Max's assault of Elizabeth) were shaped by wider discourses of (in this case) masculinity, but also by the located social contexts and interactions within which these discourses circulated. The aftermath of sexual assault, too, was highly social and frequently publicly visible within the same networks of social surveillance discussed in chapter four.

Through survey data, I illustrated that a relatively high number of participants reported experiencing some forms of sexually or emotionally violent behaviour, and

that girls were more likely to experience sexual violence or coercion. Looking further into these experiences, we found that these were often downplayed by participants in conversation, and that sexual violence in particular was surrounded by troubling discourses of gender and blame. Many of the instances reported in the survey seem to have been interpreted by participants as minor. On the one hand, it is not necessarily productive to interpret figures as representative of an epidemic problem of abuse, when they are not interpreted by teenagers this way. On the other hand, the figures need also to be placed in a context where downplaying of problems may seem necessary as a means of surviving socially and preserving a coherent identity.

Discourses of heterosexuality which encourage compulsory masculine pursuit, while discouraging female desire, create a culture where sexuality and relationships are often entered into, and sustained, although one or more of the partners is not particularly enthusiastic. They also shape young people's negotiations of conflict within their relationships: young women tend to take responsibility for managing both their own and their partners' emotions. Despite societal changes in the ways that female sexuality is represented and expressed, we have seen in previous chapters that many gendered norms remain persistent and constricting. In combination with discourses suppressing teenagers' experiences of sexual desire and pleasure, these can work to distance young women from their bodies, from expressing their own desires. Negotiation of consent is complex both during and after the fact, and for many young people, it seems, consent is secondary in determining the importance of a sexual encounter.

Through this chapter, I have situated experiences of gendered violence in the context of broader prevalent discourses around neoliberal individuality. This was evident particularly for young women negotiating discourses of neoliberal femininity that impel them to perform an autonomous, agentic self, and thus present their relationships with partners and others as equal and in control. This is entwined with a particular classed form of femininity which tends to discourage overt conflict (as discussed in chapter four). These constructions of identity and avowals of equality

often worked in practice to veil inequalities and difficulties. The tyranny of compulsory individuality could also shape hostile feelings towards those who experienced violence or vulnerability, constructing them as moral failures because of their perceived lack of autonomy and self-control. In the following chapter, I will look further at the denigration and othering of those who failed to achieve a successful, agentic identity, and consider how this worked as part of young people's construction and defence of their own classed subjectivities.

Chapter seven
Making the middle-class teen: the intersections of class, age, gender and (hetero)sexuality

This chapter draws the focus back from the intimacies of heterosexuality and relationships, and looks at the situated middle-class teen heterosexual subject. It explores how young people deploy classed and aged masculinities and femininities to make themselves, and the tensions that inhere between, and within, different aspects of the subject. It looks at how negotiations of heterosexuality and relationships work (or don't) as part of the reproduction of classed privilege, as the not-yet-fixed subject moves into, and anticipates, the fixity and security of a coherently gendered and successful middle-class adulthood. Just as young people are continually actively performing gender, so they are continually actively performing class; not as separate forms but as intertwined and dependent upon each other. These intertwined aspects of identity are also bound up with performances of age and discourses of maturity.

We have already seen in previous chapters some of the ways in which classed judgements were associated with promiscuity and undesirable (particularly female) sexuality; here I consider in more detail the ways in which this enduring discourse was negotiated and complicated by my participants. I then look at the ways in which class distinction and subtle fractions were at work in negotiating heterosexual identities, in the context of the comprehensive school. The chapter goes on to explore the ways in which investments in heterosexuality often compete with investments in education and the future, and the complex emotional orientations involved in sustaining a relationship as a middle-class teen.

Age, class, sexuality and discourses of maturity

As we saw in chapter four, participants in my research frequently judged young women for expressions of sexuality that were perceived as excessive. This judgement was frequently tied up with implicit ideas of class, respectability and

"proper" femininity. This kind of judgement, of course, is hardly new. Working class women have long been associated with out-of-control, excessive sexuality and fecundity, as discussed in detail by Bev Skeggs (1997, 2004) and Valerie Walkerdine (Walkerdine 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001) among many others. What I want to focus on is the ways in which participants' reworkings of these historical discourses were closely bound up with their negotiations of their own status as teenagers, and the specificity of youth as a site for making class.

A significant body of literature has focussed on the recent emergence in British popular culture and imagination of the figure of the "chav", who brings together all the negative stereotypical attributes of a so-called "underclass" into one body, providing an individualised scapegoat for class ridicule, disgust and hatred (Hayward and Yar 2006; Nayak 2006; Tyler 2008; Martin 2009; Taylor 2010; Jones 2011). The "chav" is most frequently represented as one of two archetypes: the teen mother, or the unemployed young male "yob". Imogen Tyler has explored in detail the "fetishisation" of the "chav mum", intensifying in new ways the focus on the stigmatised working class young mother as "the quintessential sexually excessive, single mother: an immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore" (2008, p. 26). The stigmatisation and disgust attached to the figure of the female "chav" (whether as media representation, or as perceived reality), then, is intimately linked to her embodied, excess sexuality. But this excess is also linked with her age; she is "out of her time", reproducing before she "should", expressing a sexuality that is considered "too old" for her. The rise of the "chav" as hate figure comes in a context where youth itself is a focus for adult anxiety and distaste. Media coverage focusses strongly on youth as troublemakers, juvenile crime, and anti-social behaviour; young people, particularly in groups and in public space, are often seen as a threat and an imposition (Valentine 2004). But this fear of youth is bound up with fear of a particular kind of youth. Essentially, the threatening, "disgusting" figure of the working class is a youthful figure; and the threatening figure of the young person is a working class figure. These are not confined merely to representations in media and popular culture, but play out through young people's positionings of themselves

in relation both to adults and to other young people, as I now explore through particular participants' narratives.

Katie: sexual distinction and development

In my interviews, participants frequently dissociated themselves from "undesirable" popular conceptions of teenagers, at pains to point out that they were "not like that". While they sometimes expressed frustration at adult perceptions of teenagers, they also upheld these perceptions in regard to others. Their negotiations of sexuality in particular, and their detailings of other people's sexuality, were often tied up with class disgust and negotiations of their own classed identities. Katie spoke about a friend of hers, Faith, whom she introduced as being "very... promiscuous, she won't sleep around, but she does *get* around". Talking in detail about the difficulties she had spending time with particular friends as she did not live near the town centre, she said:

> Katie: I don't particularly like being in town with them, they, Faith hangs out with a different crowd, that are quite… I don't really like them, there's lots of people from different schools, schools I've never heard of, all older boys, they all smoke [...]

Here she makes a strong demarcation between her own preferred companions and the people that Faith hangs out with. She distances herself entirely from knowledge of their social world, maintaining that they go to schools she has never heard of. Particular schools, of course, carry particular weights of locally situated knowledge (Reay 2004): we saw in chapter four that different schools were associated with more lax social "rules" on what was considered sexually permissible. They are frequently used among (young) people as shorthand and euphemism for particular "types" of people, in a similar way that particular housing estates are used as shorthand and disguise in making class distinctions (Reay 2000; Gidley and Rooke 2010). So Katie's denial of knowledge of these boys' schools keeps the undesirable elements at arms' length, indicating that her circles are so far removed from theirs that they are invisible. Going into further detail about this group, she said:

> Katie: I mean we're all friends [NH: yeah] but I don't see the point in hanging out with people that I don't really [NH: like], yeah. It's not just older guys, it's older guys that smoke and do drugs [NH: yeah sure] and that wear tracksuits in town and, that's very *<Katie laughs>* stereotypical of me! But, and that swear a lot and vandalise things, and that's just, I don't get along with that at all.

Again here she associates Faith's friends with classed markers – hanging around town smoking, wearing tracksuits and vandalism. She is clearly self-conscious about making these distinctions, laughing at herself for being "stereotypical". Throughout the discussion of this group and her friend Faith, she often equivocated around her own negative judgements; presenting the feminine middle-class compulsion to be "nice" discussed in chapter four ("I mean, we're all friends"). Simultaneously she enacts the noisy silence that often typifies class distinction in an individualised post-industrial Britain (Savage et al. 2001; Sayer 2002, 2005): she is aware that explicit distinction is uncomfortable, dispelling the created tension with humour, yet understands these distinctions to be visible and significant. I asked why Katie thought Faith enjoyed spending time with these boys, and she said:

> Katie: Um, she's *really* good-looking [NH: OK] she's really, she's got like the most fabulous body ever, and guys , she's very easy to talk to, [NH: yeah] guys find her, she's not intimidating, she's a bit stupid, so – well she's actually quite clever, but she comes across as very stupid, like she'll talk about shoes and be like *<high-pitched tone>* "Oh my God!" you know, I mean obviously when you connect with her [NH: yeah] she's great, but to boys, she probably just seems like she's easy [NH: yeah], she'll get with whoever, she'll go as far as they want, so that's probably why guys like her! *<Katie laughs>*

Here Katie navigates the imagined complexity of Faith's performances of femininity. She highlights a disconnect between Faith's "true identity" as intelligent and the performance of identity she adopts while interacting with particular guys, indicating that these guys are attracted by her appearance as "stupid", which Katie connects with her being "easy" . This is an interesting connection back to the discussions in chapter six of girls performing vulnerability at parties. Both are situations where a girl is perceived as deliberately adopting a less skilled and competent (false) persona in order for guys to "take advantage"; again, here, Faith's desire is not spoken of –

she will "go as far as they want". What she may want, in this narrative, is irrelevant: it is accessible only through a haze of sexual agency masquerading as passivity.

Katie's discussions of Faith and her performances of femininity are particularly interesting in the context of her own negotiations of class and heterosexuality. She disidentifies with Faith yet retains a sympathetic orientation towards her, as well as exhibiting the kind of detailed fascination (both negative and positive) with other women's bodies and sexualities that circulates within these teen social cultures. But Katie has a narrative about her own development that places her past self in the role of a Faith. Talking about drinking, Katie claimed that most of her peers no longer got as drunk as they used to, and that she had had a bad experience when drunk, so had "cut down completely".

> Katie: At one party [this time last year] I got off with someone I didn't know [NH: yeah] and I went - the furthest I've ever been, I didn't have sex with him but I did [NH: yeah], and, um, I did go quite astonishingly far and no one had ever done that before, I was really like my reputation just went out the window, I had never had a proper relationship, I'd messed around with some guys, [yeah] I'd got off with people I didn't like, and I was a bit stupid, and in the end I realized that it's not worth it [yeah], it's not worth it cos I could have very easily had sex with somebody and like, and that would have been *<Katie laughs>* ridiculous and I'd hate to lose my virginity in that way, better to lose it with somebody you know [NH: yeah] so, and that was why I just don't get drunk any more, and if I do I make sure that I'm in a situation where everyone I know is around me, and there's no-one, cos It was a joint party, it was actually Alex and his stepsister [NH: right, OK], and she goes to another school, and there were a huge group of people there and they were all chavvy and, I mean, he was very nice, the guy I got off with! *<Katie laughs>* But I wasn't, um, about to start anything.

In this discussion Katie presents a picture of herself as mature, reflexive and thoughtful, having learnt from mistakes she has made in the past and built on her experience to make wiser decisions in the present. Crucially, though, she did not "cross the line"; she did not have sex with somebody she didn't know, which, as we have seen in previous chapters, was at this point viewed as unforgivable. She presents her actions as misguided and as errors of judgement, not just because of the nature or extent of her sexual activity, but because of the people she was involved with: "they were all chavvy". Again, she softens the distinction she makes (as well as

validating her own past choice), by pointing out how "nice" the boy was. But there is no question that he would be unsuitable for a relationship ("to start anything"); he is of use only for a flirtation with danger and a role in a cautionary tale.

It is important to note, of course, that this discussion is taking place in the context of an interview with an adult. Certainly I am not claiming that Katie necessarily *had* stopped drinking heavily; as Fin Cullen (2010) points out in her research with girls binge-drinking, a claim of maturity and moderation in one context might be belied by observations elsewhere (which I do not have). But it is nevertheless a narrative that Katie invests in, and it is consistent with the identity and developmental narrative that she constructed throughout the interviews. She no longer goes to parties and gets drunk, because (as we have seen in earlier chapters) she is involved in a serious relationship, which forms an important part of her social and emotional life, and she needs to stay faithful. This is influenced, as we saw in chapter five, by Alex's reactions to her assault at a party (which she told me about shortly after the above story of her previous "stupid" actions) and his fear that she will cheat on him. However, she incorporates it into her own developmental narrative of maturing, emphasizing her own personal agency in the matter. There is, though, also an undertone of pride and pleasure in Katie's retelling of her past exploits. She highlights the novelty and trailblazing nature of her own activity: "I did go quite astonishingly far and no one had ever done that before". There is a cachet associated with being first; while, as we saw in chapter four, sexual notoriety for young women is often difficult and unpleasant, it can also bring pleasure and excitement.

Importantly, Katie's developmental narrative is also tied up with class negotiations. She is dissociating herself from a previous self who associated with "chavvy" boys. In contrast, Alex, her current boyfriend, is very wealthy, which, as I will explore further later in the chapter, she sometimes finds difficult to negotiate. As we saw in chapter five, she has serious issues with Alex's relationship with Natalie, his best friend, who like him is very wealthy. So it is that she narrates a movement of upward class mobility, from a risky, dangerous, casual association with a working class boy, to a solid, steady relationship with an upper-middle class boy, positioning herself as

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being part of that culture.[20] Her narrative is an illustration of middle-class young people employing distinctions from the working class in constructing their own classed identities. It is also an example of a young woman navigating a discourse of female sexual – and social – risk, using it to position herself as a skilled, and fortunate, subject. In the next section, I explore the deployment of a similar discourse of risk from a different perspective.

James: masculinity, maturity and protection

Katie was, unsurprisingly, not alone in narrating her development, highlighting her maturity and performing a "sensible" self, and like her story, others' also intersected with gendered and classed identifications and disidentifications. James told a similar story of how he had previously been a heavy drinker but had cut down since doing things while drunk that he regretted.

> James: Umm, it was, yeah I mean I got off with a close friend [NH: OK] and there were people who were ashamed of me for doing that and then um... also and then kind of after that I kind of felt, like, yeah I could do anything, well cos... yeah cos like the thing is with me is, I don't really know how... this is going to sound quite weird, but how a guy should behave himself, cos I live predominantly with my mum [NH: Right, OK] and see my dad very, very rarely [NH: yeah] and um .... yeah, it's just um yeah one thing led to another [NH: mm] and I'm not proud of, of what I did [NH: OK] um yeah. I changed my behaviour and then I got totally kinda smashed and I hurt someone [ok] which ...was, it was a wakeup call, because that is kinda why my mum left my dad [right, ok] and it was definitely kind of, there was something there. I mean, yeah I'll still have a drink [mm] but I'm, I'm now more of the person who has a drink but makes sure everyone else is kind of being sensible.

James' narration of his own development is particularly notable for the connections he makes to his masculinity. He suggests that some of his problematic behaviour was related to the fact that, as he does not see his father, he does not have a male guide to follow. He also sees his father's violent behaviour as an example of a form of masculinity he does not want to emulate, but fears becoming: "it was a wake-up call". In an apparently unrelated incident, he also regrets "getting off with a close

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[20] Of course, the boy Katie talks about might well have been described as "middle class" by others; but it is the way she identifies him and the use she makes of his assigned attributes to further her own narrative that is of interest.

friend", and speaks of other people's feeling "ashamed" of him for this. He did not go into detail regarding why this was seen to be shameful, but continuing the conversation above, he went on to describe his identity as "making sure everyone else is being sensible".

> James: and, yeah and now some people, like, we now have a group of friends and I'm kind of daddy of the group *<NH laughs>* [NH: OK] um and, yeah, um, some, most of the girls come and talk to me about a guy before they go out with him and ask for my permission *<NH laughs>* some of them, some of them do!
> NH: That's amazing.
> James: Yeah and I feel quite powerful, um [NH: absolutely] no, I mean, I mean they're not kinda really asking my permission, it's just kinda [NH: yeah] and I literally just give the advice [yeah] of, like, it's kinda your choice. And there are some guys which I don't like [NH: OK] cos they're those stereotypical guys.
> NH: And you tell them that maybe it's not that good an idea to do that.
> James: Well yeah, I use the excuse like, if you want to be pregnant by the time you're 16, go on.
> NH: Yeah, there is that I guess.
> James: And they're all like, OK, cos they're also, there are some guys which you kind of talk to when no girls are around [NH: mm] and you kind of hear what they really kind of say, I think a lot of guys kind of hush up kinda in front of girls, if you know what I mean.

In James' narrative, he has not only become "sensible" with regard to ensuring his own moderation; he has extended this role to become safeguarder of his friends' interests: "daddy of the group". He has taken up a paternal, protective version of masculinity, in contrast to the violent masculinity he has rejected from his father. He sees himself as being in a privileged position, able to understand other boys' "true" natures, which they hide from girls. Although he sets himself apart from those "stereotypical guys", he nevertheless has access to their more "authentic" identities by virtue of his maleness (and, perhaps, his previous behaviour). It is on the basis of this superior knowledge that he justifies his role of guardian. Yet he also stresses the rhetoric of individual responsibility: "I literally just give the advice [yeah] of, like, it's kinda your choice".

James' most powerful method of persuasion is, tellingly, the threat of teenage pregnancy: "I use the excuse like, if you want to be pregnant by the time you're 16,

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go on". As we have seen previously, teen motherhood is strongly associated with working class women. Here James uses the teen mother as a spectre: the fear draws power not merely from the biological fact of pregnancy, but from its associations and perceived incompatibility with existence as a respectable middle-class teen girl. It is at this point in time that a young woman might find herself sliding downwards; her not-yet-fixed middle-classness is at risk of being disintegrated by her errant sexuality. This resonates with Rachel Thomson's discussion of young middle-class people's rejection of early parenthood, and dissociation from local youth they described as "pikeys":[21] as she argues,

> While young people are already middle class, to remain so requires that they invest in the future rather than the present and that they avoid the public spaces of the local. (2000, p. 418)

In the following section, I further investigate participants' rejections of and dissociations from working class teenagers' sexualities and identities.

"The people who get the bad name for teenagers": Age-appropriate performances of gender and class

The intertwined normative constructions of age, class and sexuality that we see young people negotiating through their narratives were also negotiated in relation to differing types and levels of engagement in sex and relationships, with some participants specifically emphasizing their youth. Alex (Katie's boyfriend) and Steve, for instance, responded to one of my first questions on how important relationships were to them:

> Alex: Important as in, in our lives?
> Steve: They're kind of important, but we're still quite young
> Alex: With most people, it seems like a thing to do to fill the time.

Here they at once indicate to me their awareness of adult-centred ideas of age-appropriate relationships, positioning themselves as perceptive critical observers of teenage culture, and set up a baseline representation of their peer group from which

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[21] "Pikey" is a colloquial derogatory term similar to "chav". It has racial origins as a descriptor for gypsies/travellers, but this meaning has been lost or become secondary in some geographical and cultural areas. Thomson's participants did not seem to use it in the racial sense.

they can emphasise their own difference and maturity. Throughout the interview, they discussed their own relationships in terms of intimacy, and talked about the difficulties they often encountered trying to negotiate their identities (and defend their girlfriends) within their friendship groups.

Other participants constructed similar distinctions between themselves (or sometimes their friendship groups) and other teenagers, rhetorically employing wider ideas about youth to set themselves apart. Adrienne and Lucy discussed people who had, allegedly, started coming to school less or not at all, a move they disapproved of as it meant these people lost touch with their friends, and also because they "[hung] around with all the people who do all the drugs, and the smoking, and the gangs, yeah".

> Adrienne: They're kind of the people who get the bad name for teenagers 'cause like, quite a lot of people are like, oh yeah teenagers, they're really bad for society, they're the ones with gun crime, the knife crime, this crime, that crime. And actually, that's a very small per cent, and that's kind of unfair for quite a lot of other people I think, like for people like us, 'cause that's then, like, I'll go to help somebody, like, cross the road kind of thing and they're like, oh, teenager, don't want you to come near me, and I think, and also, kind of racial abuse, things like, our local newsagent's, it's run by an Indian person, and with the kind of people that do hang around there, they are quite scared because they are, they kind of fear young people coming into the shop, and instantly they're like, ooh, when actually might go in for like a packet of sweets or a magazine or something, where other people'll go in and they look scary, they go around in like trainers and jogging bottoms and their hoods up.

This conversation was notable for the vague, nebulous quality of description of the teenagers, their habits and behaviour: an amalgamation of specific observation and personal knowledge, and broader generalizations connected to wider societal perceptions, and unlikely to be based in direct observation. (For instance, government statistics indicate that gun and knife crime in the town my research took place in is next to non-existent.) Adrienne also constructs a stark division between the excessive criminality and antisociality of the othered teenagers, and her own somewhat hyperbolic representation of her own pro-social attitudes: "I'll go to help somebody, like, cross the road". She draws on discourses of the white working class

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as racist (Haylett 2001; Rhodes 2011), thereby implying a contrast with her own cosmopolitan, tolerant identity.

The discussion, of course, is laden with othering of the working class, with the negative portrayals of teenagers' anti-social behaviour bleeding into distaste for their appearance and attire: "they look scary, they go around in like trainers and jogging bottoms and their hoods up". It is important, though, that her description is not merely a denigration of particular groups, but that she explicitly links these groups with a cultural discourse of youth as threat: "They're kind of the people who get the bad name for teenagers 'cause like, quite a lot of people are like, oh yeah teenagers, they're really bad for society". Where class is a division constantly present but rarely speakable, discriminations based on age – or, more specifically, youth – become a euphemism and proxy for discriminations based on class. Thus it is that participants did not so much *reject* adult-centric discourses of youth, but rework and negotiate them: they redeployed these discourses in constructing identities and dissociations. In order to maintain a viable identity as a middle-class teen – almost an oxymoron within the contexts of contemporary discourses of youth – they needed to distance themselves as individuals from popular conceptions of "the teenager" while simultaneously upholding the validity of these conceptions.

Adrienne and Lucy's identity work in this interview, then, illustrates a broader tendency for participants to identify against an imagined figure of "the teenager" in performing their own middle-class identities. Throughout this conversation, although not specifically in the extract above, they also linked the imagined fecklessness of those other teens directly with avoidance of school and education, a theme that recurred throughout other interviews. Orientations to school, education and educational futures are a significant means through which young people "do" class; I will explore in further detail below the ways in which educational subjectivities interconnected with sexual subjectivities. Their discussion links back strongly to the compulsory responsibilisation and individual blaming discussed in the previous chapter around sexual violence. Adrienne and Lucy spoke of the failings of the

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teenagers who rejected school (physically through truancy, or through not working in class) in terms of individual, deliberate laziness. This tendency was found also in Mary Jane Kehily and Rob Pattman's research with middle-class sixth-formers, whose "tales of how the popular 'wasters' received their just desserts" worked to bolster their own identities as hard-working, superior and successful (2006, p. 43). The following quote came immediately after Adrienne's discussion above of the teenagers who "get the bad name for society":

> Lucy: I don't think they're really at all as strong as they put out to be, because they've just given up basically, haven't they? If they wanted to try, they would have, 'cause, the guy who lay down in the road [in reference to a young man from their primary school who had apparently been expelled and later lay down in the road in the middle of the night], he was given the chance by having home schooling, but, no.

This extract formed part of the lengthy discussion on young people who "gave up" on education, in which Adrienne and Lucy employed moralising educational discourses. They were, in particular, disparaging of those they viewed as clever:

> Adrienne: Yeah, so there's, there's quite a range of people there, I mean there's some really clever people
> Lucy: Who you can see actually just putting their life down the drain sometimes.

Here we see the strength of the link between educational "success" and acceptable futures, and the imagined abyss of educational failure. There are, behind these judgements, deep anxieties and compulsions: if not trying at school entails "putting your life down the drain", it is vital for Adrienne and Lucy to try desperately hard, as success just as failure is based on individual striving. The only other factor to be considered, it seemed, was that of another individual: the role of parental responsibility.

> Adrienne: Yeah, and I think, it's partly to do with the parents I think, 'cause one person, my mum knows his mum, and she's like, oh yeah, he won't get out of bed [to go to school] until I give him breakfast in bed
> [...]
> Adrienne: Yeah. And mum's like, well, if you're ill you can call me and I'll come and get you. But, I think like, it is like, oh, you've got a cough, you've got a bit of a sore throat, whatever, you can stay at home or oh, one of my

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brother's friends is oh, I'm too tired today, I can't be bothered to take you
into school, and that's the parent, and my mum's just like, you can't do that,
that's just not the attitude, you've had kids, you've got to have the
responsibility now. You can't, just because you've had a hectic day yesterday
doesn't mean…
Lucy: And it'd take five minutes to drop them off anyway
Adrienne: My mum's like, once she got up when she was ill got up, she was
still in her dressing gown and she dropped us off at school and drove back
kind of thing. You don't even need to make an effort, to be honest

This focus on parental input (which continued into a discussion of divorce and
separation and how parental separation might influence young people's attitudes to
relationships) was notable again for its denigration of the individual, distancing and
refusal of sympathy with "poor" "choices" ("You don't even need to make an
effort"). Popular and policy discourse on inequalities, crime, anti-social behaviour
and an array of other social problems has recently focussed very heavily on the role
of parents as individuals (their "responsibility" and "attitude", to use Adrienne's
terms), as well as family structure, in shaping children and young people,
downplaying the structural inequalities that influence familes (Gillies 2005). A
significant body of research has focussed on the anxieties that this creates for parents
investing in their children's education, and the differing ways that middle-class and
working-class parents navigate these discourses (Lucey et al. 2003; Reay 2004; Reay
et al. 2005; Reay et al. 2007; Vincent and Ball 2007; Reay 2008; Nixon 2010).
Adrienne and Lucy's discussions illustrate the ways in which these are not
discourses confined to adult negotiation of their own activity. Rather, young people
reconstruct and rework these discourses around families and parenting, in making
their own identities and those of their peers.

These negotiations of class and age were key in the navigation of young people's
sexualities and gender. Young people performed identities as self-aware and
"mature", although, perhaps paradoxically, maturity did not involve acting *older* but
rather constructing identities and behaviour perceived as age-appropriate, a complex
set of expectations around which to manoeuvre, especially when it comes to
sexuality. Similar navigation of age-based norms has been explored recently in
relation to younger teens' and "tween"s' interactions with clothing and consumer

culture (Bragg et al. 2011; Jackson and Vares 2011; Jackson et al. 2012). Like my participants, these children and young people were keenly aware of discourses of age-appropriate sexuality (and their classed subtexts), and employed careful strategies in their own discursive work and choices of clothing and consumer goods to keep within the boundaries of "appropriate sexuality" for their age. The sexual teen is "out of time" in the lifecourse and exists as a problematic classed imagined figure, one which teens must constantly steer around in doing their own sexualities and relationships.

Class fractions and social heterosexualities

Thus far the negotiations of class I have explored, and the identifications and disidentifications young people made, have been largely focussed on relations to the "other": the nebulous mass of the working class, whether as imagined threat to society or as those seen to represent risk and danger in sexual exploits. This section explores the more intimate negotiations of class; the everyday manoeuvring within a narrower range, and the ways that sociosexual relations were shaped and influenced by differences and fractions within the middle class. I will look at this first in relation to the complicated and sometimes contradictory relations to girls in the "popular group", exploring the place of excess in their representation. I will then explore the ways that some young people negotiated difference within their intimate relationships.

Wealth and excess

In chapter four, I introduced the "popular group", those young people who were considered by themselves and others to be the most sexually and socially active in a particular way, and discussed the ways that group functioned both as an object of desire and fascination, and as a source of repulsion and a way of being to identify against. Throughout that chapter and this one, I have discussed the ways in which excess sexuality, particularly in girls, was often associated with a denigration of people or actions considered working class. Yet, as previously discussed in chapter four, this fits uneasily with the simultaneous representation (and reality) of the

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"popular group" as generally affluent. The narratives and legends constructed around the popular group built representations of excess not just in sexuality but also in consumption, of alcohol and more broadly. Adrienne and Lucy, who as we have just seen were disparaging about those they viewed as "irresponsible" in terms of education, also passed judgement on the "popular group", which they did not view themselves as belonging to. In chapter four, we saw that Adrienne and Lucy spoke negatively of this group "showing off" their wealth. Nevertheless, in the interview Adrienne recirculated the narrative and the spotlight on wealth even as she played its interest down:

> Adrienne: Yeah, so it was quite, it was a lot of damage, I mean, these people have got like three fields and horses and shit so they've got quite a lot of money, and fancy cars on the drive and all that…

There is a disdainful fascination with scale, particularly the scale of destruction.

> Adrienne: I did hear that there was £10,000 worth of damage [at one party]. Whether that is actually true, I think it's a pretty large exaggeration.

Clearly both girls recognise the likely element of hyperbole in the circulating stories; Adrienne here discursively performs her own moderation and skills of critical analysis through commenting on the accuracy of the figure, yet simultaneously re-emphasises the shocking figure with an element of distance.

This spotlight on excess, then, forms part of the culture of display and spectacle discussed in chapter four, with outsiders both attracted and repulsed by the display of wealth and sexuality. A particularly notable illustration of the ways the classed identities of others were navigated and deployed emerged in a discussion with Ellie and Amy around an incident of heavy drinking, which we have already visited in the previous chapter. Amy and Ellie lived close to each other and were from a more disadvantaged area than the majority of my participants. Amy, in particular, had previously attended another secondary school in the area which was not well considered in terms of results; its intake was primarily from a council estate which was one of the more deprived areas in the town. In the context of this largely middle-class town, it was "demonized" (Reay 2004). This had not gone unnoticed by her

peers; when I asked whether people passed rumours around about either of the girls, Ellie said that Amy had frequently been the subject of rumours, and Amy backed this up.

> Amy: I used to come from Greendale and that was all, that's a rough school, and I can't... everyone was like, she speaks like a chav, she acts like a chav, everything, and then now they've just got bored and they've moved on to someone else.

Amy, then, was sometimes the object of some of the "othering" that we have previously discussed. Ellie, on the other hand, had previously been a member of the "popular group", which she described in negative terms:

> Ellie: I've pretty much always hung out with the so called 'bitchy people', wearing short skirt kind of people.

The description speaks to the blurry lines between heterosexual performance and social hierarchy that were discussed in chapter four. Both Ellie and Amy spoke harshly about the group Ellie had previously been part of, maintaining that they spread false rumours and enjoyed causing trouble. They also spoke negatively about their indulgence in alcohol and drugs, and focussed in particular on the one incident of alcohol poisoning that was discussed in chapter six. Their judgement of Sophie, the girl involved, was vitriolic, and they continued to denigrate her for her identity in general and her actions after the drinking incident. Throughout this conversation, their mutual distaste (expressed more strongly by Ellie) became bound up with judgement of her family and her affluence.

> Amy: She still goes round flaunting and everything.
> Ellie: She used to be a nice person but her family are quite high class and are quite rich and stuff and they have a swimming pool.
> Amy: Snobby.
> Ellie: She just lets boys come in naked in her swimming pool, swim naked with her and her parents let it go on. The fact that they don't want her to cause trouble in the house. It doesn't make sense to me because my parents are the opposite. [...] My parents are quite strict about that kind of thing but to her it's just fun and games and she doesn't care about anybody. She's like 'I've got the most and my friends always love me 'cause I give them things, I have tight jeans and stuff."

Again, Ellie and Amy illustrate the close interconnections between gendered sexual and class identities. Here they appear to be particularly resentful of the lack of parental punishment or control, and Sophie's perceived exploitation of her parents' wealth in pursuit of her own status as heterosexually desirable (inviting boys over to swim naked in her pool), as well as to attract friends. Sophie's lack of remorse or behaviour change as a result of her being hospitalised for drinking is seen by these participants as unacceptable and connected to her perceived ease in navigating the world. She violates the implicit individualised laws that ought to result in "bad", risky, excessive behaviour being punished. It is as if Sophie's class positioning places her above the restraints and restrictions that other girls must contend with, allowing her to indulge in more excessive forms of consumption and sexuality without being penalised. For Ellie and Amy in particular, who are partial outsiders because of their own marginal class position, this is seen as problematic. This theme of more affluent girls' greater potential freedom in heterosexuality – or, at least, more limited punishment or judgement –was not an isolated instance, but was an undercurrent in orientations to the "popular girls". I discuss one of these instances in more detail below, but first I turn to the negotiations of class within intimate relationships.

Fractious relationships: partners negotiating class difference

We have already seen in previous sections of this chapter that sexual encounters between people from different class backgrounds can carry particular elements of tension, perceived risk and excitement; if not (necessarily) at the time, then certainly in the memory and retelling. More extended intimate relationships, however, also carried within them negotiations of classed positions and tensions. It is perhaps obvious that sexual and romantic relationships are strongly influenced by class, but the intricacies of these intersections have not received very much attention. Class is relevant both in formation, in that people tend to socially mix with others from similar backgrounds, and in maintenance, in that the many ways that class shapes identity come into play in doing relationships (Johnson and Lawler 2005; McDermott 2010). For young people in school, while many class differences are (as we have

seen) very salient, some class divisions have not entirely come into play: most obviously, differing places of employment. Friendships and relationships may be formed that come to involve differences in social background which are not always clear within the school social context, and require the not-always-comfortable movement between school and home spaces.

We spent some time with Christina and her boyfriend Matt in chapter five. They were unusually intimate and spent a great deal of time in each others' company, and also kept details of their relationship very private from most of their friends. The exception to this was Christina's willingness to share with friends from her primary school, who now went to a different school and thus were not embedded in the circulation of gossip and speculation. Interestingly, she specified that these friends were at a particular kind of school:

> Christina: It's not like a – nice , school
> NH: Oh OK, yeah
> Christina: Don't want to sound like snobby but yeah it is, and quite a few of them are, like have been in quite a few relationships and done lots of stuff.

It is possible that the differing context of Christina's friends' school was also a factor in her comfort with sharing details of her relationship: perhaps she felt they would find her sexual activity less interesting and/or remarkable, or felt that the constraints on sexuality within their peer cultures were less strict.

I asked where they usually spent time together, and she at first said they went to each others' houses, or into town. Later, when we had talked about the ways in which their friends often found their closeness irritating, she said that usually out of school they spent time together without their friends, and she said:

> Christina: Um he, I don't, this is going to make me sound really snobby but like he hasn't, [laughs] I don't know, I don't want to sound… but he doesn't ,like, he doesn't get that much money [NH: right] like from his dad or anything ,so he can't really afford to just like go out loads [NG: yeah] so we just go to the park or something, or, do you know the lake round here it's like really hidden and it's really nice there.

We can see here again, as in Christina's talk about her friends' school above, the reluctance to explicitly discriminate in class terms and the discomfort of naming (or making) difference. This is particularly salient in both these instances, when Christina is acknowledging divisions between those she is emotionally close to and maintaining relationships that, in ideal form at least, are equal. Here Christina navigates the complexities of differing resources within a relationship, and the delicate balance of recognising a need to cater for Matt's limited spending capacity while not foregrounding the difference or reinscribing it as lack. This can be viewed within the context of the dynamics of their relationship: Christina commonly engaged in emotion work and defended the balance of their relationship even when she acknowledged frustrations and imbalances. We can perhaps imagine from this quote the skill and effort she expended on care for Matt and the relationship (while of course recognising that she is representing herself without input from him). In terms of practical impact on the relationship, it illustrates the complex ways in which class was embedded in other relations and interacted with other factors. Their avoidance of expensive activities meant avoiding too much time in town spent with other people, which was consonant with avoiding too much time in the company of Christina's friends (whom Matt did not particularly like). Christina also highlights the positive aspects of the places they visit ("do you know the lake round here, it's like really hidden and it's really nice there"), thus shifting the narrative from one of lack and constraint to one of choice. It is not possible to determine from the information available whether one or other of these issues was the most powerful factor deciding Christina and Matt's actions. But it may well have been similarly impossible for either Christina or Matt to determine. Part of the power of these complications and intersections is their ability to veil divisions and differences, much as the discursive negotiations we explored in chapter five's discussion of Christina and Matt's relationships did.

Katie and Alex, whose relationship we have also explored in the two previous chapters, faced some other negotiations of difference. As we saw in chapter five, Alex's family was very wealthy. This had various impacts on their relationship ranging from the practical to the emotional. It was notable that Katie spent a good

deal of time during her individual interview talking about Alex's family and their difference in wealth, while Alex raised it once only obliquely, saying that his house was bigger than hers so they spent more time at his. This difference is, of course, also methodological: Alex was taking part in a paired interview with his friend Steve, so might have felt less comfortable discussing difference. It was also clear that Katie was happier to talk about and analyse her emotions than Alex was. Nevertheless, it echoes Christina's discomfort with talk of class from the point of view of the more "advantaged" partner. The practical advantages offered by Alex's living situation were significant. Unlike Christina and Matt, who spent most of their time outside, Alex and Katie could use his house freely. I asked about whether it was difficult for them to find privacy (after she had been talking about other people's sexual activity going on outside, at parties), and she said:

> Katie: Alex's house is really big [NH: OK] which is very odd of me to say that, but it is a very big house, his mum is usually out [NH: OK] and his little sister is usually on the opposite wing of the house [NH: right] um, so it's not really <Katie laughs>, it's not really an issue.

This ties in with her description of her first sexual experience with Alex, discussed in chapter six, in which she talked about the comfort brought on by being slightly drunk. It seems an obvious point, but is perhaps a point so obvious that it is often overlooked. The space, time and setting available to Alex meant that he and his girlfriend could explore sexuality in relative comfort, in contrast to many other teenage couples. This is not merely a question of physical comfort (although that is hardly trivial), but also of the effects of lessening external constraints on the ease of the people involved, and removing the potential for shame and exposure that we saw for instance, in negative perceptions of those people engaged in sexual activity outside. Class influences on teen sexuality are not only cultural, but also, relatedly, material.

But the class fractions in the relationship also brought some discomfort on Katie's part. This was tied up with feelings of unease around his family and around Natalie, Alex's best friend, which I discussed in chapter five. When I asked whether she got on with Alex's mum, Katie was equivocal:

Katie: Ye-e-es – I can't say I relate with her exactly [NH: yeah], she's quite superficial, not sure that's the right word, she's going to Bangalore in the summer to get her teeth done [NH: Wow, OK] she's had various cosmetic surgery [NH: mm] she's very appearance, appearance. […] Annie's husband – Annie's Alex's mum – is really rich, and she, Annie doesn't work, Annie doesn't earn any money, she's a really, like, housewife

Katie feels alienated from Alex's family despite the fact that she spends a lot of time in their house. Her feelings of alienation and of being an outsider are exacerbated by the role of Alex's extended family and friends. Katie explained that Natalie and her family were good friends with many of Alex's family, and that this meant that Natalie would hear rumours about Katie through school and pass them on to Alex's family. The two families spent a lot of time together, for instance at Christmas.

Katie: [Natalie] obviously thinks she owns him [yeah] she sort of needs to understand that I'm his girlfriend [NH: now] yeah, but she also has like a whole tie with family, she gets on so well with Annie, which I find really, I'm jealous of because I don't get on with Annie that well, [Natalie's mum is] Annie's best friend [NH: yeah] so they're really over a lot, Christmas day they spend together, Boxing Day, um, and, that makes me feel like I'm a bit outsider [NH: sure] and I don't really like to be there when [Natalie]'s there because she gets – upset about, I dunno, things.

It was clear that this was not just an issue of Katie resenting Natalie spending time with her boyfriend as an individual, but of the ways in which Natalie seemed at home in a world that she herself did not feel part of.

Katie: [Natalie] has so much money, she lives in this perfect house, she's, you know, they're very similar [NH: yeah] like [Alex] has a big house, rich family [NH: yeah], she has a big house, rich family.

In contrast, she said, Alex felt comfortable with her family and enjoyed spending time in her house, which had a more relaxed atmosphere. Alex backed this up in his interview:

Alex: I like going to her house cos it's quite open, there's nowhere to just be us two, it's always like with the whole family.

This brings us back to the practicalities: although Alex was happy and at ease in Katie's house in a way she was not at his, the lack of privacy meant that they were more likely to spend time at his.

Katie's experiences of tension and lack of belonging in Alex's social context add further nuances to the aspects of her identity construction we have seen so far. Her previous sexual exploits and experimentation with working class sexuality have been left behind for a considered and stable relationship with a wealthy boy. Yet this aspect of stability is threatened by the constant presence of Natalie, who seems to represent a free and hedonistic sexuality but nevertheless be secure in her status of substitute family member and confident upper-class femininity. Again, she seems to represent a feminine sexuality which is above reproach. Katie sees her unhappiness with Natalie as impossible to change, because Natalie is so embedded in the family circles that any confrontation would result in Katie being attacked by the family and coming off worse. Indeed, she considers that Natalie would use Katie's sexuality against her, spreading rumours that she would not be able to refute.

In Katie's relationship with Alex, then, we see the ways that class creeps into the negotiations and interactions between the two partners, and the intimate ways that the relationship is tied in with other relations. Negotiating a heterosexual relationship means negotiating another's family, another's friends, and dealing with the clashes and problems that arise when two overlapping webs of social relations entangle through a sexual partnership. While the details of specific relationships will of course vary, understanding teen intimate relationships and sexuality will always require understanding of how those relationships intersect with their social contexts. Most of my analysis has focussed on teens' peer relations, but in this section I have illustrated how relationships and sexuality are also shaped in relation to families. We return a last time to Katie and Alex in the final section of this chapter, which looks at the ways that heterosexual and educational identities interact.

Between the present and the future: sexuality and becoming an academic success

The teenage years, perhaps even more than childhood as a whole, are a time of waiting, striving and becoming. Throughout this thesis, the focus has been on teenagers as people in the present: foregrounding the existing uncertainties and contradictions in their experiences and identities. But, of course, the future is also a vital presence in young people's lived experiences: as Nick Lee (2001) argues, children and young people are both "beings and becomings". It is not that adult discourses foregrounding the importance of education and the future are forced on young people against their will: rather, as we saw also in relation to ideas about maturity and the "right time" to have sex, they participate actively in these discourses and reconstruct them. And the centrality of the future, and young people's orientations to their own imagined futures, are of course deeply entangled with class. As we saw in the introduction to the school setting in chapter three, the academic environment in which my participants were engaged was one where the norm was for students to continue in post-compulsory education after GCSEs, and for a large majority to then progress to higher education. The culture, then, was to aspire to academic success, comprising progression to higher education and from there a professional career; as I have discussed already in this chapter, disengagement with education was looked upon negatively by most of my participants.

Being and becoming an academically successful subject, however, is not by any means simple to reconcile with being a heterosexually successful subject, as I argued in chapter two. For young working-class women, more than working-class men, investment in sexual relationships (as well as in particular forms of heterofemininity), often contributes towards disengagement from schooling (Archer et al. 2007b, a). For young middle-class women, investment in heterosexualities and relationships can be viewed as a source of danger, competing with education and thus to be avoided (Thomson 2000; Henderson et al. 2007; Elley 2011). We have already seen in this chapter (and previous ones) some of the ways that sexuality was associated with danger and risk, and the classed subtext of this; in particular, James' use of the threat of teenage pregnancy (which is often viewed as incompatible with

education, although in fact the situation is often more complicated than this). These tensions between investment in heterosexuality and investment in a middle-class educational identity are strong and significant. Yet, of course, as we have seen throughout this thesis, young middle-class women and men *do* invest in heterosexual identities, albeit to differing degrees and in different forms. I want to explore in this section just how my participants balanced and navigated these contradictions in their everyday experiences of heterosexual identities and relationships.

Time (and) management

Participants frequently spoke of the time constraints affecting engagement in relationships. Those involved in relationships found that other activities often competed with the time they could spend on their relationship, while those not in relationships often spoke of other activities as reasons for relationships being difficult. These competing activities were often the pressure of schoolwork, but also a range of other extra-curricular activities. As has been explored in chapter two, the trajectory of the ideal middle-class neoliberal subject is not merely one of academic success, but one of acquiring a wide range of skills in pursuit of becoming a "well-rounded" person (and writing a successful personal statement for university entrance). Throughout my interviews young people referenced a range of organised extra-curricular activities that took up their leisure time. These were often deployed in conversation as seeming defence against a perception of not participating in social activities, as well as not participating in relationships. Lucy said when, after talking about other people going to parties, I asked what she spent time on at evenings and weekends:

> Lucy: Um, well I work on Saturdays, so I'm busy until like, until about 2 o'clock, so I don't really do much Friday nights, 'cause I've got to be up at like 7 o'clock on Saturdays, so I don't want to be tired for work 'cause I'm working with kids, so I can't really be like, sleeping on the floor.

Lucy makes a point of how busy and industrious she is as well as highlighting the social value of her work and her own commitment to it ("I don't want to be tired"), setting this up against the effects of other activities and emphasizing her own choice in the matter. Adrienne continued this conversation by talking about the swimming

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training she was very involved in, through which she had met a previous boyfriend. James also spoke of organized activity, in his case drama, as a further social sphere through which he had met his previous girlfriends, also bringing him into contact with friends from independent schools. This had meant a move into a different social circle and a feeling of alienation similar to that Katie experienced with Alex's family.

> James: Yeah, I mean Jessie was, she was kinda, I mean definitely different, I mean I actually went to see a play that she was in at her school, and part of me felt really kind of awkward [NH: yeah] and of course it's like a private school and you know like, O...K, like the only person who doesn't have a proper kind of connection with this place.

It was interesting to note the different ways in which investment in extra-curricular activity (and schoolwork) were rhetorically deployed in conversation. While several participants (like Lucy) *did* speak of investment in educational (in the broader sense) activities as militating against investment in heterosexuality and relationships – consonant with Elley's findings –others spoke of similar activities in passing or in detail without suggestion that they were a significant barrier to relationships. It often appeared that young people drew on these activities as an acceptable rationale to excuse lack of relationship experience, thereby maintaining a heterosexual identity. This is similar to a tactic discussed by Debbie Epstein, Sarah O'Flynn and David Telford: one lesbian participant spoke of investing in a hard-working, "academic girl" identity in order to escape the "heterosexual pressure of the school" (she described conversations on Monday mornings after parties: "and so-and-so got off with so-and-so and so-and-so got off with so-and-so and Rachel got A in her maths tests.") (2003). Lucy and Adrienne had the following discussion when I asked if they were interested in anybody particular.

> Adrienne: Mmm, no. I mean, there are some guys that are quite friendly who you kind of think, would a relationship work with them? But, don't know. Just never really get round to it.
> Lucy: And like, it gets more busy in year 10.
> Adrienne: Yeah, with exams. And we've got quite a few people and they're like, oh yeah, I need to revise, but then their boyfriends will on and say oh, why didn't you want to come and hang around with me? So, it gets quite

hectic.
NH: So you wouldn't want it to get in the way?
[...]
Lucy: Yeah. 'Cause we were coming back from this school trip the other week, and my friend got texted by her boyfriend, just like do you want to come round, you can have dinner at my house? And she was like, really need to revise, like, really. And then she called him, and he was like trying to be like, oh, please come over, 'cause it'll only take an hour or so and she was like, no I really need to revise.

They foreground the educational importance of year 10 and represent their friends' relationships as problematic and hectic, as obstacles to being able to revise and succeed. Those who were in relationships did speak about the ways that schoolwork could interfere with relationships, although this was not always spontaneous:

NH: OK, like whenever [Will, her ex-boyfriend in the school year above] was doing his GCSEs or whatever [Laura: mm hmm], did it get in the way?
Laura: yeah cos he did a lot of revising and there was study leave when he wasn't at school [NH: yeah, yeah] but there were bits when he'd come in for his exams and I'd see him then, but I didn't see him as much then [NH: yeah] it was really kind of well at weekends then I'll see him

In Laura's representation of her previous relationship, then, she speaks of the relationship as being secondary to Will's concentration on school during his exams and revision, but does not paint this as a problem. She represents herself as being rational and respectful both of the importance of his education, and of his personal space and time.

Laura: Whenever we'd see each other it was kind of like, this is nice.

This fit in with her performance throughout the interview as self-aware, calm, rational and laid-back; notably, speaking of her acceptance of Will's decision to break up.

Another manifestation of the privileging of schoolwork over heterosexuality came in the negotiation between partners over the place of homework and revision in their relationship. This was particularly notable for the ways in which it subtly echoed gendered norms and could form another site for the emotion work discussed in

chapters five and six. Several girls talked about making sure their boyfriends did their schoolwork:

> Ellie: Well I text him constantly…we send thousands of texts in a day, like unreal and then like I see him at weekends a lot. He comes to mine a lot or I go to Amy's a lot and see him then and sometimes after school he'll come over, depending if he's got coursework or not but I prefer him to do his coursework first before he… I'm like "No, you have to put your coursework first".

Ellie takes responsibility for her boyfriend's completion of coursework, managing his time through denying him access to her. This is consonant with a prevalent educational discourse whereby girls are seen as more "responsible" when it comes to school, and, particularly, that they are more capable of sustaining concentration and effort over a long period, thus are better at coursework than boys (see Francis and Skelton 2005 for a critique of this discourse). Katie similarly took on a role of manager for Alex's schoolwork; indeed, sometimes she was more than a manager:

> Katie: It's fine, Lexy, I'll do your homework for you. I did that most of last year as well.
> Alex: I know. So bad…
> Katie: When you were there for your final exam you were like, I didn't write this bit, and I was like, no, I wrote that for you, turned back, there's pages of my writing.
> Alex: And I can't read or write either.

We see in this exchange the light-hearted, jokey way that Katie and Alex often interacted with each other, and the way in which they perform particular roles in reaction to the other. Katie is the "responsible" partner, in slightly weary resignation agreeing to make up for Alex's weaknesses. Alex is hyperbolically helpless, using humour to exaggerate the dynamic between them, thereby implying that he *could* and *would* do his homework, if only (perhaps) Katie was less willing. This has an interesting parallel in Carol Taylor's work on feminist post-feminist discourses in relation to A-level students' subjectivities. She discusses the "flirting exchanges" between her participants Abby and Simon in an interview, in which Abby focusses on Simon's shortcomings (maintaining that she always does the work when they are working on projects together) and Simon colludes in this performance. Taylor draws

attention to the complex post-feminist subject positions Abby occupies, "reinstat[ing] gender hierarchies" through the heterosexual performance of flirting, but employing "discursive agency" in her assertion of "post-feminist individualised educational labour" (Taylor 2011, p. 833). Taylor interprets Simon's position as "amiable and subordinated sidekick" as undercutting hegemonic, dominant masculinity. In the similar dynamic between Alex and Katie, however, I read Alex's positioning as consistent with discourses of masculinity which downplay effort in school, valorising "effortless achievement" (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Epstein 1998b; Jackson and Dempster 2009), as well as furthering the narrative of Katie as the responsible partner.

In both the above examples from my own research, then, we see how the subtle gendered patterns of relationships that were explored in chapter five come to bear on intimate partners' educational identities. Young women take responsibility not only for their own necessary educational achievement, but also for that of their boyfriends. And this fits snugly within a discourse of masculine irresponsibility (which can be related also to the ways in which young women are seen as responsible for male sexuality). So it is that middle-class young women work tirelessly to ensure that young men achieve the necessary educational results to progress into the future as middle-class young adults: a future that will, almost by definition, destroy these relationships.

Independent women: relationships without a future

Young people, then, placed a high priority on the importance of education in training them for the future, and this often sat uneasily with expression of heterosexual identities. But this was the case not only in terms of clashing time commitment, or investment in sexuality. It was also the case in imagining the future. The balancing acts this requires are explored in depth in Henderson et al's longitudinal research of youth biographies (Henderson et al. 2007). In this work, different young people prioritised different aspects of their life – educational and professional development, or intimate relationships – at different times, and this was shaped by their class backgrounds. Some young people spoke of being aware of sacrificing aspects of

their education for romantic relationships. And conversely, others sacrificed relationships for their education. For those of my participants who were involved in serious relationships, the future trajectory – in which they would, as a matter of course, go on to higher education – posed a problem. As in Laura Hamilton and Elizabeth Armstrong's research with university students, for middle-class young women, serious relationships were seen as incompatible with college life (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009), as well as with pursuing independent goals in different locations. In my research, Katie and Alex, unusually close for a teenage couple, were nevertheless absolutely committed to an endpoint and to a future without each other.

> Alex: You don't wanna get married, you said you wanna break up before we go to uni.
> Katie: Yeah well who knows. Maybe we'll get together after uni [...]
> Alex: it's really funny actually cos she's like "you said what we wanted to do" –
> Katie: I said it's really sad because we know that there's no future for us really –
> Alex: And so I was like, it was really funny because we were at hers um just talking and I was like, actually do you want to break up before the start of next year because I've now got to throw, like, all the parties? *<Alex laughs>* And then she was like –
> Katie: I practically started crying!
> Alex: And then like the next day you started having a go and me and I was like, I was joking, I just didn't wanna tell you it was a joke you took it like really, like, *well*
> Katie: Well, I thought you were serious. But well I think we'll have to break up before university, I mean my cousin did this he went to university and he was in a relationship and it was just hell for him, he never got any work done cos every weekend he went up on the train to Leeds to see his girlfriend and it just kind of ruins your life, I think

In this matter-of-fact exchange, Katie and Alex negotiate an inevitable future separation. While they are not eager to split up – Katie considers that they might get together again after university – Katie sees separation as the only option consistent with a successful university experience, and Alex does not disagree. Again, Katie is the pragmatic, serious partner while Alex defends himself with humour. Recalling a conversation about this issue, in which Katie brought up her emotions, Alex changed the subject from a discussion of the future to a mockery of the present, thus deflecting the anxiety. This dynamic is replayed within the exchange above, with

Katie returning to the issue of the future despite Alex's attempt to turn it into a humorous tale of misunderstandings.

Despite Katie's definitive commitment to future separation, and her frank discussion of the issues both in the interview and with Alex, it is clear that the idea causes her distress. As we have seen through this and the previous chapters, Katie invests a great deal of time and emotion in her relationship with Alex, and finds it a greater source of happiness than any of her friendships. Yet in order to follow the educational trajectory expected for her as an autonomous, post-feminist middle-class young woman, she must relinquish this. It is a heavy emotional burden to carry. Like the educationally successful working-class women in Helen Lucey, June Melody and Valerie Walkerdine's work, Katie can be seen as an "uneasy hybrid" (Lucey et al. 2003). While the specific forms of anxiety, loss and identification are very different, Katie's simultaneous impossible investment in the present and the future also involves "the construction and the constant policing of internal and external 'boundaries'" (p. 293) and the pain of incompatible aspects of subjectivity.

It is interesting that Katie and Alex's commitment to their ending would almost certainly be viewed positively by parents, teachers and other interested educational parties, as a sign of a healthy relationship. While educational rhetoric centres on preparing young people for adult life, and personal, social and health education is aimed at giving young people the skills to navigate emotions and situations through youth into adulthood, the perceived qualities of a "good" teen relationship are to a large extent the opposite of the qualities of a "good" adult relationship. Research on teenage relationships often emphasises the need to take teenage relationships seriously, as opposed to dismissing them as trivial, as adults often do (for instance, as "puppy love") (Allen 2005d; Powell 2010). I hope that my thesis has indicated that I do not dismiss teenage relationships as trivial. My analysis, though, illustrates the significant role that these supposedly adult discourses play in young people's

lives. For middle-class, educationally successful young people in particular, they *cannot* take their relationships too seriously. They are negotiating their heterosexual identities in balance with the rest of their life, constructing their academic selves as their primary identities; teen heterosexuality, and teen relationships, must be left behind in order to become middle-class young adults.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter I have situated young people's sexual subjectivities in relation to circulating discourses of age and class. This chapter has addressed aspects of my first two research questions: how young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities are negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships; and how middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities are shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts.

 I have illustrated the ways in which class is inextricable from the construction of heterosexual identities, and the ways in which it is deeply entwined with performances of age. Young people's navigation of their social heterosexual cultures involved delicate negotiations of class tensions and fractions, with a simultaneous awareness that class was to be spoken of only in euphemism. Doing the middle-class teen meant investing heavily in a discourse of individual responsibility, and dissociating from individuals and cultures that were seen as not living up to this responsibility. But young women also took responsibility upon themselves to ease young men's educational progression, managing their identities as they managed their own. The centrality of heterosexual identities in young people's social worlds interacted uneasily with the creation of the middle-class subject, with sexuality as an ever-lurking threat to becoming an educational and therefore classed success.

Chapter eight
Successful sexualities? Conclusions and futures

and were they still like this, Claire wondered, these new girls, this new generation?
Did they still feel a thing and do another? Did they still only want to be wanted?
Were they still objects of desire instead of – as Howard might put it – desiring
subjects?
Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (2005)

I began this thesis wondering about how gender is being constructed in young
relationships as we move further into the twenty-first century, as teenagers negotiate
their emotions, subjectivities, sexualities and social worlds. I wanted to explore how
young people were reconstituting, or rewriting, gendered power relations through
their micro-practices of heterosexuality, in the context of changing social attitudes
towards gender and sexuality. In particular, I was interested in focussing the
spotlight on the often-unexamined, often-unproblematic middle class, finding out
how class and sexuality intertwine and clash as young people make their
subjectivities.

In the first two chapters I introduced some of the contradictions and societal
anxieties around teen sexuality: at once forbidden and fascinating, inevitable and
deviant. Throughout this thesis, I have foregrounded the contradictions and anxieties
experienced by young people themselves, in situating their sexuality within their
broader subjectivities as middle-class achievers, navigating intimate relationships
and their hesitant starts and sometimes stormy aftermaths, negotiating sexuality
under the unrelenting social surveillance of school. Many of my participants seemed
to embody the subject position of the middle-class achiever: academically
successful, articulate, confident in their ability to overcome social and educational
problems. Young people owned their "sensible", "mature", "right" and "good"
choices, just as they owned their "immature" or "bad" choices, hyper-reflexively
constructing narratives of their own development. Yet this confidence and articulacy

often occluded the many ways in which young people's identities and actions were shaped and constrained by enduring heteronormative and classed discourses.

The journey of research: methods, strengths and limitations

I opened with an insight into some of the stories behind the words on these pages. This thesis is a narrative that continues and forms part of my own development as a researcher. My sister broke up with her boyfriend: it was hard, and very brave. She has just finished an MA in Gender Studies and brings me hope for resistance and progress. Christina's story is not so easy to trace: through the preceding chapters I have explored and interpreted her life in detail, but as I realised in my interview, my understanding can only ever be partial. The process of researching young sexualities is fraught. It is full of frustrations and unanswered questions. For a study such as mine, in which the relationships built between me and my participants are short-lived and time-limited, the frustrations seem particularly acute: reading through a transcript, muttering "But why didn't I ask that?!"; seeing the stark pen mark on a completed questionnaire indicating an experience of sexual violence, hurting, never knowing the story behind the mark on the page, wondering if she's OK, wondering why I can't do anything about it.

This has been a small-scale exploration of the lives, interactions and subjectivities of young middle-class men and women in a particular school, in a particular location and at a particular time. My qualitative research – like most qualitative research – is not intended to be generalisable in the representative sense; and nor is my quantitative research representative, beyond the population of this particular school. What it does offer, though, is a detailed, in-depth investigation of the ways class, gender, heterosexuality and age work together in young people's negotiation of subjectivities, relationships, sex and gendered violence.

Methodologically, a study like this foregrounds particular constructions of the self and privileges those aspects of the self that can be spoken (although, as discussed in chapter three, I have tried also to pay attention to silences, hesitations and

contradictions). I have analysed young people's discursive constructions of their bodies, and have spoken about what these might mean for their embodied experience, trying to "excavate" (McClelland 2008) their feelings and desires. Yet this is inherently impossible: while language shapes the body, there are many aspects of embodied feeling that cannot, or will not, be put into words. Ethically and practically, it is difficult to research the detail of sexual and intimate relationships.

Throughout the thesis, I have been aware of the ways that method constructs the findings. More than this, I have been aware of how young people use method to perform and construct their identities. Performing a narrative of the self through an interview, young people construct particular defences and versions of their own and others' actions and emotions. This is by no means to say that young people were dishonest or disingenuous in interviews (though of course they may have been), but that the interview space acts as a site for performance of gender and class identities, another place to construct the self. The discourses of compulsory individuality that I have explored, and come back to below, shaped the ways young people talked. Young women disavowed and downplayed the gendered inequalities within relationships that we saw in chapter five and six. Particularly affluent young people disavowed and downplayed their own wealth and status. As we saw in chapter six, several young women strenuously denied having experienced sexual "pressure" or coercion, despite speaking in the abstract of previous boyfriends who were "obsessed" with or "pushing for" sex.

In the rest of this chapter, I weave these methodological strands through my discussion, and explore further avenues for research. Most fundamentally, both quantitative and qualitative strands of this project could be productively expanded through research in other schools, investigating particularities and difference within different locations of the middle class. Working this project again, through different schools, I would try to secure more repeated interviews, and shorten the questionnaire: as discussed in chapter three, the level of non-completion meant that responses to many questions were of limited use in analysis (of course, a shorter survey would not solve this issue entirely, but might be productive).

For the remainder of this concluding chapter I bring together the major themes that I have presented through the thesis. I asked:

1. How are young middle-class women and men's classed and gendered subjectivities negotiated and regulated within their heterosexual relationships?

2. How are middle-class teenage heterosexual subjectivities shaped by wider peer cultures and social contexts?

3. How are power dynamics experienced, enacted and gendered in middle-class teenage sexual and intimate relationships?

4. In what ways, and to what extent, do young middle-class people experience violent, controlling and coercive behaviour in their relationships, and how do they understand these experiences? How are these located in relation to normative discourses of heterosexual relationship cultures more widely?

The first research question was answered throughout all four empirical chapters, with chapter four focussing on negotiation and regulation in "public" contexts, chapter five focussing on negotiation and regulation within the more "private" contexts of intimate partner relationships, chapter six looking at problematic and violent forms of regulation and relating, and chapter seven situating heterosexuality within the broader context of young middle-class subjectivities. The second question was explored primarily in chapter four, in relation to peer cultures, and in chapter seven, in relation to wider social contexts, although remained an enduring presence in the intervening chapters. The third question was investigated in chapter five, in relation to power dynamics within relationships generally, and chapter six, looking at those same dynamics in relation to control and violence. The fourth question was answered specifically in chapter six. Investigating all four questions, I highlighted a number of prominent themes, which I go on now to summarise.

Claustrophobia, constraints and intersubjectivity

Sexuality is often thought of as a private, personal, intimate matter: experienced between two people. But this conception ignores the multiple ways in which sex and sexuality are inextricably embedded in other social relations (Richardson 1996; Jackson and Scott 2010). For teenagers, this is particularly, specifically acute. We saw in chapter two that teenage sexuality is considered a public concern: it is open for media discussion, policy guidance, and educational and parental intervention. Although this thesis has not looked in detail at how teenagers negotiate these influences, they form a potent context whereby teenage sexuality is *not* inherently seen as belonging to the individual. And as we have seen throughout, particularly in chapter seven, my participants were acutely aware of prevailing adult-centric discourses around their own sexualities, and positioned themselves in relation to these discourses. The public nature of teen sexuality, and the ways in which it is entwined with other social relations, were also highly relevant to the ways young people negotiated the social contexts of peer cultures within and beyond school. As introduced in chapter two, the institution of the school is very difficult to escape, and for the middle-class, academically-oriented teenagers in this study, escape from the educational institution was rarely an option. As such, social and sexual relations that go on with other students from the school (or in contexts where other students are around) are not confined merely to the two (or more) people involved, but are discussed, watched, considered, reported, retold and/or judged by many others.

A significant body of research has explored the social cultures and pressures of teen heterosexuality, and highlighted the gendered and heteronormative constraints (Chambers et al. 2004a; Currie et al. 2007; Pascoe 2007; Ringrose et al. 2012) as well as the prevalence of sexual and gendered harassment (Duncan 1999; Renold and Ringrose 2008; Keddie 2009), and heterosexualised aggression between girls (Duncan 2004; Ringrose 2008a). However, less research has looked in detail at the way that these contexts influence young people's negotiations of their relationships, and the deeply social negotiation of (hetero)sexual subjectivities in sexual and intimate encounters.

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Chapter four looked explicitly at the social contexts of teen sexuality, and the relentless gaze of social surveillance under which young people do their intimate and sexual relationships and interactions. It looked at the ways in which "popularity" was related to heterosexual desirability, and explored the complex ways in which young people situated themselves in relation to the "popular group". Heterosexual desirability, particularly for girls, was not necessarily a quality attached only to the individual, but was shaped by the group: having friends who were "good-looking" was a marker of one's own attractiveness. Thus, young women's negotiation of their own status as objects of desire was not merely something they worked on individually, but something that was worked on socially. It is interesting to consider this in relation to the times in interviews when girls commented on other girls' appearances, and, in particular, the strength of emotion with which they expressed positive appraisals of other girls. Compare, here, Katie's description of her friend Faith, after I asked her why boys liked Faith, with her answer to my question about whether her boyfriend Alex was good-looking:

> Katie: She's *really* good-looking [NH: OK] she's really, she's got like the most fabulous body ever
>
> Katie: No, I don't know, I can't really, I know him so well I can't really see it, I can't really look at him and go, he's very attractive [NH: yeah] and he's got a nice smile and he's sweet and he, I dunno, it's really hard. A lot of people say they think he's really fit, um, but I just can't really see it any more cos I know him so well [NH: yeah] it's like looking at your brother and trying to think, "are they good-looking?"

It seems to be much easier for Katie to inhabit the desiring subject position of a boy looking at her female friend, than that of her own body, looking at her boyfriend. This tied in with the uncertainty of girls' relationships to their bodies discussed below, and foregrounded in feminist research on young women's sexualities (Fine 1988; Jackson and Cram 2003; Tolman 2005; Fine and McClelland 2006; McClelland and Fine 2008). Sexuality was particularly visible within the space of the house party, a setting that has not often been explored in relation to young people's sexual subjectification. This space became a spectacle for those attending, but also for those not attending, through recirculated narratives of excess (in terms of

wealth, damage, alcoholic consumption and sex), and through technological communication. Navigation of this space was complicated in terms of walking the line of appropriate femininity. Girls at once wanted to embody a "fun", sexy, desirable heterofemininity, and remain "respectable", not being seen as excessively sexual, or out of control. Unlike in some other research discussing women's intoxication and sexuality (Tolman 2005; Griffin et al. 2009; Cullen 2010a), alcohol consumption did not seem to provide a diminishing of responsibility or culpability for sexual activity. Within these localised middle-class sexual cultures, certain boundaries remained strict despite intoxication.

The claustrophobic, intense nature of social surveillance was heightened by the negotiation of communication technologies. Recent research has emphasised the ubiquity of these technologies (mobile phones and social networking) in young people's lives (boyd 2008; Ito et al. 2008; Ringrose et al. 2012). Social network sites provided positive possibilities for some young people (like Laura and Christina) to create and deepen relationships with lesser anxiety, and through different ways of relating, than in physical space (as we saw in chapters four and five). However, they also made visible aspects of social and sexual identity, in ways that were not always welcome. Facebook in particular served as a means for the party to spill over beyond its temporal and spatial borders, for others to look and comment upon, especially, the female body. Social network sites were also used in directing gendered harassment at girls, as we saw in chapter five. Laura's experience with this illustrated the entanglement of intimate relationships with other social relationships, when she was targeted for harassment by her ex-boyfriend's friends after he broke up with her.

For some young people, intimate relationships provided a welcome space of escape, a place to breathe away from the constant gaze of their peers. Yet we saw in chapter five how surveillance and social contexts influenced the negotiation even of long-term intimate relationships between partners. This is an intersection that has not been significantly covered by much other research, although it is mentioned in some studies (Powell 2010). Gossip circulated around sexual behaviour within

relationships as well as outside them, with demands for information from friends often becoming more intense as the early stages of a relationship progressed. This had impacts on the ways in which young people negotiated their friendships, and sharing information about their relationships, with several speaking about keeping the existence (or certain aspects) of their relationships secret from others. Christina, for instance, kept the fact that she and her boyfriend had sex from all of her friends within William Bishop School, to avoid becoming caught in the circulation of gossip and rumour, but shared this with her friends from other schools. This level of secrecy, within the surrounding atmosphere of social surveillance, speaks to considerable effort and tension.

These dynamics are also vital in thinking about, and intervening in, violence and other problems within relationships. As we saw in chapter seven, the majority of those who reported experiencing violence from partners had experienced these from boyfriends/girlfriends (as opposed to casual partners). In these situations, the anxiety and tension around sharing relationship information with friends outside the relationship might exacerbate the problems. Isolation from friends and networks is a common feature of violent relationships (among both adults and teenagers) (Barter 2009, 2010). The already-existing pressures and desires to keep relationships private, then, might be a factor in creating conditions of possibility for relationships becoming violent (and for these relationships lasting).

Exploring teenagers' sexual subjectivities, then, is not just a matter of exploring young people as individuals and their relations with sexual/intimate partners. Nor is exploring the social relations shaping sexuality only important in "public" spaces such as school, or parties. Rather, it is necessary to consider the intersubjective shaping of sexuality even in the seemingly private, personal space of the partner relationship. Young people come to know their sexual selves through others, and teenage sexuality cannot be understood merely by looking at individuals in isolation. But this runs counter to the overarching discourses around young people's sexuality (and identities more widely), which stress the primacy of individual choice and "agency", which I explore further below.

Taking this focus on the interaction of sexuality with social cultures further, I would want to explore possibilities for ethnographic research that investigated the everyday practices of middle –class teen heterosexuality, observing the shifts and changes of friendship groups and relationships. Particularly useful would be a project that further integrated research outside the school with research inside the school, investigating social cultures in wider settings. Ethnographically, this would require a particular set of skills on the part of the researcher, as well as particular relationships between researcher and participants: it is a project I would struggle with. Other avenues for exploring the world outside school might involve participant-directed visual methods, whether through photo or video.

This thesis has explored the subjectivities and relationships of young people who, as far as I knew, identified as heterosexual. In further work, I would also like to explore how young people who identify as non-heterosexual negotiate their sexualities, in context of their classed subjectivities. Chapter four explored some of the difficulties and oversights in relation to other sexualities within this project. While such an investigation might be better carried out as a separate project to fully centre the experiences of queer/LGBT young people, nevertheless it would be illuminating to consider the negotiations and interactions with heterosexualised social networks from the point of view of those explicitly excluded from (some) heterosexual norms. I would like to investigate the specific ways in which young queer people engaged with and/or disengaged from classed heteronormative discourses of gender.

Heterogender, ambivalence and sexual desire/consent

In chapter two I introduced heteronormative discourses around sexuality, whereby sexual pursuit and action is most often seen as masculine, with women/girls cast in the roles of gatekeepers, denying or acquiescing to men's/boys' advances. This was a theme that was prominent throughout my findings, and resonates with well-worn gendered narratives and double standards (Lees and Cowie 1981; Holland et al. 2004[1998]). These narratives linger and endure, as found in recent research (e.g.

Allen 2003, 2005d, 2008a, b; Powell 2008a, 2010; 2011), despite modern discourses of female sexual "empowerment" (Attwood 2006, 2009; Gill 2009b; Gill and Scharff 2011). These discourses shaped the ways young men and women negotiated their relationships, and also shaped the way sexual consent and desire was conceptualised.

Chapter five illustrated the way this influenced the beginnings of relationships: a number of young women talked of being uncertain about their current or previous partners until they were pursued. This resonates with the lack of space for embodied female heterosexual desire I discussed in chapters five and six. It also speaks to the ways in which these discourses and norms are not imposed, but invested in, and become "natural". Many girls did not feel that they were entering relationships or being pursued against their will (although this did happen). Indeed, some girls expressed pleasure and satisfaction in this pattern, recasting it in terms of boosting self-confidence (as discussed in chapter five in relation to Ellie and Amy).

The complexities of these negotiations, in which traditional gendered narratives seem to be reinscribed, but are discursively recast as opportunity – and allow girls to find strength in their dismissal of male pursuit – should not be reduced to a narrative either of straightforward gendered oppression, nor of liberatory agentic reclaiming of femininity. Rather, they are an example of the multiple and contradictory experiences of girls' everyday lives (Gonick et al. 2009; Ringrose and Renold 2011). Importantly, too, young men did not necessarily see their own actions, of pursuit and of compulsory masculinity, as positive or desirable. James, for instance, talked about asking a girl out after kissing her, even though he was reluctant to enter a relationship, in order to do "the right thing". We can see, then, that many traditional discourses of masculinity and femininity are recirculated through young people's performances. Young people do not take up these discourses automatically in ignorance, or without consideration; but nor does their pleasure (or discomfort) in heteronormative subject positions, or understanding of what they are doing, render the recirculation of gendered discourses irrelevant.

Heteronormative discourses also shaped ideas around sexual consent and desire, as seen most clearly in chapters five and six. Some young women spoke of the first time they had had sex with their boyfriends; while they were keen to stress that they had been willing and not coerced, they also emphasised ambiguity and uncertainty around the acts, not seeming *too* eager. They spoke of their boyfriends as taking the initiative in sexual interaction. This is not to suggest that they *were* unwilling: rather, to stress the discursive constraints around women talking about their sexuality. As Sara McClelland emphasises, it is very difficult methodologically to "excavate" women's desire (2008). But it is also important to explore this ambivalence and appreciate it as a phenomenon in itself. The physiological aspects of desire (leaving aside momentarily the myriad other (psycho)social reasons for sexual interaction) may clash with anxieties, fears, and constraints around feminine sexuality. This is not, of course, a simple Cartesian case of body-versus-mind. Subjectivity is experienced through and in the body, and what the body is "saying" is not always clear, particularly for young women, whose sexuality so rarely belongs to them. But as Muelenhard and Peterson (2005) point out, ambivalence is difficult to square with the neoliberal, individualistic discourse of "knowing what you want and how to get it". In terms of sex, particularly, we are reluctant to allow ambivalence: it is safer to divide starkly into "wanted" and "unwanted" (and, to some extent, I have done this myself, through quantitatively investigating experiences as sexually coercive and violent). But, of course, much of sexual interaction is not so clear-cut, and there is a place for uncertainty, hesitation, tentativeness in relationships. It is perhaps in recognising, naming and speaking ambivalence that we can help (young) people to navigate their own.

This ambivalence was also influenced by the "rules" around the "right place" for sex, that were discussed in chapter four, which worked to police sexuality. A boyfriend-girlfriend relationship was considered the only acceptable site for sex, and this "rule" was (allegedly) strictly adhered to: the few reports of sex outside a relationship were seen as extremely transgressive. Conversely, a relationship carried with it the expectation that sex would, at some point, happen; young women were keen to emphasise that this would be (or had been) only when they were "ready". The

concept of "readiness" as used within sex education has been critiqued (Ashcraft 2006), and I discuss in chapter four how this idea is not clear-cut or stable for young people. Being "ready" was conceived of as a state within the individual, but in fact was heavily influenced by their interaction with their partner and their partner's actions not only before but after having sex.

Normative discourses of masculinity and femininity circulated in particularly problematic and damaging ways in relation to sexual assault, agency and blame. This was discussed in chapter seven, where I explored the low relevance of consent in conceptions of sexual interaction. Again, this ties back in with the intersubjective construction of sexuality: as a sexual incident between two people became known to more than those two people, it made little difference whether this incident had been consensual or otherwise. The social embeddedness of sexual violence is an aspect that has not been sufficiently explored in previous research, which tends to concentrate on the individuals involved (even when situating violence within its broader sociocultural context), but as I have explored, for teenagers in school, this can be extremely distressing.

Even in cases which were presented unambiguously as assault, as non-consensual, young people spoke about the victim in terms of her unruly sexuality. The recirculation of these narratives of assault, blame and shame continued to shine a spotlight on the victim. Discourses of heteromasculinity which were prominent throughout survey responses and interviews saw the male sex drive as natural and inevitable, supporting findings from much research on heterosexuality (e.g. (Holland et al. 2004[1998]; Powell 2008a). This was complemented by another, more insidious discourse of heterofemininity, whereby girls' vulnerability and passivity (especially in relation to alcohol consumption) was viewed as a deliberate performance, designed to manipulate boys into taking sexual initiative.

> Alex: [some girls] like to act [as if they are drunk] cos they think that gets them somewhere
> NH: Why do they think it gets them somewhere?
> Alex: cos then some guys might take advantage, think they're easy, it's not like they're complaining about it, they want it to happen.

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This paradoxically imparts agency and choice-making power to young women even through their lack of agency and choice-making. It is a reframing of what looks like coercive, unequal heterosexual interaction following time-worn gendered patterns, to demonstrate equality, female direction, mutual choice and consent. For me, this is doubly depressing: first, that the only way for women to make a sexual choice might only be through manipulation into being chosen; second, that the "choice" to be vulnerable and open to being "taken advantage of" must surely look the same as being vulnerable without a choice (a possibility, as I discuss shortly, that was barely thinkable as a subject position).

These conceptions of victimhood, agency and blame shaped the conditions around experiences of sexual coercion and violence, but they also shaped the aftermath and responses to it. As we saw in chapter seven, responses to victims or potential victims of assault often involved distaste, blame and sexual judgement. We saw in chapters four and seven, too, how an incident of sexual assault became a source of tension and conflict in Katie's relationship with Alex. A boy forcibly kissed Katie while she was sleeping at a party; she found this distressing, but perhaps more problematic was the fact that her boyfriend Alex continued to bring up the incident in arguments as her fault (even after accepting, to some extent, that she was not to blame). So it was that Katie became responsible for managing her boyfriend's emotional response to her own assault: a pattern that brings us on to our next section.

Emotion work, conflict and gendered power in relationships

In chapter five, I looked at the everyday negotiations within intimate relationships, focussing particularly on the way that certain young people navigated close, long-term relationships. This focus broadens that of much recent research on teenage relationships (Allen 2005d; Powell 2010; Maxwell and Aggleton 2012b), which has been interested primarily in sexual negotiation within relationships. Through my analysis I have also explored the gendering of everyday intimacy and interaction. We saw that partner relationships often brought young people significant pleasure and enjoyment, and for both boys and girls could be a welcome form of intimacy away

from the social surveillance discussed above, that often made friendships complicated. Yet at the same time, relationships formed a particular site for playing out particular gendered narratives that were often problematic for girls.

Chapter six presented survey responses around experiences of controlling, coercive and abusive behaviour within relationships. In terms of incidence, these indicated that boys and girls had similar experiences. However, looking closer into the impacts, girls reported being more negatively affected by their experiences. This was supported by the interview data, through which I rarely heard of a boy changing his behaviour in order to fit in with a girl's wishes, but frequently heard of girls changing their behaviour in order to fit in with boys' wishes, as explored both in the case studies in chapter five and the discussion of emotional violence and gendered power in chapter six. Girls often took it upon themselves to "manage" their relationships, taking responsibility for the smooth running of the partnership and for their partner's emotions as well as their own. This resonates with literature on the association of emotional labour with femininity and (adult) women's practices (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; 1998). It also relates to gendered violence, or more accurately, to intimate partner violence: as Donovan and Hester show, survivors of violent same-sex relationships conceived of themselves as the stronger, more emotionally able partner, and felt responsible for their partner's emotional wellbeing. This was also notable in Donna Chung's study of young women's past relationships, in the context of situating gendered violence within sociocultural norms, in which young women saw their greater emotional "skill" as an asset (Chung 2005, 2007). My work builds on this by investigating details of the ways middle-class young women employ emotion work in their day-to-day heterosexual relationships. While I do not suggest that the relationships I explored in chapter five were violent, in concert with other work they help to illustrate how conditions of possibility can be created for cycles of violence.

These patterns were visible in the negotiation of jealousy and control. We saw in chapters five and six that both boys and girls frequently felt distress, anxiety and/or anger over their partners' interactions with the other gender, whether this was online

flirtation (as in the case of Matt, Christina's boyfriend), close friendship (as in the case of Alex, Katie's boyfriend), and/or general interaction in school or at parties (as in the case of Alex's anxieties about Katie, and Steve's about his girlfriend Jo). Again, although these feelings were discussed and argued over within relationships, there were many more instances of girls' subsequent actions being curtailed and restricted – by themselves as well as their partners. In contrast, girls spoke of dissatisfaction but resignation over their partners continuing in patterns they were unhappy with. These unequal gendered patterns of power and control resonate with those suggested by Melanie McCarry's investigation of teen attitudes towards partner violence (2009; 2010) and evidenced in NSPCC research into experiences of teen partner violence (Barter et al. 2009).

This doing of "emotion work" also extended to taking responsibility for their partners' academic achievement and performance, as I discussed in chapter seven. Young women spoke of completing homework for their boyfriends, and of restricting boyfriends' access to their own company until their coursework was completed. This occurs in the context of prevailing educational discourses around "failing boys", which suggest that boys are not succeeding at school in part because of the "feminisation" of the curriculum, and focusses attention on how to improve boys' academic performance (critiqued by Francis and Skelton 2005; Department for Children 2007). While these specific flows of gendered power were most clearly observable within the maintenance of intimate partner relationships, similar dynamics could also work on shaping young people's wider heterosexual interactions: for instance, as seen in chapters five and six, Link agreed to go out with a boy against her own will for fear that she exacerbate his depression.

It is particularly important to explore the ways that middle-class teenagers are renegotiating these dynamics of gendered power in relation to the intertwining discourses of maturity, which I explored in chapter seven. In popular and policy discourse and, importantly, in educational contexts, there is a common conception that girls are more "mature" than boys (a conception referenced by several of my participants). Girls, then, take on responsibility for boys; it comes to seem inevitable

and natural that they do the emotional work for two, carrying boys on their shoulders. This works together with other gendered (and classed) discourses, like that of the masculine sex drive discussed above and the hegemony of individual agency, such that girls are loaded with the burdens of making good choices and wise decisions: not only for themselves, but for the boys around them too.

These flows of gendered power are particularly vital to pursue further, because they are remarkably pervasive yet very subtle. They stretch into the future and into women's lives more broadly, not only in the realm of gendered violence but in the realm of work, home life and childcare. Further research with teenagers might focus on couples, looking in more detail at the everyday interactions between them, and exploring the differences – or similarities – between middle-class and working-class couples. This could involve interviewing couples together as well as individually, and integrate varying methods for researching intimacy such as diaries (written, audio or video), going further to investigate and analyse the patterns of everyday experience (Gabb 2009).

"Agency", compulsory individuality, and the veiling of inequalities

We have touched on the theme of individualisation throughout the previous sections. It exerts its power in a context where equality – on the basis of race, gender or class – is, largely, considered to be achieved; where individuals are exhorted to make their own way in life on individual merit. As we have seen throughout this thesis, however, gendered and classed inequalities and differences are still pervasive within young relationship cultures. So the power of neoliberal discourses of agency, choice and individual responsibility, as set out in chapter two, becomes particularly pernicious in obscuring and veiling these inequalities.

Several researchers have explored subjective negotiations of discourses of neoliberal individualisation, particularly in relation to educational achievement and aspiration (Bradford and Hey 2007; Baker 2010b; Taylor 2011), but also in relation to other

aspects of life, such as work and family life (Baker 2008) and consumption of alcohol (Griffin et al. 2009). Most of this research focusses on women and femininity, and, as I set out in chapter two, neoliberalism has been closely linked to a post-feminist sensibility. My research builds on work theorising feminine heterosexuality as represented and constructed in the context of neoliberalism (Gill and Scharff 2011), looking in more detail at how compulsory individuality shapes young people's practices and accounts of their own sexual subjectivities and relationships.

The power of neoliberal discourses of compulsory individuality did not lie only in their veiling of inequalities. They came with a sometimes-vicious flipside. While the lack of empathy for others has been connected with neoliberalism in some previous research (Baker 2008), research has more often concentrated on individuals' negotiation of neoliberal discourses of choice and agency in relation to their own biographies and subjectivities (Akom 2007; Evans et al. 2010; Malson et al. 2011; Stuart and Donaghue 2012). I have discussed this harsher side of individualism in relation both to sexual violence and vulnerability, and lack of educational success, and set out how these individualised discourses of blame are frequently caught up with class-based othering.

I recalled above how heteronormative discourses shaped ideas around sexual consent and interaction. The discourse of individual responsibilisation meant that vulnerability, as well as being "inviting", was entirely the responsibility of the individual concerned. As we saw in chapter six, young people reserved a particular level of vitriol for those who were seen to be unable or unwilling to care for themselves. Those who were made vulnerable or victimised might be blamed for these incidents, and have the stain of irresponsibility attached to them permanently, circulating through the peer cultures we have explored. But this was particularly complex to navigate given the need to appear in control of a pleasure-seeking, desirably confident identity, as explored in chapter four. In order to demonstrate mastery of self-responsibility, risk and danger, young women needed to skirt close to the edge of control.

This responsible, confident self was caught up in the construction of classed identities as mature and self-responsible, as I explored in chapter seven. Lack of control over sexuality and the body, and sexual choices and interactions seen as unwise, were associated with the danger and risk of the working class. The depth of feeling around these discourses of class and individuality speaks to the fear and anxiety that the burden of self-responsibility engenders: if you fall, you fall alone. Further research might pursue the ways that these discourses of individuality are negotiated in relation to sexual harassment, othering and violence, asking how these function in different classed locations.

The contradictions of being a (hetero)sexual middle-class teen

We have seen through chapters two and seven that the sexual teen is marked as being out-of-time, embodying "inappropriate" characteristics for his/her (mostly her) age group. And we have also seen how discourses of risky, problematic youth are linked to class, with the quintessential teenager in the popular imaginary being working-class and overly sexual, and the quintessential working-class cultural imaginary being the feckless youth. Through the teenage years, young middle-class people are in a precarious place, needing to hold on to their class position as they move through into adulthood, avoiding the pitfalls of educational failure and the paths of "disengaged" teenagers. That educational failure is closely linked with sexual "risk", as discussed in chapter seven.

So the desires to be heterosexually desirable and successful, which interweave so closely with social relations, as shown in chapter four, sit uneasily with desires to be educationally successful. The pull of the future is constantly present. A significant body of research, set out in chapters two and seven, has indicated the difficulty of reconciling sexualities (particularly female sexualities) with educationally successful subjectivities, both in relation to working-class girls (Archer et al. 2007b, a) and middle-class girls (Charles 2010a; 2010b; Elley 2011). My research builds on this work, taking, in a sense, a reversed perspective: that is, looking at how educational, future-oriented middle-class subjectivities can disrupt and complicate successful

heterosexual subjectivities. I have looked in particular at the emotional tensions and struggles of negotiating a serious relationship as a middle-class teen.

In order to be successfully middle-classed subjects, young people must invest in non-investment in heterosexuality, even as they work hard on their sexual selves and their relationships with their partner. Relationships are inevitably started with an endpoint in mind. It is not only that young people envisage separation in the future, but also that over-investment in heterosexuality signals a privileging of an aspect of identity that is seen as belonging to another age and class, that needs to be kept at bay. Central throughout this thesis has been the idea that gender and sexuality cannot be separated out from other aspects of identity, but that gender, class, age, sexuality and other differences come together to make the subject.

This is a question that could be taken further through longitudinal research, following young people both in and outside relationships, to understand the extent to which their paths are influenced by their heterosexual investments (and vice versa). Such research would aim to explore their confrontation of the as-yet-only-imagined futures, and to see how these interact with their negotiation of their sexualities and "critical moments" in their biographies (Henderson et al. 2007). Exploring the intersections of young people's class and sexuality more broadly, it would be useful to consider different ways of negotiating middle-class sexualities in different contexts. I explored in chapter seven how young people negotiate class fractions within the relatively homogenous area and school studied within my research. Investigating and comparing the ways that (middle-)class, and sexuality, is constructed and negotiated by teenagers in other contexts – for instance, independent schools and schools where the majority of the intake are of working class backgrounds – would allow greater insights into the practices of making class with and against others.

Some implications

This thesis has not engaged significantly with teenagers' relationships with the adults in their lives. While the school has been constantly present as a social institution and I have emphasised the intersections of educational and sexual subjectivities, my focus has been on peer cultures and relations. Nevertheless, my findings and discussions do speak to policy and practice implications in the areas of sex and relationships education (SRE) and prevention of gendered violence.

As I noted in chapter three, William Bishop School was fairly progressive in its attitude to SRE, offering lessons on "healthy relationships" in addition to the narrower prevention-focussed sex education that has been criticised by academics (e.g. Epstein and Johnson 1998; Epstein et al. 2003; Forrest et al. 2004; Fine and McClelland 2006; Powell 2010; Allen 2011) and, to a lesser degree, by the previous Labour government in reviewing SRE provision (Department for Children 2008a, b, 2010). Some participants mentioned the school's approach to SRE as having positive effects, in the sense that it delayed sexual activity. This thesis, then, is an illustration of the issues and difficulties that remain when SRE in its current form is provided well.

One particularly important theme running through my analysis has been the entanglement of teen sexuality with social networks. This is an issue that has significant impact on considering arenas for young people's learning about sexuality. Within the school, it is extremely difficult for young people to speak about sex and relationships, given the social surveillance. While friends can provide a source of support and guidance (Powell 2008b), many of my participants were very reluctant to share personal information with their friends within the school, fearing that they would share the information with others. Given this, it may be problematic to focus on school as the setting for SRE which allows young people to think and talk about anxieties and troubles, or about pleasure and desire. Of course, this is in addition to the multiple problems with talking about sexuality in a desexualised institution that were evident in chapter two, and the confused and confusing policy discourses around SRE, which paradoxically "adopt[s] an anti-libidinous stance in policing the

libidinal desires of young people" (Renold and Epstein 2010). Thus young people might be served better – particularly in the short term – through expansion of sex and relationships support outside the school environment.

The intertwined issues of pleasure and consent remain too often silenced, with young people often finding it difficult to articulate (sometimes, to themselves) their own desires and wishes, and with consent often being a secondary issue in young people's interpretations of sexual interaction. My findings in this thesis underscore previous feminist arguments that sex and relationships education, including work towards the prevention of gendered violence, ought to foreground exploration of pleasure in pursuit of meaningful consent. Moira Carmody argues for a discourse of "ethical erotics" in shaping sexual violence prevention, in contrast to prevalent current discourses of sexuality which focus on women managing the risk of men's behaviour (Carmody 2005, 2009). Throughout this thesis, I have illustrated the persistence of these gendered discourses and the problematic ways they intersect with classed distinction. Importantly, sex and relationships education has a role in shifting the locus of responsibility from women. Current popular and policy discourses around "sexualisation" refocus the spotlight on young women's bodies as vulnerable and provocative (Duits and van Zoonen 2006; Ringrose and Renold 2011; Smith and Attwood 2011; Barker and Duschinsky 2012; Egan and Hawkes 2012). As I have argued, the discourse of male sex drive as irresistible has a significant impact on young people's negotiations of sexual interaction. Yet it was also clear that young men (like young women) were frequently reflexive and nuanced in their thoughts about sex and relationships. SRE, then, does not have to be seen as a space for repressing teenagers' "natural" desires, for a futile fight against inevitable hormones and instincts. Rather, it ought to open up spaces for young people to engage with and explore their existing complicated, problematic, exciting, progressive ideas about pleasure, desire, relationships and sexuality.

Young people doing heterosexuality, gendered power, and class

As I come to the final words of this thesis, I want to open it up again, briefly, to the broader picture: to think again about the lingering, persistent inequalities of class and gender that make me (us) angry, make me depressed, and make me write.

Through this thesis, I have tried to highlight the nuance, contradiction and complexity of teenage sexuality, which is so often lost in popular discourse. I have shown how, for middle-class teenagers, heterosexual subjectivities and intimate relationships are always negotiated in relation to others, but not in a simplistic, causal fashion. I have situated teenage heterosexualised violence in its sociocultural context, and illustrated how it is shaped not only by gendered and heteronormative discourses, but also by discourses of class and individuality. Through exploring micro-practices of heterosexuality, I have explored the pleasures and pains of intimate relationships.

This thesis has spoken more of constraints and of restrictions than it has of escapes and freedoms. Nevertheless, it is important to remember the privileges that really are enjoyed by many of my participants. Their material and cultural advantages mean that, in truth, their sexuality as teenagers is not very likely to dramatically redirect the path of their lives. But this does not mean it is not worth investigating. Rather, the persistent, lingering traces of gendered power and sexual regulation among the new middle classes are signs that we cannot yet rest easy in the pursuit of equality. They are, too, illustrations of how young middle class people remake and reproduce their classed privilege, in part through gendered and heterosexualised practices, and, with these, in part through denigration and othering of working-class people. This thesis has given some insights into how gendered inequalities are rewritten and recirculated through class inequalities, and vice versa. The experiences of the young people in this study shed a little light on the work that remains to be done.

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Appendix One: Questionnaire

Please see following pages

Love hurts?

Young people and relationships

Please turn over for a survey about
you and your relationships...

YOU AND YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

1. Are you ☐ male ☐ female

2. What age are you? _____

3. What is your ethnicity?

☐ White ☐ Black/ Black British ☐ Asian/Asian British
☐ Chinese ☐ Mixed race ☐ other

4. What is your religion?

☐ No religion ☐ Muslim ☐ Hindu ☐ Sikh
☐ Jewish ☐ Christian ☐ other

5. What is your nationality?

☐ British ☐ Other (specify) _____

6. Who do you live with?

☐ Mother and father ☐ One parent ☐ Mother and mother's partner
☐ Father and father's partner ☐ Other (specify) - _____

7. Are you currently in a relationship?

☐ yes ☐ no

8. a) Have you ever been in a relationship? ☐ yes ☐ no

b) If yes, how old were you when you started your first relationship? _____

c) How long did your longest relationship last?

☐ Less than a month ☐ 1-2 months ☐ 2-6 months ☐ 6 months-1 year ☐ More than 1 year

9. In general, what age have most of your partners been (people you've been out with, or had romantic/sexual experiences with)?

☐ About the same age as you ☐ A little younger than you ☐ Much younger than you
☐ A little older than you ☐ Much older than you

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10. In general, have most of your partners been at the same school as you?

❑ yes ❑ No, at different school/s ❑ No, not at school
❑ Not sure

11. Have your partners been

❑ male ❑ female ❑ both

12. How important do you think these qualities are in a boyfriend/girlfriend? (tick one option for each quality)

	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
They share your interests				
You're sexually attracted to them				
They're popular with others				
They're interested in you				
Sense of humour				
Kindness				
How your friends feel about them				

13. How important do you think these things are in a relationship?
(tick one option for each)

	Not at all important	Not very important	Quite important	Very important
Doing things you enjoy together				
Being in love				
Sharing problems or feelings				
Sex or physical affection				
Spending a lot of time together				
Being able to rely on the other person for support				
Trusting the other person				

14. a) Have you have ever had a sexual experience with someone (beyond kissing)?

❑ yes ❑ no

b) If yes, at what age did this first happen? _____

15. a) Have you ever had sex? ❑ yes ❑ no

b) If yes, at what age did this first happen? _____

The following parts of the survey ask questions about your partners. This can mean any kind of romantic or sexual partner – not just your boyfriend or girlfriend, but more casual partners or one-off partners as well.

In the first section we'll be asking about things your partners might have done to you. After that there'll be a section on things you might have done to your partners.

These things might have happened while you were together with a partner or afterwards (e.g. after you broke up).

THINGS YOUR PARTNER/S HAVE DONE TO YOU

Section 1 This is about ways people can be emotionally hurtful to each other					
Have ANY of your partner/s ever	Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
1 made fun of you in front of other people					
2 shouted at you / screamed in your face / called you hurtful names					
3 said negative things about your appearance / body /sexual experience/ friends / family					
4 threatened to hurt you physically unless you did what they wanted					
5 threatened to break up with you unless you did what they wanted					
6 threatened to hurt themselves unless you did what they wanted					
7 told you who you could see and where you could go					
8 constantly checked up on what you were doing e.g. by phone or texts					
9 got their friends to check up on what you were doing					
10 threatened to reveal personal information unless you did what they wanted					
11 shared private information or photos of you with other people (e.g. on the internet/by mobile phone)/spread rumours about you					

YOUR FRIENDS

12. Do you know if your friends' partners have done these things to them?

- ❑ Yes, it's happened to most of my friends (girls/boys/both)
- ❑ No, it hasn't happened to any of my friends

- ❑ Yes, it's happened to more than one of my friends
- ❑ I don't know if my friends have experienced any of these things

- ❑ Yes, it's happened to one of my friends

13. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your friends' experiences?

IF ANY OF THESE THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS…

IF NOT, SKIP TO SECTION 2 (PAGE 7)

14. How did this make you feel? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ scared/frightened
- ❑ upset/unhappy
- ❑ humiliated
- ❑ Other (please specify)

- ❑ angry
- ❑ annoyed
- ❑ thought it was funny

- ❑ loved
- ❑ protected
- ❑ no effect

_____

15. Why do you think they did this? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ To hurt you
- ❑ To impress others
- ❑ To humiliate you
- ❑ Other (please specify)

- ❑ Because of your behaviour
- ❑ To get what they wanted
- ❑ Messing around

- ❑ Jealousy
- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Drinking/on drugs

16. With how many people have these things happened?

- ❑ one
- ❑ 2-3
- ❑ 4-5
- ❑ More than 5

17. Did this happen with (tick all that apply)

- ❑ Current boyfriend/girlfriend
- ❑ One-off partner

- ❑ Previous girlfriend/boyfriend

- ❑ Casual partner

18. In general, if these things happened in relationships, did things stop, stay the same or get worse as the relationship went on?

❑ Stopped   ❑ Stayed the same   ❑ Got worse   ❑ Wasn't in a relationship

19. Have you ever ended a relationship because of any of these things?

❑ yes   ❑ No

20. Did you tell anyone about what had happened? (tick all that apply)

❑ Friends around your age   ❑ Older brother/sister   ❑ Younger friends or family

❑ Parent/carer   ❑ Teacher   ❑ Other adult (specify)_____

❑ Anyone else (specify) _____   ❑ No

21. If you told someone, what happened next?

❑ Made things better   ❑ No difference – these things kept on happening   ❑ Made things worse

22. Why do you think this was?

23. Is there anything else you'd like to say about this section?

Section 2:
This is about physically hurtful behaviour

Have ANY of your partner/s ever done any of these things	Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
24 Thrown something at you					
25 Pushed, grabbed or shoved you					
26 Slapped you					
27 Hit you with something that might cause harm					
28 Kicked or punched you					
29 Beaten you up					
30 Choked you					
31 Burnt you on purpose					
32 Used a weapon on you					

YOUR FRIENDS

33. Do you know if your friends' partners have done any of these things to them?

❑ Yes, it's happened to most of my friends (girls/boys/both)

❑ Yes, it's happened to more than one of my friends

❑ Yes, it's happened to one of my friends

❑ No, none of my friends have had this happen to them

❑ I don't know

34. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your friends' experiences?

IF ANY OF THESE THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS...

IF NOT, SKIP TO SECTION 3 (PAGE 10)

35. Have you ever been injured as a result of any of these things being done to you?

❏   yes   ❏   no

36. If yes, what kind of injuries did you have?

37. How did it make you feel when force was used against you? (tick all that apply)

❏ scared/frightened	❏ angry	❏ loved
❏ upset/unhappy	❏ annoyed	❏ protected
❏ humiliated	❏ thought it was funny	❏ no effect
❏ Other (please specify)		

_____

38. Why do you think they did this? (tick all that apply)

❏ To hurt you	❏ Because of your behaviour	❏ Jealousy
❏ To impress others	❏ To get what they wanted	❏ Anger
❏ To humiliate you	❏ Messing around	❏ They were drinking/on drugs
❏ Other (please specify)		

_____

39. With how many people have these things happened?

❏ one   ❏ 2-3   ❏ 4-5   ❏ More than 5

40. Did this happen with (tick all that apply)

❏ Current boyfriend/girlfriend	❏ Previous girlfriend/boyfriend	❏ Casual partner
❏ One-off partner		

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41. In general, if these things happened in relationships, did things stop, stay the same or get worse as the relationship went on?

❑ Stopped ❑ Stayed the same ❑ Got worse ❑ Wasn't in a relationship

42. Have you ever ended a relationship because of any of these things?

❑ yes ❑ no

43. Did you tell anyone about what had happened? (tick all that apply)

❑ Friends around your age ❑ Older brother/sister ❑ Younger friends or family

❑ Parent/carer ❑ Teacher ❑ Other adult (specify)_____

❑ Anyone else (specify) _____ ❑ No

44. If you told someone, what happened next?

❑ Made things better ❑ No difference – these things kept on happening ❑ Made things worse

45. Why do you think this was?

46. Is there anything else you want to say about this section?

Has ANYBODY ever		Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
47	**pressured** you **into kissing, touching or something else sexual** with them…					
48	…by threatening to break up with you if you didn't do what they wanted you to					
49	…by asking you repeatedly until you agreed to do it (although you didn't want to)					
50	…by saying you would do it if you loved them					
51	**pressured** you into **having sexual intercourse…**					
52	…by threatening to break up with you if you didn't do something sexual they wanted you to					
53	…by asking you repeatedly until you agreed to it (although you didn't want to)					
54	… by saying you would do it if you loved them					
55	**physically forced** you into **kissing, touching** or **something else sexual**					
56	**physically forced** you into **having sexual intercourse**					
57	had sex (or done other sexual things) with you when you were so drunk you didn't know what you were doing					

YOUR FRIENDS

58. Do you know if your friends' partners have done these things to them?

❑ Yes, it's happened to most of my friends (girls/boys/both)　❑ Yes, it's happened to more than one of my friends　❑ Yes, it's happened to one of my friends　❑ No, it hasn't happened to any of my friends

❑ I don't know

59. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your friends' experiences?

IF ANY OF THESE THINGS HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS...

IF NOT, SKIP TO NEXT SECTION (PAGE 13)

60. How did this make you feel? (tick all that apply)

❑ scared/frightened　❑ angry　❑ loved
❑ upset/unhappy　❑ annoyed　❑ desired/fancied
❑ humiliated　❑ bad about yourself　❑ No effect

61. Why do you think they did this? (tick all that apply)

❑ To hurt you　❑ Because of your behaviour　❑ jealousy

❑ To humiliate you　❑ To get what they wanted　❑ Things went too far

❑ Anger　❑ They were drinking/on drugs　❑ messing around

❑ They couldn't stop themselves　❑ other reason (please specify)

_____

62. With how many people has this happened?

❑ one　❑ 2-3　❑ 4-5　❑ More than 5

63. Did this happen with (tick all that apply)

- ❑ Current boyfriend/girlfriend
- ❑ Previous girlfriend/boyfriend
- ❑ Casual partner
- ❑ One-off partner

64. In general, if these things happened in relationships, did the behaviour stop, stay the same or get worse over time?

- ❑ Stopped
- ❑ Stayed the same
- ❑ Got worse
- ❑ Wasn't in a relationship

65. Have you ever ended a relationship because of any of these things?

- ❑ yes
- ❑ no

66. Did you tell anyone about what had happened? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ Friends around your age
- ❑ Older brother/sister
- ❑ Younger friends or family
- ❑ Parent/carer
- ❑ Teacher
- ❑ Other adult (specify)_____
- ❑ Anyone else (specify) _____
- ❑ No

67. If you told someone, what happened next?

- ❑ Made things better
- ❑ No difference – these things kept on happening
- ❑ Made things worse

68. Why do you think this was?

69. Is there anything else you want to say about this section?

****

Thanks very much for answering these questions. In the next part of the survey we'd like to ask you about ways you may have treated your partners …

THINGS YOU HAVE DONE TO YOUR PARTNER/S

Section one
this is about emotional issues

Have YOU ever done any of the following things to your partner/s	Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
1 made fun of them					
2 shouted / screamed in their face / called them hurtful names					
3 said negative things about their appearance / body / sexual experience/ friends or family					
4 threatened to hurt them physically unless they did what you wanted					
5 threatened to break up with them unless they did what you wanted					
6 threatened to hurt yourself unless they did what you wanted					
7 told them who they could see and where they could go					
8 constantly checked up on what they were doing – e.g. by phone / texts					
9 used private information to make them do something					
10 shared private information or photos with other people (e.g. on internet/by mobile phone) / spread rumours about them					

IF YOU TICKED 'NEVER' TO ALL THESE THINGS PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 14 (NEXT PAGE)

11. Why do you think you did this? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ To hurt them
- ❑ To impress others
- ❑ To humiliate them
- ❑ Other (specify)_____

- ❑ Because of their behaviour
- ❑ To get what they wanted
- ❑ Accident/messing around

- ❑ Jealousy
- ❑ Anger
- ❑ Drinking/on drugs

12. How many people have you done these things with?

- ❑ one
- ❑ 2-3
- ❑ 4-5
- ❑ More than 5

13. How did you feel afterwards? (tick all that apply)

❑ Satisfied   ❑ Upset   ❑ Regretted it
❑ Good about yourself ❑ Bad about yourself   ❑ Angry
❑ Pleased   ❑ Didn't care   ❑ No feeling
❑ Other
(specify)_____

14. Do you have friends who have done these things to their partners?

❑ Yes, most of my friends have   ❑ Yes, more than one of my friends has   ❑ Yes, one of my friends has

❑ No, none of my friends have   ❑ I don't know

15. Is there anything else you want to say about this section?

Section 2 this is about physical force					
Have YOU ever done any of the following things to your partner/s	Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
16 Thrown something at them					
17 Pushed, grabbed or shoved them					
18 Slapped them					
19 Hit them with something that might cause harm					
20 Kicked or punched them					
21 Beaten them up					
22 Choked them					
23 Burnt them on purpose					
24 Used a weapon on them					

IF YOU TICKED 'NEVER' TO ALL THESE THINGS PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 29 (NEXT PAGE)

25. Why do you think you did this? (tick all that apply)

❑   To hurt them   ❑   Because of their behaviour   ❑   Jealousy
❑   To impress others   ❑   To get what you wanted   ❑   Anger
❑   To humiliate them   ❑   Accident/messing around   ❑   You were drinking/on drugs
❑   Other (please specify)

_____

26. Did you mostly do this in self-defence?

❑   yes   ❑   no

27. How many partners have you used physical force with?

❑   one   ❑   2-3   ❑   4-5   ❑   More than 5

28. How did you feel afterwards? (tick all that apply)

❏ Satisfied   ❏ Upset   ❏ Regretted it

❏ Good about yourself   ❏ Bad about yourself   ❏ Angry

❏ Pleased   ❏ Didn't care   ❏ No feeling

❏ Other
(specify)_____

29. Do you have friends who have used physical force against their partners?

❏ Yes, most of my friends have   ❏ Yes, more than one of my friends has   ❏ Yes, one of my friends has

❏ No, none of my friends have   ❏ I don't know

30. Is there anything else you want to say about this section?

| |
| |

Section 3 this is about some of your sexual behaviour					
Have YOU ever done any of the following things to anyone	Never	Once	Few times	Often	Never had partner
31 **pressured** them **into kissing, touching** or **doing something else sexual** with you…					
32 …by threatening to break up with them if they didn't do what you wanted					
33 …by asking them repeatedly until they agreed to do it					
34 … by telling them if they loved you they would do it					
35 **pressured** them into **having sexual intercourse**					
36 …by threatening to break up with them if they didn't do it					
37 …by asking them repeatedly until they agreed to it					
38 … by telling them if they loved you they would do it					
39 **physically forced** them into **kissing, touching** or **something else sexual**					
40 **physically forced** them into having **sexual intercourse**					
41 had sex with them (or done other sexual things) when they were so drunk you couldn't tell if they wanted to					

IF YOU TICKED 'NEVER' TO ALL THESE THINGS PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 45 (NEXT PAGE)

42. Why do you think you did these things? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ to hurt them
- ❑ to impress others
- ❑ couldn't stop yourself
- ❑ anger

- ❑ because of their behaviour
- ❑ to get what you wanted
- ❑ drinking/on drugs
- ❑ other reason (specify)

- ❑ jealousy
- ❑ things went too far
- ❑ messing around

_____

43. How many people have you done these things with?

- ❑ one
- ❑ 2-3
- ❑ 4-5
- ❑ More than 5

44. How did you feel afterwards? (tick all that apply)

- ❑ Satisfied
- ❑ Good about yourself
- ❑ Pleased
- ❑ Other (specify)_____

- ❑ Upset
- ❑ Bad about yourself
- ❑ Didn't care

- ❑ Regretted it
- ❑ Angry
- ❑ No feeling

45. Do you have friends who have done these things to their partners?

- ❑ Yes, most of my friends have
- ❑ Yes, more than one of my friends has
- ❑ Yes, one of my friends has

- ❑ No, none of my friends have
- ❑ I don't know

46. Is there anything else you want to say about this section?

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Final section
this includes some general questions

47. Do you think your school would be able to help with these issues if they were a problem?

❑ yes ❑ no

48. Why do you think this is? (what do they do well, or could do better)

49. If you had problems with the issues asked about in this questionnaire, who might you talk to?

❑ Parents/carers ❑ Older brother/sister ❑ Friends your age

❑ Other adult relative ❑ Teacher ❑ School youth worker
❑ Other adult (specify) ❑ Someone else (specify)

_____ _____

50. Have any adults in your house/family ever used abuse or violence?

❑ Yes, against me ❑ Yes, against other young people/children
❑ Yes, against another adult ❑ No

…and finally:

51. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the issues in this questionnaire?

****

This is the end of the questionnaire – thank you very much for filling it out!

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Appendix two

Making classed sexualities: a soundtrack

The following tracks appear in this thesis.

1. Undertones: Teenage Kicks
2. Blur: Girls and Boys
3. Billie Piper: Because We Want To
4. Lily Allen: The Fear
5. Arcade Fire: My Body Is A Cage
6. The Kinks: Lola
7. Shania Twain: Man! I Feel Like A Woman
8. Avril Lavigne: sk8er boi
9. Pulp: Common People
10. Pulp: Underwear
11. My Chemical Romance: Teenagers
12. Bright Eyes: We Are Nowhere, And It's Now
13. Magnetic Fields: If You Don't Cry

The following bonus tracks almost appeared in this thesis.

14. Róisín Murphy: Checkin' On Me (relationships, paranoia and control)
15. The Magnetic Fields: I Don't Want To Get Over You (teenage heartbreak and ennui)
16. Pulp: I Spy (sex and class antagonism)