Rethinking Truancy:

An exploration of the social worlds of truanting young people

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DECLARATION

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

Truancy is a phenomenon that has captured considerable attention within the UK and in countries throughout the world. Participation in education is regarded as a key mechanism of inclusion, and as such young people who truant from school are claimed to be at a higher risk of social exclusion. Truancy is presented within the current political discourse as a social and educational concern, affecting the truanting young people themselves, the wider community and the economy. Truancy has been politically and socially constructed as an act of 'deviance' participated in by 'pathological' and 'delinquent', 'anti-school' youths, commonly of lower socio-economic status.

This thesis presents a sociological inquiry into the everyday reality of school truancy as enacted by the young people themselves. The study reports on a year long qualitative multi-methods study of year 9 pupils (13-14 year olds), initially drawn from three schools in Cardiff, South Wales. A range of methods were utilised, specifically selected and/or designed to appeal to the young people involved. These include: focus groups, technology-mediated communication, photo elicitation projects and observation. Retrospective, situational and prospective views and experiences relating to truancy are presented. By accessing the social worlds of the young people, data have been generated on what truancy is, who 'truants' are, why pupils truant, how pupils truant, what pupils do when they are truanting and some of the consequences and implications resulting from this truancy.

This thesis suggests that truancy might be a widespread phenomenon. That is that large amounts of young people might engage in truanting behaviours, rather than a 'maladjusted' minority. Truancy is a complex, multifaceted and multi-layered activity that is undertaken by pupils from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities. Truancy is not engaged in, *only*, by males, young people from lower socio-economic groups, academic 'underachievers' or pupils of anti-school orientation. For the majority of pupils, their behaviour when truanting is not particularly extraordinary nor anti-social or delinquent. Their truanting behaviours are often purposely and strategically 'hidden' from the public and institutional gaze, performed in a covert manner. The two most dominant locations where truanting behaviours took place are in the home and within the school itself. A range of sophisticated evasion and deceptive strategies are commonly deployed in order to receive authorisation for absence or to avoid detection completely.

The young people articulate both 'push' and 'pull' factors when discussing their reasons for choosing to truant from school but the 'push' factors far outweigh the 'pull factors', heavily implicating the institution of the school. Truancy is seen as a way for the young people to gain a sense of agency and autonomy in relation to the institution. However, the majority of pupils can be seen to embrace the institution as well as resist it. Truancy, for the majority of young people, does not therefore seem to represent full detachment or full opposition from the school. This thesis highlights how the majority of the young people in this study self-manage their truanting behaviours and educational careers, as well as make efforts to maintain a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others, thus minimizing the risks associated with their truanting behaviours. However, for a minority of pupils identified as 'truants', their truancy is more problematic. A series of factors are presented that might be seen to contribute to the tipping point that leads to this more problematic truancy and it is argued that the punitive processes that schools put in place to manage truancy might be self-defeating, intensifying the practice.

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List of Abbreviations

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CA	California
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfTE	Department for Training and Education
DTLR	Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions
Estyn	Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FSM	Free School Meals
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
IM	Instant Messaging
LEA	Local Education Authority
Ltd.	Limited (company)
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NAO	National Audit Office
NfER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NS-SEC	The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SCRE	Scottish Council for Research in Education
SED	Scottish Education Department
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States (of America)
Vic.	Victoria
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
WG	Welsh Government

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Introduction

Truancy is a phenomenon that has been configured as an increasing 'problem' within the UK and in many countries throughout the world. Truancy is a convoluted, multifaceted, emotive issue that has become especially high profile within the media and on the political agenda in recent years. Truancy is purported to have far-reaching consequences impacting on the 'truants' themselves, their families, their schools, their local community, the economy and wider society (Galloway 1985, Reid 2002). It is often considered central to issues of social justice and exclusion, while also considered symptomatic of social instability and disorder. Truancy has been elevated to the status of moral panic by both politicians and the media, reported to have reached 'crisis' level (SEU 1998). Concern has largely centred upon the 'risk' factors associated with truancy, in particular truancy's presumed link with delinquency, and young people's rejection of education (DfEE 1999a, SEU 1998, DfEE and Home Office 2001 NAfW 1999). South Wales is considered to have some of the highest rates of school absence in Britain, particularly unauthorised absence (Reid 2003, 2010), although estimates regarding the extent and prevalence of truancy vary widely (see Carroll 1977, Audit Commission 1999, NAO 2005, O'Keeffe and Stoll 1995). The reality is that truancy remains a complex and perplexing phenomenon with ambiguity and contestation regarding conceptualisation, causes and impact. This thesis is concerned with exploring truancy, and the social worlds of school 'truants', attributing a level of empirical and theoretical depth which its complexity necessitates.

This introductory chapter starts by examining compulsory schooling at the secondary school level, attendance legislation in England and Wales and problems associated with the definition of truancy. The policy and media response to the issue of truancy is then outlined, which is followed by a brief overview of the existing academic research in the field of truancy. The purpose and focus of the study is then summarised and the chapter ends by presenting the structure of the thesis.

Compulsory Schooling, Legislation and Issues of Definition[1]

Truancy is not a new phenomenon. The emergence of truancy is inextricably tied to the history and politics of compulsory formal schooling. Truancy is seen as a problem because education became enforceable by law. As such, absence from school and specifically the issue of 'truancy,' has been constructed as a 'problem' in the British education system since the 19th century. The second half of the 19th century led to the inception of a national system of education in the UK, through the Elementary Education Act of 1870. However, half-time, part-time and seasonal fluctuations in attendance remained common owing to the needs of the manufacturing industries and local agriculture, while the extent of poverty and girls domestic usefulness also meant that the law was often ignored (Carlen et al. 1992, Humphries 1981). The 1876 Elementary Education Act created school attendance committees which could compel attendance. However, it was not until the Mundella Act of 1980 that a serious attempt was made to universalise compulsion by tightening up attendance laws and extending the provisions of the 1876 act, empowering Local Authorities to frame by-laws to enforce compulsory attendance. The 1891 Education Act then made elementary education free, in response to the evident barrier of poverty. Over 50 years later, the 1944 Education Act secured a universal, full-time system of compulsory education for all, at the secondary level, and stipulated the duties of parents with regards to school attendance. Section 7 of the 1996 Act has replaced the 1944 Education Act in stipulating that:

> The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –
>
> a) to his age ability and aptitude, and
> b) to any special educational needs he may have,
> either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

This section makes education compulsory, although the phrase education 'otherwise' indicates that it does not have to be formal schooling. However, there is no doubt that formal schooling is presented as the norm. A child is considered to be of school age when he or she reaches the age of five and must complete 11 years of mandatory education, ending on the school leaving date of the 11th year determined by the Secretary of State (Section 8, Education Act 1996).

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[1] The policy and legislation within this section applies to both Wales and England.

Within the legislative framework, there still remains little clarity on what exactly truancy is. All absences from school are clearly not truancy. There is in fact no widely accepted definition of truancy, legally, politically or academically. Indeed the precise meaning of 'truancy' when it is discussed by politicians or the media is rarely explored. Officially, absence from school is recorded by school registers, and a distinction is made between two types of absence: authorised and unauthorised (further explored in chapter 2 p. 14). Truancy has traditionally been taken to be synonymous with unauthorised absence (SED 1977, DTLR 1995, SEU 1998, NAfW 1999). It has now been recognised that there may be truants within the authorised absence category and recording discrepancies within and between schools, thus a sense of confusion prevails. However, the registration process remains of central importance in informing current debates on school truancy as the national absenteeism statistics are based on what is reported within these school registers. When school truancy is discussed or reported in the media or by political parties it tends to rely heavily on these data.

Policy and Media Response: Constructing the Dominant 'Official' Discourse on Truancy

Historically the issue of 'truancy' has moved in and out of the spotlight, linked to moral panics surrounding youth delinquency, declining standards of discipline and morality in schools and homes and so on (see Carlen et al. 1992, Whitney 1994). Since the 1990s truancy has been placed firmly on the political and media agenda and has since been configured as an increasing 'problem' in need of control and reduction. The murder of James Bulger by two 10 year olds in 1993 stimulated a considerable moral panic, with the media and politicians using the case as indicative of society's evils and a crisis of childhood. There were widespread pronouncements over the 'uncontrollability of unfettered youth' (Pilkington 1994: 18) and children were seen as a threat, particularly in public space (Valentine 1996). The need for harsher disciplinary measures and regulation were called for. Truancy was strongly implicated and the role of the school was considered central in order to keep children away from the streets (James and Jenks 1996). The fact that the killers of James Bulger were evidently truanting at the time, was widely reported in the media. This led to a series of initiatives aimed at the surveillance and control of truancy e.g. 'Truancy Watch' (James and Jenks 1996).

Following the election of the New Labour Party in 1997 truancy was declared to have reached 'crisis point' (SEU 1998). Since devolution, school attendance has become the responsibility of each of the four UK home nations and their respective administrations. The administrations in Wales and England are primarily focused upon in this thesis. The Government in Whitehall seems to have set the agenda with regards to truancy and represents the strongest voice in the 'official' discourse on truancy. Wales has taken a slower approach to developing its own policy direction but there are some differences between the English and the Welsh approach. For instance, the Welsh Government (previously Welsh Assembly Government) established a Task and Finish Group to tackle truancy (DFTE 2003), commissioned a behaviour and attendance review (DCELLS 2008a) and have linked truancy to Additional Learning Needs (Reid 2010). The Welsh Labour Government also made a stand against the use of fixed penalty notices which have been used in England since 2004, regarding them as at odds with their 'inclusion' policies. However, more recently the Welsh Labour Government has abandoned this stance, introducing fixed penalty notices (WG 2012). So, although devolution has led to some differences in approaches to truancy, the overriding discourse and the nature of the policies are very similar. The concern made by the Whitehall Government regarding the 'crisis' over truancy seemed to be shared by all four administrations. Truancy has been placed more firmly on the political agenda than it ever has been before. The message is clear, truancy is a 'problem' that needs to be tackled. Concern seems to be particularly focused upon the 'risk' factors associated with truancy, especially crime, delinquency and educational failure. The problematic nature of truancy was also expressed by governments across Europe, including France (Esterle-Hedibel 2006, Leroy and Huerre 2006, Lagrange 2000), Spain (Rué 2005, Duarte and Escario 2006) and Germany (Curtis 2001).

Strong claims have been made about the association between truancy and crime and delinquency, particularly in England but also in Wales.

> The wider community suffers because of the high levels of crime into which many truants and excluded pupils get drawn. Time lost from education is a direct cause of crime. (SEU 1998: 1 (English pre-devolution[2]))

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[2] The labelling of this report as English and pre-devolution is used to locate country specific differences between reports and this labelling continues throughout the thesis, where necessary.

[It is] because of the well known links between truancy and street crime and anti-social behaviour that the government sees reducing absence from school as a priority. (Knight 2006 – (English – post-devolution))

Truants and excluded pupils are at greater risk of being drawn into crime and other forms of anti-social behaviour. (NAfW 1999: 26 (Welsh – post-devolution))

Truancy also seems to be entwined with the matter of anti-social behaviour, which has become a prominent feature on the political and media agenda over the past decade. It is the concern over what young people are doing (or might do) when truanting from school and away from the control of the school that seems to be the issue here. This is viewed in a pessimistic light, assuming that as 'truants' they will naturally be involved in something 'deviant' or 'delinquent'. This is despite the contested evidence base for the link between truancy and crime (Whitney 1994, Coldman 1995, Halsey et al. 2003). Truancy in this case, is presented as a risk for the young people themselves and to the wider general public. Griffin (2000) has argued that much of New Labour's policy and rhetoric is relatively silent over gender, with an emphasis on 'youth'. Historically, it has been feared that boys not in school or work will fall into criminal activity, whereas girls have been positioned as more vulnerable to danger rather than being the perpetrators of it. Griffin (2000) suggests that despite the emphasis on 'youth', boys (working class) continue to be disproportionately represented in rhetoric and polices that emphasise punishment, discipline and control, whereby boys are still considered to be potential threats to social order.

Truancy is also commonly presented as a risk to the education of truanting young people, with great emphasis placed upon links between truancy and poor attainment:

The most obvious impact is, of course, on education itself. Truants are more likely than non-truants to leave school with few or no qualifications (SEU: 1998: 7).

Academic attainment is considered a key determinant of occupational status and as such truancy is thought to limit future life chances (SEU 1998, Miliband and Lewis 2004, DfE 2010a (all English – Post-devolution)). Truancy has also been linked to educational disaffection (NAfW 2001, WAG 2003 (Welsh – post-devolution) and poor literacy levels (DCELLS 2008a (Welsh – post-devolution)). The current political and social significance attributed to education is central here. Education has never before received the status which it does today. Under New Labour, education was positioned as their main priority, perceived as playing a

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key role not only in social justice and inclusion but also in relation to international competiveness. Truancy is thought to have a detrimental impact on this. Moreover, at a time when education bench marking, targets and accountability have dominated education policy reforms, attendance has become a central indicator by which schools are judged (ESTYN 2004). Accountability and performance movements led to the requirement that schools make their absence figures publicly available, thus increasing the level of scrutiny over attendance and absence levels.

The response to the 'risks' associated with truancy has been an unrelenting quest to 'tackle' and reduce truancy. There is an evident nexus between 'care' and 'control' in both the English and the Welsh approach to achieving this, although the Whitehall Government has tended to lean ever further on the 'control' side of the nexus, whereas the Welsh Government have tended to emphasise the 'care' side, at least in terms of rhetoric. Target setting at a national, local and school level was a central feature of New Labour's educational strategy and school improvement agenda. One of the first targets they set when coming into power was 'to deliver, by 2002, the target of a reduction of one third in the amount of time lost to truancy' (SEU 1998). The National Assembly for Wales (1999) stated its full commitment to the implementation of this target. In 2001, in the first of two 'learning country' reports, the Welsh Assembly Government made the following target:

> Reduction in absenteeism in secondary schools to below 8 per cent by 2004; below 7 per cent by 2007; and below 5 per cent by 2010. (NAfW 2001: 62)

A second 'learning country' report, 'Vision into Action', was then produced in 2006 and revised this target to the following:

> Attendance in secondary schools to be at least 92% by 2007, and at least 93% by 2010. (WAG 2006: 7)

The initial target was not met, neither were the subsequent targets. However, the persistent focus on official statistics and trying to reduce absence levels has continued unabated. In formulating and setting targets, the Government creates the assumption that there is clarity about what is to be achieved and how it is to be done, although the level of clarity that exists in reality is certainly questionable. Significant investment in monitoring and surveillance initiatives, including, the use of electronic registration systems and the sending of text

messages to absentees' parents have been invested in to assist the drive to reduce absence figures (WAG 2006). In England, persistent truants have been targeted because of their impact on absence rates and priority schools have been focused on in order to combat persistent absence (Brennan 2007).

Also in an attempt to reduce the amount of pupils absent from school, and because of concerns regarding youth crime and delinquency, New Labour adopted an increasingly punitive approach. The use of prosecution in the form of imprisonment or fines (currently on a scale up to £2,500) was increasingly utilised. Between 2000 and 2007, 133 parents of truanting children in England and Wales were jailed (Curtis 2009). The Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) gave Local Authorities in England and Wales the power to enforce monetary penalties on parents considered to be reluctant to improve a child's attendance and Parenting Contracts were introduced. The use of national and local Truancy Sweeps became particularly high profile and was an approach recommended by the Task and Finish Group in Wales (DFTE 2003). Parenting Orders and Education Supervision Orders were also used along with an extensive range of additional local initiatives. In both England and Wales there has also been a range of more supportive initiatives designed to tackle absence e.g. learning mentors, buddy schemes, school councils, children and young people's commissions etc. But the punitive approaches have been used more widely and are considerably more high profile. Thus, it is the punitive overtone that characterises the 'official' approach to tackling truancy.

In persistently presenting the link between truancy and crime/delinquency, the issue has been further sensationalised by an increasingly anti-youth media and the punitive stance taken by the Government is legitimised as a moral imperative. In doing so, the 'official' discourse plays a considerable role in defining and constructing truancy as an act of 'deviance', criminalising certain types of truant children and their parents. It is clear that the prevalent discourse is not uniformly applied and attributed to all parents, but rather as Southwell (2006) suggests, often centres on 'social deprivation' and 'familial breakdown'. This is also made evident by the constant promotion of statistical figures linking truancy to measures of deprivation (e.g. DfEE 1999b, NAO 2005, DCSF 2008, DCELLS 2008a, WAG 2009), and the Welsh Government has consistently linked the challenge of tackling truancy to the challenge of tackling social disadvantage, with levels seen to be disproportionally higher in Wales than in England (WAG 2003, DCELLS 2008a). The need for state intervention to address

the 'inadequacies' of parents has been a reoccurring issue, most recently emphasised through the notion of 'parental responsibility':

> Where parents are simply unwilling to fulfil their responsibilities, it must be right that society demands legal sanctions, and penalty notices for truancy will provide due accountability. (Lewis 2004 (English – post-devolution))

Parents are encouraged to discipline and control their children, directed by the morally obligated State. As a result, concerns over poor parenting, order and control, and crime are evoked in a causal fashion. This is a reoccurring theme apparent since the inception of formal schooling (Carlen et al. 1992). However, middle class parents did receive a minor place in the spotlight following the scrutiny of parentally-condoned absence in relation to term-time holidays.

The recently elected Coalition Government looks set to continue and increase the punitive approach to truancy. The Minister of State for Schools Nick Gibb announced that the Government would be introducing a series of measures to 'get tougher on parents and pupils who do not abide by the rules' (DfE 2010a). The Coalition have also called for increased discipline and control in schools and the pronouncement of a 'pupil premium' to follow children from lower socio-economic groups is currently being promoted as a strategy to address the causes of truancy (DfE 2010b). Therefore, this approach continues to signify the assumption that truancy is an activity concentrated among 'deficient' and 'deviant' pupils from lower socio-economic groups. In Wales, the Education Minister Leighton Andrews has pronounced a 'zero-tolerance' approach to tackling truancy and indicated that discipline and the scrutiny of attendance figures will be focused upon (Smith 2011, WG 2011a).

England has ploughed large amounts of money into attendance initiatives aimed at combating truancy. The National Audit Office reports that in the first two terms of administration the DfEE/S spent £885 million, £560 million was also budgeted for spending up until 2006 (NAO 2005, Williams and Pritchard 2006). Wales has far fewer resources but has made significant investments (WAG 2006, Reid 2010). However, despite the proliferation of initiatives and the punitive enforcement undertaken, there is little evidence to suggest that any significant progress has been made, at least in terms of absence rates (NAO 2005).

Nevertheless, a strong imagery of truancy and those participating in truancy has been constructed. Despite the often inadequate evidence base, the dominant discourse on truancy

remains very much a political one. Tackling truancy is positioned as a 'national interest', invoking the collective in the political discourse (equally applicable to both Wales and England). Formal schooling is presented as an unquestionable societal 'good', one which should be desired by all rational, 'normal' children and parents. An ongoing preoccupation with the perceived threat to social stability posed by unregulated, disorderly young people outside adult control has persisted throughout the 20th century and in to the 21st century in both England and Wales. The roots of which, were firmly established in the 19th century. Truancy has come to be associated with the 'deficiencies' of working class family life. It is regarded as symbolising family failure and inadequate parenting and values. The diagnosis has changed very little for over a century, though new parameters of uncontrollability and demonisation have been associated with children themselves since the latter stages of the 20th century. Although a preoccupation with the pathological and deficient family has a long history with regards to truancy, its contemporary characterisation has assumed a distinctly punitive edge. As attendance at school has become regarded as undeniably positive, absence from school has not. The 'official' and dominant imagery and discourses on truancy has come to rest on a number of key assumptions: that truancy is an irrational behaviour; participated in by deviant and delinquent youths; usually from lower socio-economic groups; who are of anti-school orientation and as such are deficient in some manner. Truancy is thus seen to determine poor life chances, educationally and socially. This thesis questions whether the dominant image of truancy is the reality experienced by the truanting young people themselves.

Existing Research on Truancy

Academically, a picture of confusion and contestation prevails. Truancy has been researched from a number of disciplinary approaches, including sociology (e.g. McNeal 1999, Parampukattil 2006), psychology (e.g. Kearney 2008), social work (e.g. Teasley 2004, Whitney 1994, Collins 1998) education (Southwell 2006, Zhang 2003, Wilson et al. 2008), criminology (e.g. Pratt 1983, McAra 2004), economics (e.g. Dustmann et al. 1997), medicine/psychiatry (e.g. Berg 1982) and history (e.g. Sheldon 2009). The study of truancy initially suffered from a paucity of research and literature, a voluminous international literature base now exists. However, much of the literature consists of one-off reports and publications often of an applied and atheoretical nature (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy 2008). Few academics have

remained committed to the study of truancy, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Reid 1985, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2007 etc.). This has resulted in a relatively dispersed and incongruent evidence base, leading to a fractured image of truancy. The difficulties associated with defining truancy are also evident in the academic literature, with a multitude of different definitions in usage. Most researchers do though seem to be united on the assumption that truancy is a 'problem' in need of control and invariably a bad thing, whilst truanting young people are often marked out as 'different' from their 'non-truant' counterparts.

Purpose and Focus of the Study: Researching the Social Worlds of Truanting Young People

Despite the attention given to truancy in the political and media domain, sociological understanding of truancy still remains underdeveloped. There has been a particular lack of sustained engagement with the very people who are at the centre of the policy and media hype, the truanting young people themselves. A narrow construction of truancy has prevailed, partly owing to problematic research starting points. This thesis seeks to address these issues through an intensive involvement in the everyday lives of truanting young people and by prioritising their perspectives and experiences. An in-depth, qualitative multi-methods approach is employed in order to gain a multi-dimensional appreciation of the phenomenon, thus, seeking a more nuanced understanding of truancy, grounded in the social worlds of truanting young people. The following research questions frame the parameters of this study:

1) What is truancy?
2) Who are the 'truants'?
3) Why do young people choose to truant?
4) How do young people truant?
5) What do young people do when truanting from school?
6) What are the implications of their truancy?

Sixty young people were initially drawn from three state-maintained secondary schools within Cardiff in South Wales, UK. All were in year nine at the time of study (13-14 year olds). The study lasted one year and consisted of almost daily contact with the young people involved. Importantly the study initially started by focusing on *young people*, rather than specifically

attempting to recruit *'truants'*, avoiding adult imposition regarding conceptualisation and operationalisation of truancy and the narrowing of research scope.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised around the research questions of this study. The next chapter provides a context within which the study is situated. The academic literature on truancy is examined, starting with difficulties associated with the conceptualisation of truancy and problematic research starting points. It then moves on to chart three dominant explanatory approaches. The chapter concludes by highlighting the need for an alternative starting point when researching truancy.

Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical and methodological framework of this study. It starts by outlining the potential benefits to be gained from researching the everyday social worlds of truanting young people. It also details the theoretical framework adopted. It then outlines the study's starting point and details issues concerning access and ethical considerations. The chapter then outlines the various stages of the research process and decisions made, including the variety of methods employed and the analytical approach taken.

Chapter 4 sets the scene of the research for the reader by providing contextual information on the schools and the pupils. The chapter also begins the documentation of the empirical findings by presenting data on what truancy is and which young people engage in truanting behaviours.

The chapters that follow continue to present the empirical data from the research and discuss the emergent themes in relation to the sociological literature. Chapter 5 looks at why young people choose to truant, drawing heavily upon the reasoning provided by the young people themselves. Chapter 6 looks at the enactment of truancy by the young people. It considers the different forms which truancy can take and also explores the young people's use of space, place and time when truanting. Chapter 7 makes a distinction between 'contained' truanting behaviours and 'disrupted' 'truants'. It considers issues regarding the self-management of truanting behaviours, educational careers and identity and highlights a series of factors that might contribute to more problematic truancy and the identity of a 'truant'.

The findings from the data are drawn together in the conclusion of the thesis (Chapter 8). The theoretical, methodological and empirical findings highlighted in the previous chapters are reflected upon. Wider sociological and policy implications are then presented and the further recommendations for research complete the thesis.

Chapter 2:

The Complex & Contested Nature of Truancy

Introduction

This chapter will explore and examine the complex and contested nature of truancy. The previous chapter looked at the ways in which truancy has been constructed within the 'official' and dominant discourse, drawing upon policy and media representations of truancy and the 'truant'. This chapter will further explore the construction of truancy, critiquing the academic literature. The study of truancy initially suffered from a paucity of research in relation to other areas of educational study but a voluminous literature base now exists. In the main though, research that focuses exclusively on the issue of truancy has been sporadic, atheoretical and practice-orientated and there is no clear disciplinary base in which the study of truancy is located (Darmody et al. 2008). However, it has been possible to examine the study of truancy from a number of disciplinary backgrounds and discussion has been widened to include studies on disaffection and resistance. This chapter is split into four main sections. The first explores the contested area of the conceptualisation of truancy, highlighting the existing lack of clarity and less than comprehensive understanding of who 'truants' are. The second, examines common starting points made by researchers studying truancy and the tendency to distinguish between 'truants' and 'non-truants'. The third looks at explanatory approaches for truancy and is split into three dominant sets of approaches: pathological approaches, cultural approaches and pupil's perspective approaches. The fourth section poses the question 'where now for the study of truancy?' and explores the avenues where it is felt that further empirical investigation is required. The chapter ends with suggestions for how the study of truancy might proceed.

Fluidity of Concepts

An important preliminary task is to ascertain what exactly is 'truancy'? There is no widely accepted definition of truancy. Rather, conceptualisation is fraught with ambiguity. The term truancy is not used in any educational regulations or legislation (Zhang 2003). 'Officially' truancy was traditionally taken to be synonymous with unauthorised absence (SED 1977, DTLR 1995, SEU 1998, NAfW 1999). This definition has, since 1994 (when the DfE introduced the new categories for England and Wales), been based on the distinction between authorised and unauthorised absence recorded in school registers. Here, an absence may be authorised if a child is unable to attend for: reason of sickness or unavoidable cause; religious

observance; an approved educational activity or because of failed transportation when the school is not in walking distance of the child's home. The school must be informed of this absence in advance or accept the reason given afterwards as satisfactory. In addition to this, schools also have discretionary power to grant absence for other reasons (e.g. 'extenuating circumstances', holidays, and 'special occasions'). All other absence is recorded as unauthorised (The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2010). Cleary the process of authorising absence based on these guidelines leaves an area of considerable discrepancy and indeed ambiguity. For example, what counts as a 'legitimate illness', an 'unavoidable cause' or 'special occasion'? Should certain activities receive preference for authorisation over others? Hoyle (1998) claims that there is an 'implicit moral bias' in the government's categorisation of absence, citing the DfE's stated example of allowing 'authorisation' for those attending a sibling's graduation (DfE 1994: 7). Discretion is far reaching as teachers may allowably authorise part or full absence as they see fit, on a case-by-case basis. Recently, in acknowledging this ambiguity and scope for discrepancy there has been a move away from defining truancy as unauthorised absence (e.g. Ofsted 2001). Though, with lack of clarity on alternative definitions the word 'truancy' appears to have declined in explicit usage within policy documents and publications, supplanted with 'absenteeism' instead (DfE 2010a). However, when the term 'truancy' is used, it is not uncommon to see it equated with unauthorised absence (e.g. Cardiff Council 2005). The media also frequently dissolve the distinction between the two.

There is no better clarity on an academic level. Collins (1998) conflates truancy with 'unauthorised' absence, as officially recognised. Stoll (1990: 22) defines the act in a broad manner, as 'absence from school for no legitimate reason'. Similarly, Carlen et al. (1992) define a truant as 'someone suspected of being illicitly absent from school' (p.63) and Berg describes truancy as 'children who fail to attend school regularly without adequate reason' (1980: 137). However, even with such simple definitions, complexities remain. For example, what constitutes a 'legitimate' reason? What counts as 'regular' and hence 'irregular attendance'?

Conceptualisation of truancy varies within and between disciplines, though there is a significant departure evident within psychological/psychoanalytical/psychiatric definitions of

truancy. By focusing on individual behavioural traits when attempting to conceptualise the issue, a distinction has been made between 'truancy' and 'school phobia/refusal'. Carroll (1977) defines school phobia as 'absence from school as a result of an emotional maladjustment' (1977: 6). It is suggested that school phobia/refusal is a clinical issue, a 'syndrome', and thus should be differentiated from the predominantly social issue of truancy (Seabrook 1974, Waller and Eisenburg 1980). This distinction implies that truants are therefore culpable, whereas school phobics are not (Farrington 1980). Further, some make this distinction based on the presumed deviant conduct of truants. For example Hersov and Berg (1980: 2) contend that 'the clinical view of *truancy* is that of staying off school as one of several kinds of antisocial behaviour such as stealing, lying, destructiveness and excessive fighting'. However, others (e.g. Reynolds and Murgatroyd 1977, Hoyle 1998) refuse to recognise this distinction. Denney (1974) suggests that the categorisation of 'truancy' and 'school phobic' may reflect the ideological bias of educational psychologists. Accordingly, working class children tend to be regarded as 'truants' whereas middle class children are regarded as 'school phobics'. Hoyle (1998) suggests that the 'dividing practices' evident within this categorisation introduce a moral judgement which 'psychologically legitimates' school phobia over truancy. He goes on to suggest that the grounds for this distinction are often not made transparent and the division appears to be underpinned by an 'opaque mythology', with worrying implications for service provision (Hoyle 1998: 9). Tyerman (1968) suggests that it is not possible to separate the two, as both lie on a continuum of reasons for absence. Thus it can be argued that school phobia/refusal represents a form or type of truancy rather than a completely separate and distinct issue. The boundaries between the two, in either case, are most definitely blurred (Galloway 1985). Budgell (1983: 183) suggests any attempt at creating a dichotomy between those who 'won't' attend school and those that 'can't' is questionable when scrutinised, citing the example of a child who may 'want' to attend school but cannot because they have no shoes.

The issue of whether parentally-condoned absence should be considered as a 'legitimate' absence and hence not 'truancy' is also open to dispute in the conceptualisation of truancy. When defining truancy, some authors (e.g. Hersov and Berg 1980) exclude absence that is condoned by parents. For example, Tyerman (1968) applies the term 'truancy' only to children who are 'unlawfully absent on their own initiative without their parents' permission' (1968:7). The more traditional, popular characterisation of the 'truant' undoubtedly does the

same. Historically it was common practice to keep children home to help domestically or with the family business, a factor often supported by local education boards (Collins 1998, Carlen et al. 1992). The 1944 Education Act stipulates that a child's parents are responsible for their attendance at school. Thus, questioning the basis by which a child absent with their parent's knowledge should be defined as truancy (Galloway 1985). However, the 1996 Education Act states that only schools, not parents, may authorise absence. Indeed, as the issue of attendance has come under closer scrutiny in recent years, more authors and political bodies appear to be associating parentally-controlled absence with 'truancy' (e.g. DfES 2006). Robbins and Radcliffe (1980: 68) adopt a less restrictive definition by referring to truancy as 'absence from school without an acceptable reason, whether or not the parents know and approve'.

Carlen et al. (1992) make a useful distinction between 'parentally-condoned absence' and 'parentally-approved absence'. Both would be recognised by the school as 'illicit' absence, but in the former, absence would be considered as beyond a parent's control or responsibility and disapproved of by the parent. Empirically, however, distinguishing between these two categories is difficult as it introduces the notion of 'intent' which is particularly difficult to measure. Under parentally-approved absence, Carlen et al. (1992) suggest that parents may approve of their child's absence for reasons of their participation in paid work or domestic assistance. Many travellers would be included in this category, although legally some of the travellers' absence is legitimised through section 6 of the Education Act 1996 which stipulates that they must only attend for 200 half-sessions to prevent prosecution. There are other children that fall into the same category through employment yet they are considered to be illegally absent. Le Riche (1995) refers to absence taken for employment as subsistence truancy.

Due to the complexities of definition, some authors (e.g. Galloway 1976, Carroll 1977, Reid 1985) have preferred to utilise the terms 'absenteeism' or 'non-attendance' rather than 'truancy'. Carroll (1977) has stated a preference for the usage of 'absenteeism' because it avoids the negative and emotive connotations that have become associated with the word 'truancy'. Others have used such terms when there is an intention to include forms of absence which would be 'officially' regarded as authorised. However, there are also some that use the term interchangeably or take the meaning to be synonymous (e.g. Reid 1985).

Hence, rather than simplifying conceptualisation the additional usage of 'absenteeism' can often lead to further semantic confusion and problems of meaning.

Types and categories of truancy

A number of types and forms of truancy have been presented, relating to frequency, extent, and organisation of the act. O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) have suggested that there are two main types of truancy: blanket truancy and post-registration truancy. Blanket truancy refers to the traditional notion of the truant (e.g. Tyerman 1958), with pupils staying away from school for whole days (with or without parental knowledge). Post-registration truancy consists of registering for a given session then going missing or skipping individual lessons. In this type the truant may remain on the school premises or leave the school grounds. In highlighting the issue of post-registration truancy, this definition addresses some of the inadequacies of data based on school registers. Le Riche (1995) further suggests that alongside the inclusion of post-registration truancy, should be lateness, which, when accumulated, amounts to the same as truancy.

A further distinction made within the conceptualisation of truancy is whether it is perceived as a social or personal act. Much of the dated psychological research characterised the truant as an isolate, a 'loner' (Tyerman 1958), but many now highlight the prevalence of group truancy. O'Keeffe and Stoll's (1995) large-scale English survey revealed that the majority of secondary school absence took place as a group activity. While Reid (1985, 2002) has suggested that many children begin their 'absenteeism' alone and then gradually move into group 'absenteeism' as they get older. The linking of truancy and gang behaviour is also emphasised within more recent political and media rhetoric, particularly linked to crime and anti-social behaviour in public space.

Some definitions are based on frequency (e.g. occasional truancy or persistent truancy), but these can be inconsistent. Galloway (1985) for example operationalised 'persistent absentees' as those who had missed more than 50% of attendances in a stated autumn term, whereas Reid (1985) included pupils missing more than 65% in a school year. Interestingly, a recent government definition of persistent absentees applies the term to those pupils who miss 20% of their schooling in a given time period (Brennan 2007), which is much lower than other academic operational definitions.

There are a number of problems associated with this definitional variability. Based on the above definitions, a given person may be considered as a 'persistent' truant in one study but an 'occasional' truant in another. There is also no distinction made between patterns of absence. Clearly, one person may miss school consistently for a length of time, but have otherwise good attendance throughout the rest of the year, whereas another child may truant for low-levels throughout the year, yet when totalled both absences may equal the same amount. This has two implications, firstly the different types may signify two very different reasons behind them and secondly the first form of absence may fail to be picked up if it did not occur within the period specified for identification of such absences by a given study. Hence, there is also the problem of how these samples are identified, who decides whether a child has missed 65% of attendance? Survey data, 'official' statistics taken from registers, self-reporting, teacher and Education Welfare Officer (EWO) identification have all been utilised, introducing further levels of variance and discrepancy both in terms of who is perceived as a truant and how the frequency of absence is assessed.

The complex and contested issues surrounding the conceptualisation of truancy have led to a picture of confusion and a less than comprehensive understanding of the issue, such that is difficult to ascertain what exactly truancy means and who truants are. Given the problem of definition, rates of incidence reported in the literature must be examined with some care. It may be suggested that given the complexity of this issue, proceeding with a fluid definition for the empirical investigation of truancy is necessary. This issue is explored further in the next section, where research starting points are examined.

Starting Points:

The complex nature of truancy, makes deciding where to start when selecting a sample or when measuring truancy, a particularly difficult task. There are a number of different starting points used in previous research studies that may be seen as problematic for our understanding of truancy, leading to a focus on the more visible forms of truancy and 'truants'. This section explores and critiques some of the starting points that have been presented in the truancy literature. The problem with distinguishing between 'truants' and 'non-truants' is highlighted, and then the identification and sampling of 'truants' by official statistics, authority figures, pupil self-report and cross-sectional studies is discussed.

Hard-to-reach populations like truants are notoriously difficult to measure or sample because of issues regarding sensitivity and visibility, and the specific definitional ambiguity associated with the study of truancy further complicates this matter. However, in order to study truancy researchers have had to find some way of identifying their target population. In doing so, there has been a tendency for researchers to differentiate between 'truants' and 'non-truants' as a starting point to data collection. Dividing the population in this way and then sampling specifically for 'truants' may be seen as potentially problematic. Starting with 'truants' implies that there is clarity over *who* and *what* truants are, yet as we saw in the previous section, no such clarity exists. The result is that most studies provide insightful accounts of truancy, but of specific types of truancy as defined by their original conception of truancy. It often seems to be the most visible forms of truancy that are focused upon and the most visible 'truants' that are identified for data collection. There may well be young people that are less obvious to the public and institutional gaze, but still truant nevertheless.

'Official' absence statistics are a central way in which researchers have attempted to determine whether someone is a 'truant' or not. The problematic nature of using unauthorised absence or overall absence as a proxy for truancy has already been discussed. Absence data are based on information collected from school registers. These registers often fail to pick up on post-registration truancy. Even when registration is taken in each lesson, there is still opportunity for truancy after the register has been taken, including in-school truancy (O'Keeffe and Stoll 1995, James 2007). Truancy may also be recorded as authorised, and thus studies that determine their sample based on unauthorised absences may fail to pick up on it. This can rest on teachers' assessments, as it is their responsibility to classify pupil absences. Guidance is issued on how absence should be recorded and categorised but there is significant scope for interpretation and discretion. This may lead to a situation where some schools are authorising absences which others schools record as unauthorised and variation can also occur within schools (Reid 1999). Based on 'official' absence rates, particular schools become the focus of enquiry, whereas schools with low 'official' absence rates are disregarded. This is not to suggest that these statistics have no factual basis or empirical significance, but it is probable that insight into truanting behaviour can only be partial when official statistics are used as research starting points or when truancy is measured in this

manner. As Halsey observes when discussing official statistics in general, 'the problem remains largely that of adapting to social science ends statistics which, from the point of view of the sociologist, are a by-product of administrative or organisational activity' (1972: 3). This is additionally problematic in the case of truancy, because official statistics are heavily drawn upon to inform political and media debates and thus what they record is central to our understanding of truancy.

 A further way that 'truants' have been selected for sample inclusion is through their identification by authority figures. For instance, Fogelman and Richardson (1974) report on findings where pupils were identified as 'truants' by teacher statements as to whether they were known to have truanted or were suspected of truancy. May (1975) also used pupils identified by teachers, whilst Tyerman (1958) included pupils identified as 'truants' by Attendance Officers and Stott (1966) used pupils selected by EWOs. Some researchers (e.g. Kinder et al. 1996) have selected 'truants' because of their involvement in school initiatives that deal with attendance. Such pupils are initially referred to these schemes by authority figures. Relying on adults for the identification of 'truants', to be used for statistical analysis or subsequent data collection may be potentially problematic for two reasons; firstly their decisions may be susceptible to bias and secondly, authority figures are only in the position to identify truants that are known to them through either visible truancy or having been previously detected. Young people who have truanted without attracting the attention of their teachers or other authority figures are unlikely to be included when 'truants' are identified.

The self-report of truancy by pupils may be more advantageous as it is the young people themselves that participate in the act. This is now a particularly common technique used in questionnaires (e.g. McAra 2004) but can be used as a starting point for most types of research. Atwood and Croll (2006) used data from the British Household Panel Survey to select a sample of truants for further statistical analysis and for subsequent interviews. In order to determine whether a person was a truant or not, the survey asked 'In the past year have you skipped school without an excuse? Was this never, once or twice, several times or often?'. Such a starting point avoids the possibility of bias arising as a result of truanting young people being identified by others and it is more likely to pick up on less visible truancy. However, the types of truancy and the young people identified by self-report may be affected

by the researcher's definition of truancy[3]. The young person's understanding of the issue may well be very different from the researchers. Their self-report will clearly depend upon whether they regard the researcher's definition as encompassing the forms of truancy which they undertake. For example, in the question above, used by Atwood and Croll, it is possible that young people may fail to report their truancy because they gave a fabricated excuse when truanting or because they might interpret this question to mean: did they truant without a reason. Indeed, deciding how to phrase such questions is a difficult task that is open to ambiguity. It is not as simple as asking whether one has 'truanted' or not, as we shall see in chapter 4 the term 'truancy' often means very little to young people. One possible way to get around these difficulties may be to avoid imposing a pre-formulated definition of truancy and instead to opt for a more fluid conceptualisation. This could be explored with the young people themselves, meaning that the young people's own conceptualisations of truancy would be prioritised and would perhaps result in a more accurate understanding of different forms of truancy[4]. It is this approach that I adopted. A similar attempt to avoid imposing definitions on participants was undertaken by Cullingford and Morrison (1997), although their sample started with young people who had been excluded from school. Asking self-report questions generally means refraining from making the distinction between 'truants' and 'non-truants' at the outset of a study[5].

Some studies in the truancy literature have avoided making a distinction between 'truants' and 'non-truants' by selecting a cross-section of young people and eliciting their general views about truancy. The cross-sectional approach is useful with regards to avoiding making assumptions about truancy at the start of the study. However, the studies that have done this (e.g. Le Riche 1995), have then tended to include young people's typifications about other people's truancy in their resultant findings and explanations of truancy. This is then not a reflection of actual experiences or reasons for truancy but reflections on what *pupils* think 'truants' *might* think or do. Whilst the voices of the young people that do actually truant are dissolved (Southwell 2006). Starting with a cross-section of young people and then

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[3] Trust, is of course, an additional factor here in terms of whether a young person feels comfortable enough to reveal their truancy to the researcher.

[4] Clearly this would only work for face-to-face or open-ended questions.

[5] However, a target population does have to be identified to begin with, for instance the researcher needs to decide whether to ask questions about truancy in a school, in a prison, in a youth offending team, in a particular geographical area etc. These choices clearly also have implications with regards to the explanatory claims that can then be made about the resulting sample of truants.

determining a sample of truants based upon the pupils' self-report of their truancy without imposing a pre-formulated definition would seem a more useful starting point.

Research starting points are particularly important to the study of truancy and our current understanding of truancy and the 'truant'. The definitional ambiguity and the incomprehensive picture of truancy outlined at the start of this chapter may, at least in part, be associated with the problematic starting points that can arise when studying truancy. There is clearly no doubt that truancy is a complex issue to research and no starting point is likely to be perfect. However, it would seem that adopting a more fluid conceptualisation of truancy has particular advantages with regards to being open to studying a wider variety of different forms of truanting behaviours. Explanations for truancy are also often related to the starting points that researchers take. It is the dominant explanatory approaches of truancy which this chapter now turns to.

Explanatory Approaches

The study of truancy, for a considerable period of time, suffered from a paucity of research (Adams 1978) relative to other areas of educational study but a wealth of studies have since been generated. Much of the literature that makes the specific issue of truancy the main focus of inquiry, can though, be seen as generally quite sporadic, diverse and often atheoretical (Darmody et al. 1998). However, it is possible to map out three discernible explanatory approaches which have comprised the study of truancy and these are further informed by a wealth of more theoretically informed literature drawn from the wider school literature and from studies on disaffection and resistance. These are: pathological approaches, cultural approaches and pupil's perspective approaches. Although the three approaches are distinguishable with regards to explaining truancy and/ or 'deviancy', there are a number of overlapping issues throughout.

Pathological approaches

The early literature on truancy, dating back to the 19th century, can generally be seen to take a pathological view of truancy. There are several explanatory variants of this approach. Truancy is explained in terms of personal deficit or character flaw on the part of individuals, or shortcomings linked to the failings and inadequacies of their families. It is essentially a

model tantamount to 'blaming the victim', with systemic factors, such as the education system and wider structural inequalities typically regarded as blameless (Valencia 1997). The discovery of various 'pathological' characteristics and features of truants were recognised as being the 'causes' of truanting behaviour. This section examines the literature which links truancy to maladjustment and then provides an overview of the literature that has focused upon the home and social backgrounds of truanting young people.

Maladjustment

The early literature on truancy was almost exclusively a professional concern, influenced by psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and child psychologists. Here, absence from school was primarily positioned as maladjustment, necessitating psychiatric attention and treatment. Burt (1925) is recognised as among the first to advance such thinking, suggesting that the truancy by some could be attributed to a fear of school and related neuroticism. Psychoanalyst, Broadwin (1932), further supported the existence of personality disorders among truants pointing to the 'obsessional neurosis' displayed by some children reluctant to leave their mothers during school time fearing their injury or death. Partridge (1939) then developed the concept of 'psychoneurotic truancy'. The term 'school phobia' was coined in 1941 (Johnson et al. 1941), subsequently regarded by many as distinguishing refusal to go to school from 'truancy' because of its anxiety component. The mutually dependent relationship between mother and child was again implicated here, later to be termed 'separation anxiety' (Estes et al. 1956). Thus, the emphasis is on how absence from school may reflect underlying problems regarding family relationships (Reynolds et al. 1980). More recently this traditional anxiety based view has been revisited, leading to a common reconceptulisation of the problem as 'school refusal' pointing to a heterogeneity of symptoms (Pilkington and Piersel 1991, Merrell 2003). These studies generally excluded the young people's accounts and explanations of their own behaviour. Instead practitioners establish explanations, legitimated by their psychomedical roles.

Stott (1966) was a prominent researcher reporting on the maladjustment of truants. He claimed, using the 'Bristol Social Adjustment Guide', that 'truants' were three times more maladjusted than 'non-truants' from the same neighbourhood and birth date. Families of truants were again implicated, with Stott suggesting that the most maladjusted truants

received little emotional provision at home as their parents were too busy following a 'hedonistic pattern of life' (1966: 107). However, the maladjustment model of truancy has been questioned with regard to the sample of truants selected. Many such studies have drawn samples from children already 'processed' by authorities (Reid 1985). Tyerman (1968), who equated many instances of persistent truancy with 'emotional disturbance' or 'maladjustment' (p. 75), used children who were already known to educational social workers and the courts. Hence, there is reason to suggest that the children involved in these studies may have been less than typical of truants in general. This again highlights the issue of problematic starting points. Carroll (1977) has since added support to this proposition, finding no significant difference between a group of persistent truants and non-truants suggesting that both groups fell within the 'stable range' (p. 36).

The conclusions reached by this line of research indicate that if children truant it is because they cannot cope with school. Thus, attempts to stop them from truanting must be concerned with readjusting them. Since then, many researchers have devoted themselves to discovering what is wrong with the personalities or backgrounds of those who truant. For example, truants were found to have been relatively smaller than other pupils, with less well developed physiques, they lacked concentration, were restless and lazy (Farrington 1980) and had lower self-esteems (Reid 1985). They were also regarded as socially isolated (Hersov 1960), insecure and unclean (Tyerman 1958). Alternatively, these could reflect issues to do with the home and social backgrounds of truants explored within the next section.

Home and social background

The home and social backgrounds of truants is a predominant theme in the research literature on school truancy that is fairly consistent in its findings. A considerable number of studies have indicated that truancy is significantly associated with lower social class (e.g. Fogelman and Richardson 1974, Tyerman 1968, Davie et al. 1972, Kavannagh and Carroll 1977) or deprivation (e.g. Galloway 1976, 1982, 1985, Rutter et al. 1979, Malcolm et al. 1996, Zhang 2003, McAra 2004, WAG 2009, DCSF 2009).

Many of the studies that report on a link between pupil background and truancy are large scale statistical correlation studies. These were particularly common in the 1960s and 1970s. More recently there has been a notable tendency to triangulate with knowledge from other data sources, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group etc. (e.g. Malcolm et al. 1996,

McAra 2004). The statistical studies are useful for presenting large scale patterns between truancy and related groups or factors. However, an important point to remember is that these studies highlight an *association* or *correlation* between pupil background and truancy. They do not represent a *causal* link. Researchers usually acknowledge this fact but when these findings are taken up in the media and policy discourse they are often used to bolster claims that lower social class or deprivation is a *cause* of truancy. This is a somewhat premature conclusion about causality when it is *correlation* that is observed. Truancy and the social background variables may be related to other mediating variables rather than being directly causally related themselves. Some more recent studies have conducted multivariate regression analysis when exploring associations with truancy. This is useful for determining the predictive power of different variables. However, when regression models have been applied there have been indications (e.g. McAra 2004) that social background and deprivation variables are significant but that their effect is comparatively weak. Attwood and Croll (2006) have also highlighted that the great majority of pupils in all SES categories do not truant at all and in their study, over 80% of those in the lowest SES category truant 'never' or 'once or twice', whereas over half of those reporting high levels of truancy were in the middle or high SES categories.

Furthermore, no amount of sophistication in statistical analysis will compensate for problematic starting points. For instance, it is possible that research starting points that focus on the most visible of truants may overlook different forms of truancy which may be undertaken by pupils of other social class backgrounds. As discussed, a number of the studies that point to the home and social backgrounds of truants rely on teacher identification for determining truancy which may be susceptible to class bias as the literature on pupil setting and teachers' expectations has highlighted (e.g. Ball 1981). The statistical studies that use official statistics to identify 'truants' are also hampered by the problems discussed in the starting points section. Similarly, the indicators of social class and deprivation have limiting factors with regards to their measurement validity and reliability. In addition, Reynolds et al. (1980) have questioned the variables that are used in the statistical analysis of studies that have attributed home and social backgrounds factors as explanations for truancy. They suggest that 'the studies are usually heavily loaded with family variables rather than school variables. The school variables that are included are of the simplest – and most banal kind.'

(p. 89). They therefore purport that certain school factors may be a mediating factor in the relationship between pupil background and truancy. Nevertheless, it is certainly worth acknowledging the increased sophistication of variables employed and statistical tests used since Reynolds et al. made this statement.

Moreover, these studies cannot account for why some working class young people truant whilst others do not. Further, as the purely quantitative studies do not incorporate the young people's own explanations for why they truant we learn little about the processes which may account for the association between pupil background and truancy. The more recent studies (e.g. Atwood and Croll 2006, McAra 2004, Zhang 2003) that have adopted a multi-method approach do address this, to a degree, but highlight the importance of other mediating factors as a result, such as the influence of the school or the curriculum etc.

Other social factors and pathologies which have been linked with absence rates are family size (e.g. Cooper 1966, May 1975), with truants more likely to come from families of above average family size; homelessness (Twaite and Lampert 1997); familial criminal activity (Farrington 1980); alcoholism (Hersov 1960); and mental illness (Galloway 1980). The issue of association rather than causation is especially evident here. While there have also been suggestions that parents collude in their child's truancy because they are hostile to or uninterested in their child's education (e.g. Fogelman et al. 1980, Fogelman and Richardson 1974, Hodge 1968, May 1975).

The primary concern within the pathological approaches has been to identify young people and to ascertain biological, psychological features or social backgrounds which supposedly differ from the 'normal' majority. The 'causes' of truancy are seen to be attributable to personal deficiencies or family background. This research contributes to the construction of truants as 'different' or as 'other'. This approach has retained particular dominance in the political arena. It clearly sustains policies which emphasise the 'responsibility' agenda whilst deflecting attention away from the education system. For instance, it supports measures that have been enforced as a way to 'fix' the deficits of young people and their families, such as Parenting Orders, parenting classes etc. In the past 20-30 years there has been a general decline in studies which point to the home or social background of pupils as a sole

explanation for truancy. As discussed, it is now more likely for studies to take a multi-method approach and the result of this has been for home and social background factors to be presented as one among a list of many multi-faceted explanations for truancy. Although Reid (1999, 2002, 2003), the most prominent figure within the field of truancy, continues to focus our attention on the home and social backgrounds of children as a prime explanation for truancy. As we see next though, cultural explanations also became a dominant approach within the academic truancy literature.

Cultural approaches

A second set of approaches incorporating truancy are the cultural approaches, which is far more sociological and looks at truancy and/or deviancy as a response to social and cultural circumstances rather than individual notions of pathology outlined in the previous section. The starting point here tends to be 'delinquent' or 'deviant' youths, and truancy is highlighted as an element of the multiple forms of resistance expressed. The majority of the studies do not exclusively focus on the issue of truancy, but the empirical and theoretical work within this approach are useful to inform debates on truancy, regardless of the brevity which truancy is given. Cultural approaches were particularly prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside escalating concerns regarding the disorder of youth mediated by media and political discourses. This period also coincided with the growing disenchantment with psychiatry (Crossley 1998, 2006). There are significant differences between the cultural studies, but collective coping mechanisms are generally portrayed, presented as responses to contradictions in the social structure and resistance to hegemonic culture through a series of inverse or counter-values. The generational phase of youth and the relation of youth to social class, the mode of production and resulting social relations tends to be implicated throughout (Brake 1990, Woods 1977). The initial studies discussed in this section tend to focus almost exclusively on boys and deviancy. However, studies that have addressed the apparent 'invisibility' of females are then presented, followed by debates informed by theories of masculinity and femininity and the section ends with a more recent consideration of youth culture and its relationship to space, place and identities.

Early American sub-cultural theories (e.g. Cohen 1955) can be seen as particularly influential in the development of subsequent cultural approaches within the US and the UK. The supposedly high levels of 'delinquent' behaviour among the lower social classes were

depicted as a collective response (particularly among adolescent boys) to social inequality. The education system is attributed particular importance here, especially the relationship between school success and class background. The collective deviant and delinquent behaviour of these young people is seen as a response to a system where status and success is denied to them. For instance, Cohen (1955) points to the notion of 'status frustration' and Cloward and Ohlin (1961) regard delinquent subcultures as a response to 'blocked opportunity'. The young people's failure is attributed to their lower social class backgrounds where cultural deficiencies are seen to limit educational opportunities. Out of this frustration, deviant subcultures are formed which reject the values and norms of the hegemonic culture and invert them, thus endorsing their opposites. Delinquent behaviour, including truancy, is highly valued within the subculture, who, as Cohen maintains 'delight in the defiance of taboos', and as such is status-enhancing (1955: 201). Behaviour is not solely delinquent but it is commonly present orientated, characterised by 'short-run hedonism' (Cohen 1955: 203). These theories have received criticism for exaggerating the differences between delinquent and non-delinquent youths, with regards to a wholesale rejection of middle class values. For instance, Matza (1964) developed his theory of 'drift' in critique of these subcultural theories to suggest that young people sometimes drift into delinquency in particular circumstances and under particular conditions, but their behaviour is not characterised as an adherence to delinquency as a 'core value' and episodes of rebellion have little impact on their later lives.

The argument that delinquency (including truancy) is a product of subcultural membership was taken up empirically in the English ethnographic studies by Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970). These classic studies were particularly influential, as Furlong (1985: 89) remarks 'between them these two books more than any others served to establish the legitimacy of the sociological approach to school deviance'. Hargreaves, undertook his study in an industrialized town in the North of England at Lumley Secondary Modern School for Boys, before the 1988 Education Reform Act [ERA][6]. He suggested that the fourth years at the school could be divided into two subcultures, the 'academic' subculture of the higher stream and the 'delinquescent' subculture of the lower stream. The 'academic' subculture was characterised by a positive orientation to school, whereas the 'delinquescent' subculture

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[6] From this point forward ERA is used in place of Education Reform Art. Reference to studies as pre or post 1988 ERA are indicated when appropriate to inform the reader whether the research took place before or after the National Curriculum for Wales and England and the increasing 'market' principles associated with the 1988 ERA.

were negatively orientated, inverting the values of upper stream pupils. This subculture polarization was seen to reveal itself as the pupils moved up the school. The selection and differentiation in the form of the 11+ and streaming used at the time of Hargreaves's study were fundamental here. The pupils in the lower stream were failures in both respects. They had failed to pass the 11+ and were not in the higher streams of the secondary modern. As a result, they rejected the middle class values of the school which centred on academic achievement and sought alternative anti-education values. In doing so, according to Hargreaves, the role of pupil is rejected as the peer culture takes precedence, conferring informal status within the unity of a subculture. Truancy, fighting and smoking were some of activities which could be harnessed to enhance a pupil's status within the subculture, whilst conformist 'academic' behaviour and attending regularly resulted in low informal status. Lacey (1970) also highlighted how positioning within the educational structure can contribute to the process of subcultural formation but, importantly, his research was undertaken in a boys' grammar school in the North of England (also before the 1988 ERA). Here, deviant behaviour such as truancy is seen as a response to the *relative* academic failure of being in the lowest stream, developing into a social solution in the form of 'anti-group' culture as 'polarization' sets in. In contrast, pupils from the top stream were the least likely to be absent. Social class differentiation is especially apparent here with working class pupils more likely to be found in the bottom streams, failing to meet the middle class values of the school and thus disproportionately orientated to anti-school attitudes. At the time, research on girls was generally overlooked therefore we know little about the behaviour of girls in streamed schools within this era (Delamont 1999). However Lambart (1976), Hargreaves and Lacey's contemporary, did provide a useful insight into a selective girls' grammar school which used mixed-ability teaching and sets (pre 1988 ERA). Lambart did not find the same evidence of 'polarisation' that was evident in Lacey's work. Interestingly, she also found no general connection between deviance, achievement and social class (Lambart 2007). The 'sisterhood' were identified as a 'deviant' group but were not academically weak and were positive about school.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s rigid streaming commonly gave way to mixed-ability teaching, consistent with the concern for educational equality that was apparent at the time (Boaler et al. 2005). In addition, with the introduction of comprehensive schools, secondary moderns ceased to exist and there are now few remaining selective grammar schools.

Meyenn (1980) looked at peer relations in mixed ability classes in a coeducational 9-13 years middle school in the English Midlands (pre 1988 ERA). When focusing on the girls, he identified 4 peer groups that exhibited a relatively consistent culture. However, he had more difficulty in placing the groups on a pro/anti-school continuum. For instance, academically successful girls such as the 'PE girls' were found to be robust in their 'rejection of, and reaction to', school rules and discipline. Meyenn (1980) documented a number of different ways that pupils from the different groups were able to make space for themselves to avoid school rules. In 1981 Ball was able to provide an insight into the subcultural thesis in comprehensive schools (pre 1988 ERA), in his English study of 'Beachside Comprehensive'. Ball was able to compare two types of school/classroom organisation as the school moved from banding to mixed-ability groups and in doing so illuminates greater insight into the notion of 'status deprivation'. Ball (1981) showed that banding in a co-educational comprehensive school had similar effects to the streaming in the single-sex secondary modern and grammar schools described by Hargreaves and Lacey. However, anti-school subcultural response was notably reduced when the school moved to mixed-ability groups where differentiation is less clear. Total disaffection and rejection of school was far less common as pupils found some aspect of school to engage with e.g. sport. Similarly Furlong (1984), in his study of an English co-educational comprehensive school (among disaffected Afro-Caribbean boys pre 1988 ERA), found evidence to support the proposition that less explicit differentiation can reduce more sever disaffection. However, greater hostility was evident when the truth was exposed through the public examination system and labour market reality. A move back to ability grouping via subject setting has since been widely adopted[7] and a number of studies have reported similar cases of differentiation and polarization that was previously associated with streaming. Abraham (1989) examined the differentiation-polarisation theory in a *setted* co-educational comprehensive school in the South of England before the 1988 ERA, and concludes that although setting does allow more flexibility, there is adequate reason to suggest that organizational differentiation contributes to subcultural polarisation in the setted comprehensive. Dubberley's (1988) research in a

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[7] From the 1990s onwards setting became especially widely adopted, consistent with the increasing focus on 'competition' and 'academic success' which is now pervasive. This can in part be seen as a consequence of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the introduction of the National Curriculum and national assessment, as well as the educational 'marketplace' which schools now compete in (Whitty et al. 1998, Gerwitz et al. 1993, Boaler et al. 2005). It might be argued that England operates under a higher level of market principles than Wales. However, both countries are affected by principals of the 'marketplace'. For example, Welsh schools do have open enrolment just as England does.

setted co-educational comprehensive school in a Yorkshire mining village also provides evidence in support of the differentiation-polarization model, with resources, teaching style, content and commitment differing between the top and bottom sets as in Hargreaves and Lacey's schools.

The differentiation-polarization thesis with its emphasis on status deprivation has been critiqued from a number of angles. Furlong (1985) outlines a number of these criticisms. The assumption that there is a single value system operating within schools which pupils subscribe to but invert when they are excluded from achieving success in accordance with these values (e.g. academic achievement), has been criticised for failing to recognise that not all pupils will necessarily subscribe to these values but might be cynical and questioning of them. Under this approach the level of rationality, agency and intentionality is also limited. Pupils are attributed with more than in the studies outlined in the pathological approaches section. However, choice is limited and individuals are seen to be constrained by the structures at work in the school *and* by the norms of the group, allowing little room for individual manoeuvre or for the existence of deviant behaviour among those that are not constrained in this way (e.g. high achievers) (Furlong 1985). Hammersley and Turner (1980) highlight that even within these studies there is evidence to suggest that pro-school pupils might act in non-conformist ways but that this secret deviance might be a calculated strategy (just like conformity) with many more pay-offs rather than just been the product of an attachment to alternative values. The importance of the curriculum and its relationship to society, in that it favours middle class pupils, has also been raised in criticism of this approach (Whitty 1985). Furthermore, Ball's (1984) study usefully highlights teachers' differential interpretations of rule-breaking that might provide a link between differentiation and polarization which is not acknowledged in the other studies. Crucially, this might conceal the extent of possible deviance among those who are not 'status deprived' or academic 'failures', for it could be that they may engage in deviant behaviours yet this behaviour is not interpreted as such (Furlong 1985) (the issue of labelling is discussed further in the next section). It is frequently reported that pupils may be treated differently by teachers and other pupils according to factors such as social class background, neighbourhood, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, special educational needs etc. (e.g. Munn and Lloyd 2005, Cohen et al. 1994, Gillborn 1999, Wright et al. 2000, Hurrell 2010).

The studies outlined thus far have highlighted how it is working class young people, rather than middle class young people who are disproportionately engaged in school deviance and who hold anti-school attitudes. However, it was the Neo-Marxist work on 'resistance' and 'social and cultural reproduction' that explicitly and systematically studied social class and school deviance (Furlong 1985). Here cultural youth groups are reinterpreted under a Neo-Marxist rubric as a form of active 'resistance'. Corrigan (1979, pre 1988 ERA), in his study of working class boys in two schools in Sunderland, claimed that truancy is a *conscious* working class cultural response against the power of the school to enforce attendance and the cultural imposition of the school. Corrigan argues that historically schooling was established to change working class culture and this remains the case, resulting in a significant number of working class pupils viewing it as a form of attack and rebelling through truancy which Corrigan argues is a natural form of opposition within their cultural repertoire. He suggests that if middle class pupils had reason to express opposition they would do it in a more organised way using strategies to improve their situation instead of truanting. A more subtle account that moves beyond viewing resistance as a *fully* conscious act of class conflict is provided by Willis (1977), in his empirically rich study of a group of anti-school, working-class pupils (the 'lads') in an English West Midlands secondary modern (pre 1988 ERA). The counter-school culture which he depicts again incorporates truancy as one of a number of anti-school acts participated in by working class boys. These deviant activities are the manifestation of their opposition to the middle class values of the school and the inherent culture clash, 'a fight between cultures' (1977: 19). The lads are attributed a significant degree of agency, creativity and knowledgeability. In contrast to Hargreaves' (1967) study, the deviant counterculture of the 'lads' is seen to develop not as a result of educational failure but because the 'lads' essentially choose to 'fail' themselves. School and qualifications are perceived as irrelevant to their future in working-class manual jobs and 'emasculating' to their notion of working-class masculinity. The counterculture, Willis suggests, poses a threat to the school but paradoxically leads the 'lads' into the futures capitalism had assigned to them, thus, reproducing the initial inequality that they were attempting to resist through their opposition. Willis' approach can be seen as a much more political interpretation of the young people's resistance, when compared to the earlier subcultural theories. In contrast to the earlier work, the counterculture is emphasised as a positive exercise rather than specifically a product of deviant or deficient personalities. It is also notable for recognising the interplay between

agency and constraint. Similar male anti-school peer groups characterised by truancy, delinquency, disinterest with school, negative pupil teacher relationships linked to the culture of the working class have been found outside the UK such as Eckert's (1989) Detroit 'burnouts', Macleod's (1987) 'hallway hangers' and Mclaren's (1986) Toronto 'cool guys'.

Despite the considerable influence that Willis's study has had, it has been criticised on a number of grounds. As Gomm (2001) has highlighted, in contrast to the 'lads', the pro-school boys described as the 'earholes' receive far less attention from Willis and are largely dismissed despite significantly outnumbering the 12 lads that are used by Willis to stand for 'the working-class'. Subsequently, as Delamont (2000) and Griffin (2005) highlight, the 'earholes' are largely forgotten in subsequent reviews of Willis's work. We are told that the 'earholes' are 'conformists' and that as a result we should expect little in the way of deviant behaviour (such as truancy) from them. For Willis, as a Marxist writer, the 'conformists' have been ideologically indoctrinated by bourgeois thought and are not therefore attributed the same creativity and agency as the 'lads' (Brown 1987). Brown (1987) also criticises Willis for overplaying the 'active' role of the pupils at the expense of the class differences in power and privilege that allow the middle class to maintain social and material advantages through the manipulation of education and labour market processes. The resistance of the 'lads' has also been questioned by a number of researchers who have highlighted the implications of the overtly racist and sexist cultural practices of the lads (e.g. Griffin 1985, McRobbie and Garber 1975, Mirza 1992).

Similar 'lads' that celebrated 'machoism, manualism and antimentalism' were found in Williamson's study (1981, pre 1988 ERA) of the 'Milltown Boys' from a Cardiff council estate. Most of these boys regularly truanted, 'dossing' in the woods, shoplifting or helping their fathers with casual employment, and most left school with few credentials. A combination of motives are identified by the boys for their non-attendance, including institutional practices (e.g. labelling, penalization etc), individual choice and personal circumstances, but for the most part it was the more desirable activities outside school that were seen to hold a significant pull to truant. The culture of truancy was hard to resist if they were to be accepted as part of the peer group. School lacked relevance for these boys, just as it did for Willis's 'lads', jobs were to be obtained through personal contacts. However, whereas Willis's 'lads' could leave school into relatively stable manual jobs, opportunities were far more bleak for

Williamson's 'boys'. Towards the end of the 1970s youth unemployment had escalated considerably and the collapse of the unskilled labour market was dramatic. The boys had failed to realise the need for baseline qualifications. State intervention via government training programmes to address youth unemployment by providing a 'bridge to work' (Rees and Atkinson 1992) was considerable at the time, but as Williamson (2004: 43) remarks 'the job creation programme led to unemployment more often than it did work'. Many of the boys thus either went straight into local fruit market after school or ended up there after the job creation scheme, biding their time until they could enter adult employment at 18. Low paid precarious unskilled work and/or criminal enterprise, interspersed with periods of unemployment and spells in custody seemed to typify many of the boys' early adult lives. In the follow-up study (Williamson 2001, 2004 (post 1988 ERA)) over 25 years later, the boys (now men) discuss their regrets at having truanted. The research also notes how their children have started to follow the same paths as their parents and Williamson (2001: 53) suggests that this is 'a powerful reminder of the cultural forces which continue to prevail in an environment such as Milltown'. Today, in the context of a very different labour market and changed nature of youth transitions (which has seen greater opportunities but also greater risk (Furlong and Cartmel 1997)), Williamson (e.g. Rees et al. 1996, Williamson 1997, 2010) draws our attention to a whole new generation of young people in Wales facing experiences of disengagement from education, employment and training. Only now they are termed 'NEETS' (previously 'Status zer0' See Rees et al. 1996, Williamson 1997) and recognised as a concern nationally and internationally. Early truancy from school is a common feature in the retrospective accounts of 'NEETS' or 'Status Zer0' young people, symptomatic of marginalisation from social institutions from an early age. However, Rees et al.'s (1996) study of jobless 'Status Zer0' school leavers in industrial South Wales (post 1988 ERA) highlights the complexity of the issue. For instance, they indicate that a significant minority of people in their study performed well at school but found themselves disadvantaged in terms of training and employment because of contingent reasons. Moreover, they question the political approach to understanding 'Status Zer0' purely in terms of subcultural characteristics, with its overtones of the 'undeserving' jobless and coercive and punitive strategies. Instead they indicated that the majority of their school leavers held 'highly conventional' attitudes and values to employment. Their dismal of the value of education was often related to a perception that it was likely to be ineffective in securing employment rather than being a

wholesale rejection of education per se, thus highlighting the importance of the structure of opportunities and access to them.

Brown (1987) conducted a study, under an interpretative framework, which provides a useful critique of the differentiation-polarization theory and Willis's (1977) depiction of working class young people and their engagement with either resistance *or* conformity, by highlighting the plurality of 'different cultural responses among working-class pupils' (1987: 22). Brown's study took place in an industrial Welsh community and data was collected from three co-educational comprehensive schools, in the era before the 1988 ERA. Mass unemployment was acute because of changes within the British economy and the effects of the world recession. There was a notable collapse of job opportunities for school leavers in Wales and England when compared to the buoyancy of the youth labour market that was apparent at the time of Willis's study. In his study, Brown (1987) criticises Willis (1977) and similar accounts for their over-deterministic depiction of 'conformist' responses, noting that Willis 'ignores the possibility that some pupils may comply with the school without being conformist' (p.25) and questions the generalizability of working-class confrontational rebels as representative of the majority of working-class pupils. In Brown's (1987) study, he identified three pupil subgroups, the 'rems', the 'ordinary kids' and the 'swots' (similar to those outlined by Jenkins (1983)), all working-class but with very different orientations to school. Three types of aspiration are noted which provides a more nuanced understanding of working-class pupils. Brown (1987) summarises these aspirations as: to 'get into' the adult working-class world and out of school at the earliest opportunity; to 'get out' of the working class and into the middle class through success at school; and to 'get on' within the working class through achieving educational qualifications which would give access to desirable working class jobs (pp. 104-106). He highlights how the majority of 'ordinary' working-class kids opt for the latter ('get on'). They see much of the academic curriculum as irrelevant and boring but continue to 'make an effort' at school, neither rejecting nor accepting school but complying with it (without being the 'conformists' depicted in other studies). Brown suggests that this resistance *and* accommodation represents an authentic attempt by the ordinary kids to uphold command and dignity over their own lives in an institution where they are 'modestly placed' and enhance their chances when leaving school, in working-class terms (e.g. to secure an apprenticeship or clerical job etc.) Brown (1987) notes that it is the interplay between class culture and institutional school structure that are central to understanding the

educational behaviour of working-class young people. However, according to Brown, the incorporation of large numbers of working class kids depended upon the existence of enough working-class jobs for school leavers, the extent of youth unemployment apparent at the time was seen by Brown to have created a situation where it would be particularly difficult for teachers and schools to continue to contain working-class alienation from school. Thus, the decline in the types of jobs that allowed ordinary kids to 'get-on' was seen as fundamental to the 'crisis' in schools that was heralded in the 1980s. Mac an Ghaill (1988) supports Brown's argument, with regards to the importance of the local labour market, noting that the collapse was even worse for black youth. A more recent study by MacDonald and Marsh (2005) of young people in a neighbourhood blighted by deindustalization and deinvestment in Teeside, North-East England, also found support for the importance of the changing structure of local opportunities in patterns of (dis)engagement with school. The young people questioned the value of school attendance in relation to the likely job prospects that could be gained by education and frequently truanted finding a sense of belonging in the peer group. In contrast, a London based study by O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000:87) found 'social class-based anti-school subcultures less strong than previously'. MacDonald and Marsh (2005) propose that this may be a result of relative difference in employment opportunities between the two localities[8]. However, Furlong (2005) has argued that in contemporary society, cultural-based rejections of the value of education tend not to be as strong and are significantly more complex as working class families place increased emphasis on the importance of educational attainment and the need for educational credentials in the modern economy. A factor also influenced by the decline in the manufacturing industry.

With regards to Brown's (1987) depiction of working class pupils, he highlights some important differences *between* working class pupils and recognises that working class pupils may comply with elements of schooling without necessarily being 'conformist'. However, we might also expect to find similar variation among middle class pupils who are not part of Brown's study. Aggleton (1987), for example, in his study of 29 students at a further education college, emphasises that not all middle class pupils are 'conformist' or excel academically as they are often portrayed, some of course underachieve. He highlights how some middle class students demonstrate 'contestation' directed against 'localised principles of control' as a desire for personal autonomy. However, he also demonstrates that such

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[8] Both studies took place before the global economic recession that was apparent at the time of this study.

resistance does not carry the same consequences for the middle class pupils as it does for the working class pupils. In addition, Power et al. (2003 (post 1988 ERA)) highlight the complexity apparent in middle class pupils' education pathways and note the occurrence of disrupted middle class careers alongside successful ones. Furthermore, some of the behaviour among working class children described by Willis (1977) are in some ways similar to those documented among elite private schools in Wakeford (1969) and Delamont (1976) for example.

Although the focus of the studies discussed thus far have been predominantly class based, those conducted from the late 1970s onwards (e.g. Brown 1987, Ball 1981) were notably more sensitive to gender and masculinity (Willis 1977) (to a degree) than the earlier studies had been. The feminist movement of the 1970s gradually began to produce a greater amount of research that incorporated girls' experiences of schooling to remedy the previous relative lack of such research (Acker 1981, Delamont 1999). Although there were exceptions (e.g. Lambart 1976, Llewllyn 1980), up to this point, girls had largely been ignored or they were presumed to be passive or 'conformist' and thus unworthy of research focus. As Valentine et al. (1998) remarks, there had been a disproportionate focus on 'youth' as 'deviant, spectacular and male' (p.16). Gordon et al. (2001:192) note that feminist researchers 'wanted to redress the balance arguing that girls were oppressed by patriarchy as well as capitalism'. When more attention was paid to girls it was found that they were not the 'passive' 'conformists' that they had been stereotyped as. For example, Davies's (1984) 'wenches' truanted, disobeyed rules, were cheeky to teachers and fought. However, importantly, Davies suggests that the girls in her study did not reject commitment to school values in place of allegiance to subcultural norms. The collective remained important and there were similarities between the 'wenches' and Willis's 'lads' but the level of solidarity was not perceived to be the same, nor was the level of opposition. Instead Davies (1984: 57), in her interactionist study that took place in an English Midlands comprehensive school, highlights the individual manoeuvre that was evident among her 'wenches', utilised as a solution to status concerns and an 'anonymizing institution'. Davies also notes some gendered differences in the enactment of truancy with girls more likely to truant in school although responsibilities outside school also meant that some truanted to carry out domestic duties etc. Griffin (1985) conducted an ethnographic study of white working class women in the English Midlands, commissioned as a 'female version' of Willis's (1977) work, informed by a

feminist cultural studies approach. No parallel distinction between the anti-school 'lads' and the pro-school 'earoles' was found among the girls and she highlights the absence of 'typical girls'. Blackmann (1988) identifies a different stance in his feminist account of the 'New Wave girls', from a comprehensive school in the South of England. He does find a more consistent actively resistant female youth cultural group but these girls were in an academic mid to upper-stream. Importantly they were not uniformly anti-school but truanted nonetheless. Truancy is only discussed briefly but the study contains some significant insights and departures from the majority of the literature. Truancy or 'skiving' is presented as a form of intentional resistance adopted by the 'New Wave Girls' to support their youth cultural discourse and resistance from masculine control within the school but is also based on the manipulation of the school's structure to *support* their educational aims which they shared with the school. Importantly, Blackman suggests that the girls would spend some of their time when truanting helping each other with their school work, a sharp contrast from how 'truants' are commonly portrayed to be spending their time in current 'official' and media discourses on truancy. With little in the way of research on pro-school boys who engage in truancy we do not know whether such behaviour should be seen as related to the fact that it is a female youth cultural group or whether we could expect particular boys to spend their time truanting in a similar manner. Indeed, many studies, such as the English studies by Osler and Vincent (2003), Wolpe (1988), Hey (1997) and Collins and Johnston-Wilder (2005), have highlighted how girls' resistance can take different forms to boys. These studies have highlighted how girls can be very successful at disguising their subversion and that their behaviour is often less confrontational than boys, but that they are not 'conformists' as previously assumed. Osler and Vincent (2003) suggest girls' different reactions can mean that their problems go unnoticed. In their study, investigating girls' low exclusion rates relative to boys', they highlight how girls experiencing problems are more likely to opt for what they describe as passive engagement such as prolonged truancy rather than more overtly disruptive behaviour that is more likely to lead to official exclusion. Wolpe (1988) also highlights the *active* role that girls play in the construction of gender difference. Wolpe (1988) and Hey (1997) provide useful insight into how girls use their sexuality to avoid reprimand for truancy, perhaps offering one explanation as to why girls seem to be less frequently identified as 'truants'.

In the past 20 years research about anti-school boys has been particularly prevalent, tied in with the moral panic about the 'underachievement' and 'failure' of working class boys in schools. This is particularly pertinent in the current educational context with its emphasis on national assessment, standards, performance and competition in education 'markets' post 1988 ERA, when compared to say the time of Willis's study, where anti-school 'laddish' behaviour might have restricted the 'lads' to the working class but it did not exclude them from stable work (McDowell 2003). The loss of traditionally 'male' working class jobs associated with the de-industralization of the UK, globalised production and the dependence on service sector activities, alongside the successive raising of the school leaving age and the changing nature of the youth labour market has had a profound impact on the opportunities available to young people (See Francis 2000, Egerton and Savage 2000, Delamont 1999, Crompton 1999). Boys are positioned as disadvantaged by these changes whereas girls are portrayed as benefiting from increased access to education, the changes in the labour market and the feminisation of teaching. However, research has shown that this picture is much more complex than depicted within media rhetoric (Epstein et al. 1998, Skelton 1998). For example, Delamont (1999) provides a useful analysis of the literature which suggests that the so called feminisation of teaching has not had as great an impact on boys as it is portrayed to have had. Gorard et al. (1999) has consistently questioned the size of the achievement gap and highlighted that in absolute terms, both girls *and* boys have seen significant improvements in the achievement of credentials and attainment levels than their predecessors, and Warrington and Younger (2000) and Paechter (1998) argue that girls' experiences of schooling are far from ideal. Nevertheless, concern remains over a culture of anti-school 'laddishness' which has been linked to 'underachievement' and anti-school behaviour that has seen boys constructed as active agents in this and simultaneously passive victims (Griffin 2000). The issue has remained a hot topic in the UK and elsewhere (see Foster et al. 2001 for an overview in Australia and the USA), informed by theories of masculinity (Francis 1999, Martino 1999, Warrington et al. 2003, Jackson 2003, Younger at al. 2002). In particular, many researchers have highlighted that dominant ways of expressing masculinity run counter to the educational goals of school (Mac an Ghaill 1994, Younger and Warrington 1996, Warrington et al. 2000). Theories about hegemonic masculinity provide an explanation for the supposed rejection of academic work and values by highlighting how academic work is often seen as 'feminine' and thus is to be avoided if boys do not wish to be defined as 'other'

(e.g. Epstein et al. 1998, Frosh et al. 2002). Rejecting school is a way of rejecting femininity and thus serves as a signifier of masculinity (e.g. Martino 1999, Mills 2001, Reay 2002). 'Laddish' behaviour has been noted across the social classes[9] and ethnic groups (Francis 1999, Martino 1999, Reay 2002, Youdell 2003). However, it remains an identity associated with the working class, in particular the 'unrespectable' elements of working class lifestyle (Griffin 2000, Skelton 2001). Consequently the underachievement debate has been seen to represent an attack on working class boys (Griffin 1998). Abraham (2008) cautions against the association between anti-school 'laddish' peer culture and working class culture by highlighting that it is possible for many working class boys to subscribe to much of what passes for 'hegemonic masculinity', but for this not to include a rejection of learning and academic work. Similarly, Pattman et al. (2005) show how boys may manage multiple and contradictory identities, displaying anti-academic 'hegemonic masculinity' in a public context but less so in more private contexts of learning. Indeed, recent work on masculinities has emphasised the fluid, multi-layered and shifting nature of identities but Connell cautions against this stance by suggesting that 'it might be helpful to think about the "fixing" mechanisms that limit the fluidity of identities' (2001: 8). For instance, Reay (2002) outlines some of the tensions and difficulties experienced by a 'hard-working', working class boy trying to balance academic success with working class masculinity whilst maintaining standing within the male peer group culture. Studies (e.g. Lloyd 2005, Jackson 2006) have also highlighted how females can adopt similarly problematic 'troubled' or 'troublesome' femininities (increasingly reported on within the media) and that for these girls there can be a double stigma as they offend the dominant view of 'bad boys' and 'good girls', and the norms of their gender (Lloyd 2005: 2). Griffin (1993, 1997) makes a distinction between 'in trouble' and 'troubling' arguing that the former are usually seen as working class, male and/or minority youth whereas the latter are typically seen as female, working class and/minority youth. The active antipathy discussed in Lloyd's (2005) edited collection provides a contrasting view to the more covert resistance discussed earlier (e.g. Osler and Vincent 2002, McRobbie 1991). Indeed, since the 1980's gender researchers have increasingly focused on the diversity *within* each gender (Gordon et al. 2001), highlighting the more complex and contradictory ways gender is played out than was evident in the earlier studies. In doing so

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[9] 'Tried on and used as a resource' by middle class males for example (See Skeggs 2004).

they question notions in the public and media of girls and boys interests being unambiguously opposite (Skelton 2001, Meyenn and Parker 2001, Swain 2005).

From the 1990s there was also another strand of youth research which saw youth culture explored in relationship to space, place and identities, made through 'local' cultures but additionally shaped by global influences and interconnections (Griffin 2001, Holloway 2000). Many such studies often draw upon a broader range of methods reflecting methodological and theoretical approaches associated with the 'spatial turn' and 'mobilites paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006, Thrift 1996). Contributions from sociologists and social geographers in the 'new social studies of childhood' (e.g. Holloway and Valentine 2000, James et al. 1998), have drawn upon postmodern and poststructuralist approaches to explore multiple cultures and everyday spaces through which identity is made and remade, emphasising the power of young people to resist adult definitions of their everyday lives (through for example their appropriation of time and space etc.), but yet also highlighting the ways in which young people continue to be controlled. Skelton (2000) for example explores the way a small group of teenage girls living in the Rhondda Valleys in Wales resist the marginal positioning of 'being the 'wrong' age, being the 'wrong' gender and being in the 'wrong' place' (p.69) by constructing their own leisure and through the importance of friendships developed away from the confines of the domestic sphere.

The studies discussed at the start of this section, broadly recognised as differentiation-polarization theory studies and resistance theory studies, have distinct differences in terms of contributions and areas of critique in relation to the field of truancy, but also similarities (Woods 1990). Both advanced our understanding of pupils who had previously been depicted as maladjusted and irrational and the in-depth nature of these studies provides a rich and prolonged insight into peer culture and the informal worlds of pupil interactions. The role that the school, its values and its organisation can have on different groups and on their 'deviant' and/or truanting behaviours is also partly illuminated. In addition, many of the groups are granted subjectivity related to their interpretation of the situation, in contrast to the 'objective' notions of deficit and pathology. These studies, particularly the later resistance theory studies, attributed these young people agency and a degree of intentionality, whilst recognising wider structural constraints. However, the oppositional dichotomies between resistance and conformity, domination and subordination, anti/pro-school have been

critiqued for masking the complexity of action and for the comparison against a consistent sense of 'normality', which is unlikely to exist in reality (e.g. see Furlong 1976). It may also be argued that these studies overplay the countercultural nature of these young people in terms of consistent values, commitment and orientation. Turner (1983) has argued that the assumption that pupil behaviour (such as truancy) is based on the internalisation and rejection of official values or goals is problematic, when due weight has not been given to the processes of decision making that mediate between actions and values. Studies that have focused more on these processes are explored in the next section. Since the 1980s and 1990s postmodern and post-structural positions on resistance and power led to towards an understanding of resistance as multi-layered, on-going, temporary and partial rather than totalizing. A more nuanced consideration of the complexities of class, gender and ethnicity and how they intersect also emerged. Some of the later studies discussed in this section reflect this.

In relation to the specific study of truancy, the starting points of many of the cultural approaches studies are problematic because they start with 'delinquents' or 'non-conformists', commonly from working class backgrounds. Truancy is then found as a manifestation of their oppositional behaviour and this compounds truancy as an anti-school act, which is the domain of 'delinquent', working class young people, often boys. Such a view informs our understanding of truancy but is very much related to research starting points. Research studies which start with a more varied cross-section of young people are explored in the next section.

The pupil's perspective approaches

A third set of explanatory approaches for truancy may be subsumed as the pupil's perspective approaches. In the last section a number of the studies discussed gave due weight to pupils views and perspectives in their analyses, particularly the more recent studies and the studies that I used to critique the research within the cultural approaches section. However, this section will focus specifically on studies that have looked at individual choices, interests and situational influences in a school-based context. Significant attention is paid to interactionist contributions but the chapter will also consider a succession of more recent pupil voice studies and applied and practitioner/policy orientated studies (often atheoretical) which have given considerable focus to the issue of truancy. These studies share the notion of

intentionality inherent in some of the resistance theory studies (e.g. Willis 1977), but action is explained in terms of choices and desires. Here truancy is positioned as a rational act, undertaken in response to dissatisfactions with the service on offer. These approaches represent a significant departure from the previous two models. Here, truancy is not seen as a cultural phenomenon or an individual pathology. To understand truancy, the young people's reasons, decisions, intentions and individual choices must be understood.

In terms of the general school literature, interactionists have provided considerable insight into the subjective worlds of different pupils, including 'deviant' pupils. Interactionism was especially popular in the 1960s and 1970s but continues to retain considerable influence in the field of sociology and education in a considerably more diverse form (Fine 1993). As Woods (1990) notes, the interactionist approach 'emphasizes individual interests and choices and situational influences upon them…there is too a different set of concerns among these interactionist studies arising from their different starting point of the pupils' own construction of meaning' (1990: 139). Pupils are seen as purposely choosing lines of action based upon how they interpret the teacher's actions, other pupils, classroom situations and their worlds[10]. Pupils are recognised to be strategic thinkers (Woods 1990). Studies that have taken an interactionist approach to the study of school pupils have been especially useful in highlighting everyday life in schools. Variability of pupil behaviour across different situations and times has been strongly highlighted in contrast to the more determined accounts inherent in some of the cultural approaches. For instance, Furlong (1976 (pre 1988 ERA)) in his study of a secondary modern school in a large English city, presents data from 16 girls of West Indian origin of 'below average intelligence' (1976: 24) who occupied positions in a low stream. He questions research (e.g. Hargeaves 1967, Lacey 1970) that suggests that the 'culture' of norms and values found in the peer group dictates the school experience for individual pupils. Instead he presents data that suggests that patterns of interaction can vary considerably and at different times 'interaction sets' form but these are not the same as friendship groups with consistent norms and values. These 'interaction sets' vary depending on negotiation of definitions of the situation communicated between the girls. For instance, different 'interaction sets' might form depending on pupils interpretations of teachers as strict or soft, ineffective or effective. When it was considered not possible to 'learn' because

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[10] Further elaboration on symbolic Interactionism is included in chapter 3.

of their specific interpretation of different teachers and lessons, 'bunking it' was opted for. However, Furlong does suggest that the 'interaction sets' of girls who would 'bunk it' were more consistent than other 'interaction sets' that formed. Furthermore, Furlong highlights how 'learning' was important to these girls despite their low academic position within the school. Furlong (1985: 119) did however go on to critique his analysis in this study by suggesting that his 'view was the result of observing behaviour too close up', thus overlooking patterned behaviour and leading to a 'sort of cultural nihilism'.

Many interactionist studies have highlighted similar variability to Furlong, showing how pupils can strategically use conformity or deviance to make the most out of their options. Measor and Woods (1984) provide numerous examples of 'knife-edging' behaviour in their English research on school transfer (pre 1988 ERA). Here they empathized how pupils are often involved in a delicate balancing act between conformity and deviance as they try to uphold identities of their interpretation of 'normal pupils'. Strategic deviance was undertaken in situations when pupils judged that their identity would not be under threat. Measor and Woods highlight how some areas of the curriculum were more prone to this strategic deviance undertaken by 'knife-edgers', depending upon pupils' interpretations of lessons and judgements about their utility. Importantly, Measor and Woods (1984) suggest that the majority of their pupils were 'knife-edgers'. This included pupils in the top subject groups demonstrating a departure from much of the research discussed in the previous section, which generally ignored the possibility of deviance among such a variety of pupils. However, Measor and Woods (1984) also identified two other camps of pupils: 'conformists' and 'deviants'. Truanting behaviours both inside and outside school were more common among the 'deviants' but there was a notable distinction between the strategies used by the boys and girls. The boys displayed more overt and challenging deviance, whereas the girls displayed avoidance strategies such as daydreaming that mostly went undetected by teachers because their behaviour was less challenging than the boys.

For many interactionists 'negotiation' (Straus et al. 1966) is fundamental to everyday life in schools. It is through the art of negotiation that pupils learn to change and vary behaviour in different situations as a basis of strategic action (including strategic deviance), maximising their interests whilst putting themselves in the others position in order to assess the situation

and the gains or losses to be had. Power is central to this. Teachers, backed by laws regarding compulsory attendance, are imbued with more power but pupils have considerable room for manoeuvre and relationships are on-going, continually defined and re-defined (Woods 1990). Pupils may seek to gain control of the situation for many aspects. Strategies of parameter establishment between pupils and teachers have been noted by a number of studies (e.g. Ball 1980, Delamont and Galton 1986, Beynon and Delamont 1984, Measor and Woods 1984) during initial school encounters. In Beynon's (1985) study, at a boys' comprehensive school in South Wales, he identifies a range of 'sussing strategies' used by some of the boys in the negotiation process to test their teachers and their expertise and gather from this what flexibility was available for them to exert a degree of control within the classroom climate. Beyond initial encounters, Delamont (1976) provides a detailed insight into this power struggle and battle for control in her study of St Lukes a girls' private school in Scotland. One example she gives is how pupils attempt to 'please' teachers in return for grades but the 'pleasing' only lasts as long as it maximises the pupils' interests. Woods (1979) in his study of 'Lowfield', a secondary modern in the English Midlands, has detailed some of the ways in which pupils try to negotiate the demands of school work, including the amount of work they do and the behaviour considered acceptable in different lessons. Reynolds (1976) in his observations of ten South Wales secondary schools has shown how negotiation can be key to reducing conflict in school. By permitting a certain amount of rule-breaking, teachers and pupils were able to reach a 'truce' based on negotiation and mutual agreement which essentially functioned to reduce conflict and more extreme deviance. Similarly, Burgess (1984), in his ethnography of 'Bishop McGregor' a co-educational comprehensive school in the English Midlands, found that in the 'Newsom department' teachers and 'newson pupils'[11] negotiated a tacit agreement whereby rule-breaking and limited work were overlooked by teachers in exchange for pupils being less disruptive to the rest of the school. However, the negotiated equilibrium is constantly in threat and pupils (and teachers) may need to adopt a range of 'strategies' (e.g. humour and laughter (Wood 1979, 1983)) to deal with any imbalance and to 'cope' with tensions, contradictory pressures and demands (Woods 1990, Pollard 1985). Such strategies may also be seen as at the heart of the preservation of self.

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[11] 'Newsom pupils' were those at Bishop McGregor who took courses that were provided for the 'non-academic' and 'non-examinees'. 'Newsom' refers to the Newsom report (1963) that had made recommendations on the education of secondary school pupils of average and below average ability (Burgess 1984).

A number of studies have highlighted the deviance that can ensue when teachers repudiate the pupils' perceptions of 'agreed' definitions of classroom situations, breaking the implicit rule structure. For instance, in Werthman's (1984) American study of black lower-class 'gang members', the boys behaviour was thought to rest on their judgements of the legitimacy of the teacher's authority. Unfairness and weakness undermined the teacher's authority and cooperation with specific teachers and the legitimacy of their role was subsequently withdrawn. Similarly in Marsh et al.'s (1978) British study pupils identify a number of teacher 'offences' (e.g. contempt, softness etc.) which they respond to with 'retribution' in the form of disruptive behaviour. Tattum's (1982) English study of 29 'disruptive' pupils in a 'detached unit' found similar motives to those highlighted by Marsh et al. and Werthman. Pupils, regardless of age, sex or background, explained their behaviour and the subsequent need for reaction in 5 ways: 'it was the teachers fault'; 'being treated with disrespect'; inconsistency of 'rule application'; 'we were only messing- having a laugh'; 'it's the fault of the school system'. These points were apparent within the school's own value system. However, Tattum suggests that although they may have been 'real' motives for the pupils, the teachers were likely to have seen the situation very differently. For the pupils, their response was often regarded as legitimate and meaningful given their perception of the situation. Tattum's research is also notable for being among the first to present the perspectives of pupils outside of mainstream education from a sociological approach (see Burgess 1984, Cooper and Jacobs 2011, Phtiaka 1997, Delamont and Atkinson 1995 for further insights).

Bird et al. (1981) in their study of 115 'disaffected pupils' in six outer London comprehensive schools, note similar institutional factors as those that have been outlined in many of the studies so far. However, they also highlight how the school environment created a perceived conflict of values between the home or community and school, and a clash between the pupils' roles as children in school and their more adult-like roles outside of school. Perceptions of their future lives and subsequent judgment of exams and qualifications as irrelevant were also raised. Girls in particular were seen to aspire to occupations where qualifications were not needed, in line with a number of earlier studies that noted girls' low aspirations and how academic success did not accord with the dominant image of femininity (Spender 1982, Gaskell 1992, Sharp 1994, Deem 1978, Measor and Woods 1984). In contrast, contemporary girls have been found to be much more academically focused and ambitious

about future occupations, many aiming for professional jobs that require high qualifications (e.g. Francis 2000, 2003, Arnot et al. 1999, Stables 1996, Lightbody and Durndell 1996). Bird et al.'s study is clearly influenced by interactionism but also recognises the impact of wider factors on pupils' perspectives of school. Indeed, interactionist studies are often critiqued for their lack of consideration of the relationship between schools, culture and social structure (Reynolds 1993, Delamont and Atkinson 1995), although many interactionists such as Woods (1990) do emphasise that not all pupils are regarded as having equal weight in the 'bargaining' or 'negotiation' process.

As discussed in the previous section, Interactionists have also made a significant contribution to the study of education and deviance though the work on labelling. Interest here tends to focus on how people react to deviance rather than the pupils themselves (e.g. Cicourel and Kitsuse 1968, Sharp and Green 1975, Chessum 1980). Hargreaves (1976) provides a useful paper on pupils reactions to the labelling process and 'deviant' identity formation in schools although it does not specifically draw on pupils own accounts of this process. He outlines the conditions which may lead pupils to accept a deviant label, internalise it as a part of her/his identity and embark on a deviant career. Four conditions were proposed 1) the frequency of labelling 2) the extent to which the pupils sees the teacher as a significant other whose opinion counts 3) the extent to which others support the label and 4) The public nature of the labelling. He goes on to outline a number of negative consequences that may arise when all four conditions are met. However, Bird (1980) in her consideration of the labelling process from the pupils' perspective has raised a number of conclusions that might be seen to challenge the work of labelling theorists. Within the context of a large English comprehensive school, she suggests that the impact of labelling is likely to be minimal by questioning the extent to which pupils are fully aware of the labels that teachers might have of them. Here, she suggests that: pupils are likely to see deviant labels inconsistently applied because continuous teacher-pupil interaction can be limited (particularly in large schools); pupils tend to individualise teachers responses to them; and labelling may be inconsistent for pupils if they are habitually absent from the context of the labelling (i.e. school). The latter point is particularly relevant to the issue of truancy. However, if Bird's findings are applied to the issue of truancy and the labelling of 'truants', we might expect to find increased awareness of one's label by those who have been identified as 'truants' in today's school climate, whether

habitually absent or not (e.g. through court orders, EWO visits etc). Since Bird's study, there has been an ever increasing punitive stance taken towards school truancy, alongside the relentless focus on accountability via 'official' absence statistics (outlined in chapter 1) indicating that when the label relates to truancy being absent from the context of school might not necessarily minimise the impact of labelling. This proposition is supported by Wardhaugh's (1990) study which focuses on the Education Welfare Service in a city in the English North Midlands. She pointed to the multiple dimensions to the labelling process that can result from a variety of interventions (designated as either punishment or welfare) which those identified as 'truants' are subjected to. More recently, retrospective research undertaken by Cullingford and Morrison (1997) with young offenders with a history of truancy has highlighted the significance of teacher and pupil generated labels in 'deviant' identity formation. They argue that a consequence of this is that alienated and excluded young people then seek an alternative social identity with others who have been labelled and rejected in the same way. The impact of labelling has also been highlighted in a number of studies which have reported the accounts of 'disaffected' young people (e.g. Rustique-Forrester et al. 2002) and who have been excluded from mainstream education (e.g. Munn and Lloyd 2005, Cullen at al. 1997). Munn and Lloyd (2005) in their Scottish study, suggest that teachers might operate a 'construct of worthiness' in relation to disruptive young people whereby some young people are felt to be deserving of professional effort and others are not, often because of their reputation or the reputation acquired from the area they live in.

During the 1990s and 2000s there has been a significant escalation of studies (all post 1988 ERA) seeking to hear and represent pupils' perspectives. As discussed there is nothing new about this but this recent agenda seems to be related to the increasing interest in and support for pupil voice, academically and politically (e.g. WG 2004, DfES 2003), with the latter influenced by the desire to be seen as responding enthusiastically to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Alongside this there has also been a significant growth in studies taking a more rationalist approach which may reflect current perspectives of schooling and the education system that emphasise the notion of 'choice' and are almost certainly connected to the school improvement movement (Rudduck and Flutter 2004). It is perhaps against this backdrop that a proliferation of recent studies have been conducted that have presented pupils views on disaffection, exclusion and truancy.

As discussed in the past 20 years there has been a succession of studies that have come to understand truancy as a 'rational' response to dissatisfaction with the service on offer. The most well known proponents of this model are O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995). In their English study post ERA, they suggest that it is not necessarily the process of education or the institution of formal schooling that is responsible for truancy but rather it is the National Curriculum enforced upon schools and its pupils. The study consists of a large scale survey of year 10 and 11 pupils. Institutional factors are highlighted as more significant than pupil backgrounds due to the high incidences of specific lesson truancy. Such findings, alongside suggestions of boredom and complaints about lessons, led O'Keeffe and Stoll to suggest that truants are involved in a sophisticated form of curriculum rejection, strategically selecting to absent themselves from lessons which they find inappropriate or irrelevant. The study dismissed claims that truancy occurs as a result of an anti-school culture, claiming that if this were the case then they would have expected to have found higher amounts of blanket truancy which would have indicated a rejection of school. A US study by Guare and Cooper (2003) found similar findings. Southwell (2006) has critiqued the central finding of O'Keeffe and Stoll's study and suggested that they give undue recognition to teachers and pedagogic processes, as reasons for truancy, even though they are ranked highly by their sample. Stokes and Walton (1999), Le Riche (1995) and Bartholomew (2009) also highlight the purposive nature of truancy, citing dissatisfaction with a range of school-based factors. School-based factors are also highlighted in a number of other applied reports which have attempted to elicit the perspectives of pupils (e.g. Kinder et al. 1996, Malcolm et al. 2003), though, other factors including home factors are also listed and the multi-causal nature of truancy is emphasised. Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) held a number of panels with disaffected young people, some of whom were truants, who voiced their frustrations and dissatisfaction with teaching and learning styles, the physical environment of the school and the curriculum they received (see also Riley and Docking 2004). The school effectiveness literature (e.g. Reynolds et al. 1980) may also be seen to contribute to the rationalist approach to truancy.

The studies outlined here eschew the individual pathology and cultural approaches in preference of rationalist approaches, where pupils are seen to critique the quality of their education and make choices about their attendance based upon their evaluations. However, the models are not in agreement over what is being criticised by the young people, thus essentially contributing to the uncertainty regarding explanations for truancy. With regards to

intervention, the emphasis on pupils as 'consumers' of their education, draws upon ideologies of the market and suggests that intervention should be placed on improving the service on offer by making schools more attractive (Blyth and Milner 1999).

The studies outlined in this section have presented the subjective views of school held by a range of different pupils. A rich insight into pupils' perspectives about many aspects of school life (e.g. teachers, lessons etc.) has been provided, that has highlighted how pupil worlds are complex, differentiated and nuanced. This stands in sharp contrast to the view presented in the 'pathological' approaches section of this chapter. Most notable about the 'pupil's perspective' approaches is that the distinction between 'deviants' and 'conformists' is thought to be much more blurred. It is considered that virtually all pupils will make careful determinations about what their school has to offer and will act accordingly and this can be a fundamental part of identity construction. The acknowledgement of intentional conduct and purposive action within these approaches can be seen as particularly beneficial for the study of truancy. However, if the countercultural approaches are seen as too over deterministic many of the studies within this section might be regarded as the polar extreme, neglecting structure or constraint in favour of volition. Indeed, as Giddens (1984) has highlighted, understanding intentional conduct is vital, but there may well be a number of unintended consequences associated with a social actor's intentional conduct which cannot be understood at the level of practical consciousness. In addition, Furlong (1991: 296) suggests that attributing too much rationality to pupil action might be limiting for the study of disaffection and that pupils' perspectives are only 'one dimension of the truth'. He suggests that sociological analysis must give greater consideration to the emotional demands of school resulting in 'hidden injuries' for some pupils.

Where Now for the Study of Truancy?

A voluminous literature now exists on the issue of school truancy. A picture of confusion and contestation still remains, with regards to definitions of truancy, explanations and consequential views on what response should be taken. However, with the exception of some recent research (e.g. O'Keeffe and Stoll 1995), underlying most of the approaches discussed in this chapter is the assumption that young people who engage in truanting behaviours are 'different'. In the pathological approaches they are 'sick' and 'deficient', in need of treatment.

In the cultural approaches, they are 'anti-school', 'deviant', educational 'failures'. This is accentuated by the constant emphasis on the polar dichotomies between 'deviant'/'pathological' young people and 'normal' young people, 'conformists', and 'non-conformists' etc. In this sense, these approaches can be seen as similar to the image of truancy which is depicted in the dominant and 'official' discourse. Indeed, the emphasis on truanting young people as 'different' and the moral panics on truancy have remained remarkably consistent through considerable educational policy change. For instance, the school leaving age in England and Wales has been raised (to 16 in 1972), the 11+ abolished, co-educational schooling is now widespread (largely a consequence of the issuing of circular 10/65 (Department of Education 1965) requesting the reorganisation of secondary education from single-sex grammar and secondary-modern schools into comprehensive schools), the National Curriculum has been introduced (1988), and benefits have been written off for people under the age of 18. Since 1999 the educational system of Wales-v-England has diversified as a result of devolution, leading to a number of changes. For example, the Welsh Government has consistently pursued a policy of non-selective 'community-based' schools in distinct contrast to the vast diversity of school types in England. The Welsh government has also introduced distinctive programmes such as the vocationally led 'learning pathways' broadening traditional conceptions of learning (Pring 2009). Nevertheless, consistency on the issue of truancy remains. Ken Reid, the most long-serving researcher in the field of truancy and the most influential with regards to policy and practice in Wales has consistently taken and reinforced the pathological approach to truancy for over 40 years (see DCELLS 2008a, Reid 2012, 1999, 1985, 2003 etc.). Indeed, Furlong (1991) has suggested that the 'individualised psychologically orientated approach' towards disaffected pupils still dominates most parts of the educational profession. The pupil's perspective approaches have, however, begun to outline a different image of truancy, where truanting young people are presented as rational and strategic and truancy is not necessarily seen to be restricted to particular social and academic backgrounds or to characteristics of particular personality types.

There are many questions about truancy that are still unanswered. In the starting point section of this chapter it was suggested that a less problematic starting point for the study of truancy would be to avoid initially dividing the population between 'truants' and 'non-truants'. Instead, rather than impose prior assumptions and a fixed pre-formulated definition of truancy on the research before it has begun, it is suggested that this should be explored

with the young people themselves. The research would then be open to exploring the possibility of different forms of truanting behaviours. It is this approach that this study takes. Eliciting young people's accounts is thus seen to be advantageous and a fundamental starting point for studies that seek to understand truancy.

The pupil's perspective approaches have highlighted the importance of attempting to understand truancy from the point of view of the young people themselves. However, the interactionist studies that took this approach contain only a limited amount of detail on the specific issue of truancy. Many of the more recent rationalist and pupil voice studies did focus specifically on the issue of truancy but conversely they lack the depth of exploration that was apparent in the interactionist studies or the empirically rich, more nuanced research of the countercultural approaches (or more specifically the ethnographic research which many of the researchers undertook), where the benefits to be gained from a prolonged involvement in the worlds of the young people are clearly demonstrated. These studies have been able to explore the day-to-day lives of young people in much more depth, such that everyday conduct and situational experiences can be studied as well as their more explicit perspectives and articulations. The specific issue of truancy, however, was not the primary focus of these studies. As such, we still know very little about how truancy is enacted on a day-to-day basis or what pupils engaged in truanting behaviours do when absent from school and only recently have researchers examined the decision-making processes which underlie truancy. In addition, there are many risk factors that have been associated with truancy but few studies have explored how and if these impact on the young people's everyday lives. Exploring the social worlds of truanting young people and prioritising their perspectives may provide a degree of depth to the study of truancy which the complexity of the phenomenon necessitates.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically explored the academic literature base on the study of truancy. It has highlighted the complex and contested nature of this literature throughout. By examining various different conceptualisations of truancy, it has argued that definition remains problematic and our understanding and image of truancy remains incomplete and unclear. It is thus suggested that we still know little about who the young people engaged in truanting

behaviours are. The ramifications of this were considered in relation to research staring points and it is suggested that many studies start from problematic points which may limit the scope of inquiry. Three explanatory approaches were then discussed. The pathological approaches highlighted individual and family deficit as explanations for truancy. The cultural approaches pointed to the existence of sub- and counter-cultures developed in response to social inequalities and the school's values and organisation, with truancy depicted as an act of opposition and resistance. The pupil's perspective approaches eschewed both these explanations with the interactionist studies highlighting the contextual variability of pupil behaviour and the rationalist studies positioning young people as consumers of their education, opting out of ineffective elements of schooling. The chapter finished by advocating the benefits to be derived from prioritising the young person's understanding of truancy and their definitions of the situation whilst also suggesting that alternative starting points based on a cross-section of young people may be a more adequate approach to the inherently complex and contested study of truancy.

Chapter 3:

Methodological & Theoretical Approach

Introduction

The review of the literature in chapter 2 has highlighted the implications that theoretical and methodological decisions can have for the study of truancy. This chapter details the various stages of the research process and decisions made. It begins by discussing some of the benefits to be gained from a multi-dimensional in-depth engagement in the social worlds of social actors, specifically highlighting the advantages of this approach for studying truancy and young people. I propose that the social worlds of truanting young people should be explored and then highlight some of the epistemological considerations that arise from attempting to prioritise the perspectives of young people. I then outline the theoretical framework which was inductively used to make sense of the empirical data, before moving on to discuss the starting points used in this study. I also reflect upon the emerging nature of the research design and then outline some of the ethical considerations evident throughout the research process. The chapter then moves on to produce a detailed account of the range of methods used within this research. The intention here is to provide the reader with a comprehensive description of each of the methods employed, drawing attention to their advantages but also their inevitable limitations. The chapter will conclude with an explanation of the messy reality of qualitative data analysis.

Exploring the Social Worlds of Truanting Young People

At the heart of this research are the social worlds of young people. This section will explore the benefits to be gained from a multi-dimensional in-depth engagement in the social worlds of social actors, specifically highlighting the advantages of this approach for studying truancy and young people. Methodological and theoretical influences are located and the legitimacy of the pupil's perspective is discussed. A detailed account of specific methods employed throughout the year of study are not discussed here but rather receive significant exploration in the subsequent 'methods and data generation' section.

In chapter 2, the need to conduct research from the starting point of young people was proposed. It was highlighted how truanting young people have been cast as 'maladjusted' and 'deficient' and unable and unworthy of commenting on their own lives. However, chapter 2 also reviewed literature that provided detailed insights into the everyday lives of school pupils

and their views of school. Some of these studies included comment on the issue of truancy, especially the more recent literature associated with the school improvement and pupil voice movement. However, much of this more recent literature lacks the sustained empirical depth which is apparent in the earlier interactionist studies and in much of the ethnographic work referenced within the cultural approaches section of the previous chapter. Although a multitude of studies have commented on truancy, the focus it receives is often brief. A study which focuses specifically on the issue of truancy and is capable of uncovering the complexity and nuance of young people's lives in relation to their absence from school is thus considered of vital importance. This is especially important given the level of commentary that truancy receives in the media and level of 'panic' which the politicians and the media have attributed the issue. My intention was to address the lack of empirical depth on the issue of truancy by systematically studying truancy and making the social worlds of truanting young people my priority.

From the outset this study was guided by a primarily interpretivist approach, particularly influenced by symbolic interactionism and especially the work of those that have come to be associated with what some (e.g. Fine 1995) have referred to as the 'second Chicago School' (e.g. Becker, Blumer, Goffman etc.). Symbolic interactionism has varied intellectual roots but derives in the main from the work of G.H. Mead, interpreted through the work of Blumer (1966) (Fine 1992). Blumer notes that 'the symbolic interactionist approach rests upon the premise that human action takes place always in a situation that confronts the actor and that the actor acts on the basis of defining this situation that confronts him' (Blumer 1997: 4). How people 'act' on the basis of their interpretation of their social world which they develop through interaction with others is thus crucial. For interactionists the focus therefore is on trying to understand the meaning of subjective worlds (Furlong 1985). People are seen as active agents who construct their social world. The concept of the 'self' is fundamental here. The 'self' interprets and defines situations in a social context, assessing the meaning of other people's behaviour and the external world in a continuous process of meaning attribution guiding action (Woods 1979, Furlong 1985). The 'self' assumes the role of others through the process of role 'taking' but also 'makes' roles (Woods 1981). Woods (1988) neatly sums up some of the key concepts which are elevated to a high level of importance for Interactionists. He notes:

> Symbolic interactionists focus on the *perspectives*, through which people make sense of the world; the *strategies* people employ to achieve their ends; the different *contexts* and *situations* in which they define their goals; their group *cultures* in which they interact; and their *subjective* as opposed to objective *careers* (Woods 1988: 90).

For interactionists then, how social actors subjectively define the situation and taking seriously pupils' own accounts is of prime importance, as is the close empirical inspection of their social worlds. This study was certainly influenced, though not determined by this approach and draws upon many of these concepts to illuminate the social worlds of the young people.

Symbolic interactionism has seen considerable changes over the decades and is not without divisions, fragmentation, controversies or indeed expansion (Fine 1993, Plummer 1996). Nor is it without criticism. Interactionism has attracted considerable criticism for its neglect of power, social structure and history (e.g. Giddens 1973, Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds 1975). Nevertheless, some (e.g. Dennis and Martin 2005, Rock 1979) have questioned this view as misguided. Dennis and Martin (2005) for example draw on interactionist studies in deviance and education (e.g. Becker 1963) to show how the social processes through which power has been enacted are central concerns of these studies.

The commitment to understanding everyday life in given social worlds through prolonged engagement in that social world is perhaps best realised through ethnography. There has been a strong affinity between interactionism and ethnography in the UK, with interactionist research studies being especially influential in promoting ethnography (Atkinson and Housley 2003). An ethnography of truancy was initially considered to be the most ideal way to address the research questions within this thesis. However, the practicalities of studying truancy, alongside a desire to include a cross-section of young people in this study meant that compromises were made that ultimately meant that a 'true' or 'pure' ethnography could not be achieved[12]. The ethical implications of working with young people restricted my full immersion within their lives and social worlds and time trade-offs arose from my attempts to explore and document a wide range of different forms of truancy and to avoid the constriction and narrowing of a phenomenon that was by no means so. Therefore, although ethnographic influences heavily guided the methods and analysis deployed within this study,

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[12] However, I would argue that it is indeed very hard to determine what a 'true' or 'pure' 'ethnography' is, particularly given the multiplicity of forms which ethnographic enquiry now takes.

the approach taken within this research is perhaps best described as a qualitative multi-methods approach.

Qualitative methods have been seen as characteristic of Interactionism, although interactionist inspiration is by no means the only source of intellectual influence for qualitative methods (Atkinson and Housley 2003). The decision to use a range of qualitative methods in this study was guided by a desire to understand meaning in interaction, to prioritise the perspectives of the young people and to ultimately immerse myself in the daily lives of the young people within this study to gain a more rounded insight into the young people's socially situated everyday lives of which their truancy is a part. The adoption of a multi-method approach additionally provides a multi-dimensional appreciation of the phenomenon of truancy. This was thought to be particularly advantageous given the inherently multifaceted nature of the issue highlighted in chapter 2. In order to understand the social worlds of these young people and their truancy, and to do justice to the complex changes in everyday life (Bauman 2000, Urry 2000) of which they are part, there was a recognition that my study would need to be capable of capturing mobile, spatial and temporal aspects of everyday life. Areas of inquiry that have received growing attention among researchers in recent years (e.g. Ross et al. 2009, 2012, Hall et al. 2009, Kusenbach 2003, Fincham et al. 2010, Lash and Urry 2004, Urry 2007, Thrift 1996). The act of truancy by its very nature is clearly tied up with mobility and different spatial contexts, yet there are new methodological insights derived from the 'spatial turn' and 'mobilities paradigm' in the social sciences (Thrift 1996, Sheller and Urry 2006). Freudendal-Pedersen et al. (2010) note that the changes apparent in modern everyday life and the insights gained from the methodological and theoretical developments associated with these changes necessitates new ways of collecting data. This study has not been as innovative as some studies have in taking advantage of the new possibilities for multi-modal data generation and representation (see Dicks et al. 2012). However, in thinking about research design and selecting the methods to be used in this study I had to think carefully about how contemporary young people might make sense of space and time and the different ways that they might use it and selected methods accordingly, extending relatively traditional methods for the purposes of the study. A research design that was capable of evolving in response to understanding these aspects though my engagement with the young people throughout the year of study was therefore fundamental.

Denzin (1978: 99) notes 'methodologically, symbolic interactionism directs the investigator to take, to the best of his ability, the standpoint of those studied.' In this study, from a starting point of the young people's own construction of meaning it was the pupil's standpoint and their perspectives which were to be the focus. Historically, as the earlier literature cited within chapter 2 demonstrated, young people were viewed as *objects* of study, silenced and marginalised (Alldred 1998). Over the years there has been an increasing call to respect young people as knowledgeable social actors and give voice to their views and experiences (Hill 1997, Holloway 2000). Thus, reflecting a shift from children being viewed as objects of study to seeing children, through their perspectives and interaction, as active participants in the construction of their own social worlds. A movement therefore, that emphasises research 'with' rather than 'on' children (Alderson 1995) and that reflects wider developments with regards to children's rights (e.g. Children Act 1989) and their social status (James 2001). James et al. (1998) represent this change as an epistemological break where children are to be understood as:

> A person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs rights or differences – in sum, as a social actor… this new phenomenon, the 'being' child, can be understood in its own right. It does not have to be approached from an assumed shortfall of competence reason or significance (James et al. 1998:207)

It is intended that the 'voices' of the young people involved in this study will be given significant priority, recognising from the outset the importance of their definition of the situation and their status as meaning makers. My contention is that young people are knowledgeable, self-aware, active arbitrators of their own experiences. Although it is also recognised that there are things that social actors simply cannot see or know themselves. Thus, it is also necessary to be open to acknowledging the interplay between agency and structural constraints and aware of the unintended consequences of intentional conduct (Giddens 1984). Attributing a high level of validity to the status of the young people's accounts is not therefore an end in itself. This also raises the issue of my role as researcher. Although the young people's accounts and interpretations are placed centrally within the analysis and within this thesis, my role as researcher in interpreting and reconstructing the worlds of the young people cannot be ignored. In recognising this, the need for reflexivity is also raised, for as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 17) highlight, researchers are not 'automatons' or 'neutral vessels of cultural experience'.

This study has a number of empirical and methodological influences that enhanced my understanding of informal social worlds, deviance and schools before during and after the research process. They are documented here as part of the reflexive portrayal of my work, to make clear some of the influences that initially guided my approach to the study of truancy. The insight into hidden populations and hard-to-reach groups that has been popular in ethnographic studies of deviance from its anthropological outset has been especially illuminating. The ethnographic study of deviance has been particularly popular among sociologists (e.g. Liebow 1967, Whyte 1943, Thrasher 1927, Becker 1953, Willis 1977, Ditton 1977), with prolonged engagement, interaction and observation considered particularly beneficial to the unearthing of deviant groups and their social worlds (Alder 1985). The rich empirical accounts of many of the above studies made an in-depth approach to the study of truancy and immersion in the daily lives of young people engaged in truanting behaviours seem plausible and potentially revealing, especially the focus on the routine and everyday and upon the social worlds of these populations. The detailed insights into the worlds of young people in the context of schooling apparent from the 1970s onwards when classroom ethnography began to bloom in the UK has also influenced this study. The studies conducted within the Manchester School (e.g. Hargreaves 1967, Lambart 1976, Lacey 1970), along with subsequent classic British Interactionist classroom studies (e.g. Delamont 1976, Furlong 1976, Ball 1981, Woods 1979, Pollard 1985) provided insightful empirical accounts that have enhanced my understanding of the official and unofficial worlds of the 'school'. Further insight into everyday social worlds relevant to the study of truancy comes from in-depth research which has focused on children and childhood more generally, in particular those associated with the 'new social studies of childhood' (e.g. Christensen and James 2001, Punch 2000, 2001, Holloway and Valentine 2000 etc.). The research encapsulated within the 'new social studies of childhood' can be seen to have advanced our understanding of the everyday lives and social worlds of children in an increasingly diverse range of settings beyond that of the school e.g. the home, the street, the club etc. In doing so, they have highlighted the importance of space and place and a variety of spatial discourses associated with these arenas, which has been particularly influential in relation to my understanding of truancy. However, I also needed a theoretical framework which allowed me to make sense of these everyday social worlds and their social contexts.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretically this thesis draws heavily upon the work of Erving Goffman, in particular that presented in Asylums (1961). Goffman's work was by no means a starting point to this research, it was an *emerging* theoretical framework that was utilised to interpret and understand the data in an inductive fashion. A theoretical framework was needed that enabled an understanding of the social context in which the young people's social worlds are embedded and which attends to subjective meaning and experience. The institution of the school was heavily implicated in the young people's accounts of why they choose to truant from school but also conversely why they attend school. Several of Goffman's concepts, detailed in Asylums, provided a useful way to think about this. It is difficult to locate Goffman within a specific sociological school of thought. He is usually referred to as a either a symbolic interactionist or ethnomethodologist but dismissed the labels of both (See Verhoeven 1993). Branaman (1997: xlv) refers to him as a 'sociologist of everyday life' and it would seem that this is an apt description. His concern with the nuance of routine and mundane everyday life and for deconstructing taken-for-granted assumptions makes Goffman's work particularly relevant to the findings of this thesis. Goffman's work is also useful because as Hammersley and Turner (1980: 39) highlight, it focuses on 'organisational structure as well as 'organisational goals''.

Asylums (1961) constitutes a series of four essays based on Goffman's covert ethnographic field work at St. Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital in Washington, DC. Goffman primarily focused upon the hospital patients, stating that his main research goal was to 'try to learn about the social world of the hospital inmate, as this world is subjectively experienced by him' (Goffman 1961: ix). He reports on how individuals navigate their daily lives as they transpire in mental hospitals and examines the complex relationship between the 'inmates' and the institution. However, his own ethnographic findings from St. Elizabeth's are also interspersed by a wealth of findings from other researchers in different settings and with additional examples used to support and illustrate his conceptual models. The result is a conceptually rich collection of essays[13].

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[13] Because Asylums (1961) is a collection of essays which were later produced into one book, the four essays are related but are not explicitly connected and therefore are different in tone and emphasis and involve an element of repetition, as Fine and Martin (1990) have also noted.

One of the main concepts mobilised in Asylums (1961) is the 'total institution' used to describe all-encompassing institutions 'where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (1961: 11). Activities are tightly scheduled and imposed from above and these are brought together into a rational plan designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution. There also tends to be a sharp staff-inmate split with each residing in different worlds thus becoming hostile to each other. Mental hospitals, prisons, boarding schools, concentration camps, army barracks, ships, monasteries and convents, among others are listed as examples of such an institution. However, Goffman acknowledges that the concept is an ideal type and that it can be expected that other institutions will manifest some characteristics of the total institution. In total institutions, people are subjected to mortifications of self, humiliated and degraded, and may be dispossessed of the collection of roles they once filled in their home world to be replaced with the 'official self' of the institutional world, resulting in a significant restriction of self-determination, autonomy and freedom of action. However, although the total institution is repressive it is also enabling, as Goffman details the acts of resistance that prevail[14]. To be clear, it is not suggested that the schools within this study are total institutions. The school shares some elements of the characteristics of total institutions but it is not the totalizing nature that is of primary concern in this thesis. Rather it is Goffman's analysis of the inmates' worlds within these institutions, their attempts to preserve their self-autonomy and what this tells us about the capabilities of social actors and their relationship to institutional control, which is of interest here. Although total institutions are highly restrictive institutions Goffman believed that the processes that he identified in Asylums (1961) may apply, in some ways, to all institutions. The concepts expounded may therefore be useful for shedding light on the processes and interaction occurring in more ordinary settings such as the school. It is in Goffman's third essay 'the underlife of a public institution' where the resistant elements of the self receive particular attention and where the lapse in institutional control is exposed. This essay he devotes to the informal and unofficial activity occurring in institutions.

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[14] Goffman's work on Asylums can, in some ways, be paralleled with Foucault's (1977) account of the 'carceral society' in 'Discipline and punish'. Foucault also claims that power is invariably accompanied by resistance. However, Goffman's inmates have faces in a way that Foucault's do not (Giddens 1984). The consciousness of Goffman's inmates strikes a closer similarity to the truanting young people of this study and Goffman's attention to micro detail makes his work a more adequate 'fit' as a theoretical framework.

In this third essay, Goffman introduces the notion of 'secondary adjustments' and it is this concept which frames the analysis of the truancy documented within this thesis. Goffman defines secondary adjustments as:

> Any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and what he should get and hence what he should be. Secondary adjustments represent ways in which the individual stands apart from the role and the self that were taken for granted for him by the institution. (Goffman 1961: 172)

This is to be distinguished from the notion of primary adjustment, where the institution and institutional processes are fully supported and social actors follow the role expectations placed on them. In contrast, it is the balance between involvement and disaffection, embracement and resistance that epitomizes the notion of secondary adjustments. These are oppositional practices in which the official expectations and demands are resisted and the inmates decline in some way to except the official view, but *not* in its entirety. Inmates also accommodate and embrace the institution and learn to hide the majority of their secondary adjustments in order to preserve the social order of the institution. Individuals are depicted as 'a stance-taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organisation and opposition to it' (p. 280), and Goffman believes that this recalcitrance is an 'essential constituent of self' rather than an incidental means of defence (Goffman 1961: 279-280). These secondary adjustments belong to the informal world and comprise what Goffman refers to as the 'underlife' of institutions, stating that, 'whenever worlds are laid on, underlives develop' (1961: 267). Goffman suggests that secondary adjustments reach their 'finest flower' in prisons but that 'other total institutions are over run with them too' (p.78). It is argued in this thesis that truancy can be seen to resemble a secondary adjustment. How this concept relates to truancy is dealt with primarily in chapters 5 and 7.

Related to the concept of secondary adjustments is Goffman's notion of an 'official self'. It is the 'official self' that inmates take leave of when participating in secondary adjustments. Goffman has been accused of being inconsistent and unclear in his discussion of self (e.g. Dawe 1973), though Lofland (1980) suggests that Goffman's conceptualisation of the self is threefold. The three fold model consists of the 'official self', the 'performing self' and

'selfhood'. These three selves are given various different names throughout Goffman's work such is his literary way. The 'official self' resides in roles, existing apart from persons, whereas the 'performing self' is the person that plays the role. In entering the institution, alternative official selves held in the home world are ideally to be replaced by the new 'official self' which the institution requires of the individual. In Asylums (1961) a primary adjusted person would seem to be one whose 'performing self' exists in harmony with the 'official self'. In concluding remarks Goffman then, very briefly, introduces the notion of 'selfhood' which is thought to arise out of the conflict between 'official selves' laid on and the 'performing self'. This is the 'stance-taking entity' which was referred to earlier. In this thesis the 'official self' is the role of 'pupil' imbued with its associated institutional demands and expectations.

Goffman is often venomously critiqued for neglecting the issue of power in his work (e.g. Gouldner 1970, 1979). On the contrary I would argue, as others have too (Rogers 1977, 1979, Scott 2010, Williams 1986), that power and control are implicit throughout Goffman's work, but especially in Asylums (1961) and with respect to the notion of secondary adjustments. Asylums represents a departure from the criticism (e.g. Gouldner 1979) that Goffman focuses exclusively on micro-analysis at the expense of structural or institutional frameworks but Goffman is then critiqued for rendering his inmates as passively controlled and powerless. The total institution is repressive and maintains considerable power and control over the lives of its inmates but it is also enabling (Scott 2010). Goffman clearly attributes a significant degree of agency and autonomy to his inmates, as exemplified through his notion of secondary adjustments and other concepts such as role distance[15]. Relational power is certainly evident throughout Asylums and it this relationship between structure and agency that is particularly relevant to this thesis and my understanding of truancy. A further notable criticism lodged against Goffman is that he provides no supporting evidence from the participants themselves (Smith 2006, Fine and Martin 1990), which is presumably because of the covert nature of his ethnography. We are therefore left unclear about the inmates' interpretations of their experience or their own definitions of the situation. It is my intention to address this shortfall by prioritising the voices of the young people in this study.

The findings of this thesis are also informed by 'labelling theory', which has been useful in illuminating discussion on the construction of truancy and 'truants' as a 'social and

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[15] Although the ahistorical nature of Goffman's analysis is perhaps a more warranted critique (see Gouldner 1979, Williams 1986).

educational problem', and has contributed to findings related to how some pupils in this thesis seem to have acquired identities as 'truants' whilst others do not. Labelling theory developed in the early 1960s from interactionist constructs, recognising that rule-breaking is a normal part of everyday life but that the creation of 'deviance' is dependent upon 'social reaction' rather than a product of the act itself.

Howard Becker's (1963) approach to labelling, described in Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (1963), has been particularly influential in labelling theories development and popularity. Particularly pertinent for this study, with regards to the issue of starting points outlined in chapter 2, Becker highlights that those studying deviance cannot 'assume that the category of those labelled deviant will contain all those who actually have broken a rule, for many offenders may escape apprehension and thus fail to be included in the populations of "deviants" they study' (1963: 92). Becker further offers a relevant and useful distinction between two types of rule-breaking behaviour 'pure deviance' and 'secret deviance'. 'Pure deviance' he describes as behaviour 'which both disobeys the rule and is perceived as doing so'. He describes 'secret deviance' as when 'an improper act is committed, yet no one notices it or reacts to it as a violation of the rules'. It is the public labelling of behaviour that Becker sees as having particularly significant consequences. Lemert's (1951, 1967) similar differentiation between 'primary' and 'secondary deviance' is also considered useful for understanding the potential significance of being publically labelled. When rule breaking is unnoticed it is referred to as 'primary deviance'. It can be easily 'normalized' and will have few implications for the rule-breaker. When rule-breaking behaviour is noticed *and* reacted to, particularly by those in authority, labelling theorists argue that it takes on a reality for the rule-breaker. If the rule-breaker is not deterred or not able to normalise or neutralize their behaviour, they may come to accept their public 'deviant' label and internalize it. As the individual struggles to cope with problems arising as a result of their treatment as 'deviants', they engage in increased deviant behaviour as a consequence of the public reaction (Becker 1963, Hargreaves 1976). They have become 'secondary deviants' and embark on a 'deviant career'. It is those who have been publically identified as 'deviants' and the consequences of their labelling that are of most interest to the labelling theorists (e.g. Becker 1963, Hargreaves 1976) In contrast, labelling theorists are not so concerned with those who have not been publically labelled, the 'primary deviants'. In this thesis, an opposite stance is taken as the majority of young people involved in the study do not seem to have acquired public identifies

as 'truants' and yet they are the central focus. Discussion about pupils identified as 'truants' is included in chapter 7 and it is here where labelling theory is drawn upon. In this sense, the majority of the young people in this study might be regarded as similar to Becker's 'secret deviants'. It is worth pointing out that Becker has often been criticised (e.g. Gibbs 1966, Hargreaves 1975) for his notion of 'secret deviance' and thus some clarity on the stance taken within this thesis is necessary. Becker (1974) outlines this predicament in his later reconsideration of labelling theory:

> If we begin by saying that an act is deviant when it is so defined, what can it mean to call an act an instance of secret deviance? Since no one has defined it as deviant it cannot, by definition be deviant; but "secret" indicates that we know it is deviant, even if no one else does. (1974: 187)

There have been many attempts at resolving this issue for Becker (e.g. Hargreaves 1975). However, Becker draws upon support for his concept in the work of Lorber (1967) and it would seem that his clarification is also the most appropriate with regards to the truancy within this thesis. Becker notes:

> Lorber partially resolved this paradox (1967) by suggesting that in an important class of cases the actor himself defined what he did as deviant, even though he managed to keep others from finding out about it, either believing that it really was deviant or recognizing that others would believe that. (1967: 187)

Indeed, the young people of this thesis were clear that although they were not 'mitchers' (i.e. publically identified as 'truants') they did 'mitch'. This is not therefore a researcher imposed knowledge of rule-breaking independent of the actors own accounts, as Hargreaves (1975) supposes in the case of Becker. In addition, as we shall see, the young people were certainly in no doubt that others would believe their behaviour to be 'deviant' if they were to be caught. However, for the sake of clarity, although all the accounts of absence within this thesis are considered to be 'truancy' and are recognised as such by the young people themselves, the thesis will refer to the absences as 'truanting behaviours' and will only use the term 'truant' when referring to those who seem to have been publically labelled as such.

Furthermore, because of the focus on responses to deviance, labelling theorists have often been criticised for not considering why people are deviant in the first place. In contrast this

thesis gives due consideration to the pupils reasons for their truancy as a main research question. The subtleties of *interpretations* of deviance by teachers and pupils provided by phenomenologist accounts of labelling (e.g. Hargreaves et al. 1975) are not included in this study, although it is recognised that there is much to be gained from such an approach. The primary focus of the study is concerned with the pupils' social worlds and their perspectives on their truanting behaviours and the notion of labelling only features as one among a number of factors contributing to the marginalisation of a minority of young people within this study. It is the starting points on my empirical research which this chapter now turns to.

Starting Points and Emerging Design

In chapter 2, when discussing starting points it was suggested that there is no consensus on what truancy is and thus what constitutes a 'truant'. With this in mind I posed the question of where do you start with a study on truancy? and suggested that a more 'fluid' notion of truancy should be adopted, at least to begin with. It was argued that an understanding of what truancy is and the forms that it takes could only really be gained from asking those involved in the act. However, because of the lack of clarity on who 'truants' are, it was considered necessary to avoid attempting to initially sample specifically for 'truants' by making a distinction between 'truants' and 'non-truants'. Rather, it was considered of fundamental importance to start with a cross-section of young people, from which a working understanding of truancy can be explored and from which truanting young people could then be identified and researched further. This section details the starting points of this thesis, decisions made with regards to initial sample selection and the emerging research design which was adopted.

Initial sample selection

A review of the literature revealed that the starting points opted for by researchers can influence the type of truancy that is investigated. I did not want to focus exclusively on the most visible 'truants', rather I wanted to start from a point that made it possible for me to access a variety of different types and forms of truancy. Starting my research by looking exclusively outside of the school for 'truants' and attempting to submerge myself in their worlds was not therefore deemed to be a wise option because it may have been restrictive in terms of the types of young people I would have access to. In order to gain initial access to a

broad cross-section of young people it was decided that the research should start within schools. In an attempt to access a variety of pupil backgrounds, three schools were chosen as initial access points. The schools were chosen because they each had different 'official' absence rates and were in different localities, with different levels of deprivation. Details of these schools, their 'official' absence rates and their locales are discussed in chapter 4 when setting the scene of the study. Briefly, the schools consisted of Pen-Y-Peel High School, Hillsden High School and Cooperfield High School[16], all of which are state-maintained 'community focused' secondary schools. They are all located within three separate areas in the city of Cardiff, South Wales. Although estimates regarding the extent and prevalence of truancy vary widely (see Carroll 1977, Audit Commission 1999, NAO 2005, O'Keeffe and Stoll 1995), South Wales is considered to have some of the highest rates of school absence in Britain, particularly unauthorised absence (Carroll 1977, Reid 2004, Reid 2010). The highest of these absence rates are frequently concentrated in the cities, especially Cardiff.[17] Cardiff was thus considered a particularly suitable focus for the study. The city should not however be assumed to be atypical because of its high absence rates. The official statistics indicate that a range of absence rates exist within the authority, including schools at either extreme.

It was decided to start with 60 pupils, 20 from each school. This is fairly sizable for in-depth, prolonged research, but at this stage I was looking for a cross-section of young people and was attempting to maximise my chances of being able to meet 'truants' (after determining what and who truants are). I also wanted to start with high numbers because of known issues associated with sample attrition. I intended to enter the 'field' for the duration of one academic school year and to maintain regular, preferably daily contact with the young people of the initial sample, although efforts were to be focused on those that self-identified themselves as truants, or as having truanted in the past. I decided to focus my research on pupils from year 9 (13-14 year olds), as pupils in the lower school years (i.e. year 7, 8 & 9) are more likely to be studying a broadly similar curriculum than pupils in the upper school, where alternative 'learning pathways' and 'options' are more commonly available. A number of previous classroom ethnographies (e.g. Willis 1977, Lacey 1970, Hargreaves 1967) have indicated that many of the features and outcomes that have been observed at the end of the

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[16] These are, of course, pseudonyms.
[17] See appendix 1 for absenteeism by Local Education Authority in Wales.

school career have their antecedents much lower down the school and it has been suggested that year 7 is regarded as a 'settling-in' year (Meyenn 1980, Willis 1977).

The contact members of staff within each of the schools were asked to pick 20 young people to participate in the research, ten boys and ten girls[18]. They were asked to pick these pupils *randomly* from a cross-section of young people across the year group (thus, *not* to distinguish between 'truants' and 'non-truants'), with the exception of 3-4 pupils which I asked them to purposely select. Mindful of the possibility that persistent truants may be absent on the days of data collection, I decided to ask the schools to identify 3-4 'persistent absentees' to be involved in the research[19]. These pupils were then specifically asked to make sure they attended on the day of data collection. In chapter 2, I outlined the problems associated with teacher identification, including the possibility of selection bias. However, in this case, the teachers were being asked to pick the majority of the pupils *randomly*, and I was asking for a cross-section of *pupils* rather than 'truants'. Hence, the possibility of selection bias according to common assumptions about what truancy is and who truants are was avoided. Selection bias was more of an issue for the teacher identification of the 'persistent absentees'. The teachers were asked to base their selections of the 'persistent absentees' on the pupils' 'official' absence rates, which I also highlighted as a problematic starting point in chapter 2. However, I made sure to use the word 'absentee' rather than 'truancy', in order to avoid instigating stereotypical choices by the teachers.

Four focus groups were then held in each of the schools so that the meaning of truancy could be explored from the young people's perspectives and a subsequent sample of truanting young people could be established. Details on the backgrounds of the young people that took part in the research are provided in chapter 4 and in appendix 3, and the diverse backgrounds that resulted from this method of sample selection are highlighted.

Emerging research design

An emerging rather than 'fixed' research design is a common feature of ethnographic research. Before entering the 'field' I was relatively familiar with the literature as my Masters

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[18] But also to pick an extra five 'stand-by' pupils in case pupils were absent on the day.
[19] Based on the DCSF definition at the time i.e. pupils with absences totalling 20% or more of the available sessions per school year.

research examined the issue of primary school truancy and I had a broad understanding of existing theoretical work in the fields of sociology, criminology and education. However, I did not enter the field with a fully developed research design or carefully worked out itinerary, beyond my initial access strategy. My aim was to explore the issue of truancy in terms of definition and meaning with a cross-section of young people and to develop a more focused strategy of enquiry from there, based upon the data from this initial encounter. I was obviously aware of common assumptions regarding 'truants' as displayed in the media and in the 'official' discourse but my desire to enter the field with a fluid conception of what truancy may be, meant that it was necessary to suspend any initial preconceptions regarding this prior knowledge as neither true or false. Some writers in the symbolic interactionist tradition (e.g. Becker et al. 1961, Rock 1979) contend that theory and methods should not and cannot be fully developed prior to the field work experience. This is the approach that I generally followed, allowing the investigation to be guided by my experiences during the fieldwork process. I also took a generally reflexive process with respect to research design, throughout the research process, following the advice of a number of authors (e.g. Ball 1984, Delamont 2002). I had no hypothesis or theory to be 'tested' prior to entering the 'field'. I did, however, enter the field with a thorough knowledge of possible research methods and engagement strategies that I might be able to use throughout the year of study and a loose idea of how these might be deployed.

Despite having no firm research design, I had developed a set of broad research questions prior to the field work period, loosely formulated and designed to essentially encompass all angles considered necessary to explore and understand the issue of truancy. These were:

Main aim: to explore the social worlds of truanting young people

1) What is truancy?
2) Who are the 'truants'?
3) Why do young people choose to truant?
4) How do young people truant?
5) What do young people do when truanting from school?
6) What are the implications of their truancy?

These questions continued to frame my enquiry throughout, but once entering the 'field' as the research developed and theory was inductively and iteratively applied, re-applied and modified, these questions in turn produced supplementary questions and focused the original questions. Thus, many additional questions arose, in situ, that could not have been anticipated at the outset and the research shifted focus at different points in the research process in light of new data. The 'methods and data generation' section of this chapter documents the eventual course that the research process took.

Negotiating Access

A considerable milestone to overcome in any social science research is that of access. I needed to negotiate access with the schools and the young people and how this was to be achieved was given significant thought. The first obstacle was gaining access to the three schools, and then I attempted to negotiate and re-negotiate access to the young people, throughout the year of study, as I endeavoured to sustain contact with them. This section outlines how my initial access into the schools was achieved.

Negotiating access through the school was by no means an easy option, as Delamont (2002) highlights, access to formal organisations, particularly schools, can take a substantial amount of time and effort, not least because of the complex bureaucracy that accompanies such institutions. My initial approach was to select three schools with different 'official' absence rates, sending each a formal letter, which I then followed with a telephone call three days later. I was not successful in gaining access on this first approach, and thus the process of selecting three schools began again. Of the schools that declined, 'research saturation' was the main reason given. This certainly opens up debates about over-researched populations and settings. The letters were addressed to the Heads of the school but when phoning it was often difficult to be granted contact with them as, more often than not, they were in meetings or out of their office. Thus, a number of phone calls were usually required. Leaving a message with the school secretaries was rarely successful. Indeed gaining my initial access to the schools (and then to the young people) involved a 'chain of negotiation' with a number of 'gatekeepers' often in a hierarchical fashion (Hood et al. 1996). Of the schools where access was granted, one Attendance Officer phoned me immediately after receiving the initial letter; one was negotiated by talking to the Head over the phone and one involved phoning the

school on a number of occasions, then speaking to the Head of the school and then speaking to the Head of Year 9. In each of the three schools, I was asked to meet face-to-face with the Heads to discuss my proposed research further before access was granted.

At this stage, access was by no means secured so making a good impression in person was imperative to the approval of access. I had heeded Delamont's (2002) advice about dressing appropriately for the specific audience, printed out relevant copies of information sheets, and parental and child consent forms so I appeared prepared if they were asked for and arrived ready to have an informed discussion about my intentions and the benefits of research. It was clear from the outset of each of the meetings that the purpose was to scrutinise my 'real' intentions and to search for any hidden motive. There appeared to be far less concern about how I actually intended to carry out the research in practice, rather the focus seemed to centre on my views regarding non-attendance and on the school in general, as well as its locality. Many researchers have reported similar encounters from 'gatekeepers' wishing to protect their activities and efforts from outside intrusion and have highlighted the delicate process of access negotiations (Beynon 1983, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I made every effort to present an unthreatening 'front' (Goffman 1959, Salisbury 1994) and I sought to avoid being in anyway judgemental about the professional capabilities of the teaching staff and the school in general. This, I believe, was crucial to my success in securing access. In one school, negotiating access in this meeting was particularly intense as the Head openly admitted that he was suspicious and dubious of outside researchers and their intentions, based on previous negative experiences. He was particularly keen to know if I was connected to the Government in any way. These negotiations lasted for over an hour, after the first half an hour his initial hostility appeared to be replaced with an enthusiasm. He was keen to put forward his ideas and perspectives on reasons for truancy and printed out a number of graphs plotting the attendance levels of each year group which we looked through together. I was then asked to meet with the school's Attendance Officer on a separate occasion to discuss the practicalities. In contrast, the Attendance Officer was particularly enthusiastic from the outset and extremely keen to demonstrate the efforts he went to in monitoring truancy and the progress that had been made since his appointment. The initial suspicion was also apparent in the other two schools, although they were certainly less hostile. In one of these schools, the Head was particularly keen to highlight the social and economic deprivation in the

surrounding locality. I then met with the Head of Year 9 and he was given the final decision on whether access should be granted. In the final school, the Head had met with a researcher looking at the same issue in the year previous but had declined him access because of his initial attitude in discrediting the efforts of the teaching staff before any research had actually taken place. This highlights the importance of presenting a non-judgemental 'front' at all times.

From the outset, I detailed my intentions to study the pupils for one year and that most of the research was to take place outside of the schools but that I also might want to return to the schools after the focus groups in order to carry out more school-based research and observation. The continuing (re)negotiation of access to the school for each research stage is outlined further in the methods and data generation section of this chapter.

At one stage, it appeared that my access to one of the schools might be jeopardised when three parents overtly displayed their opposition to the research. Letters of consent had been sent out to pupils' parents and three parents had become hostile to the idea of a researcher scrutinising the behaviour of the community. Two of the parents joined together and visited the Attendance Officer at the school to express their concerns and refuse their children's participation. A further friend of theirs also visited the school the next day. The Attendance Officer phoned me to explain this situation and suggested that if any more parents were to visit then he would regard this as an indication of "community resistance" to being researched and would have to cancel the research. As it happened, no further parents approached the school or denied their child's participation and so the research continued. The issue of consent is discussed further in the next section which looks specifically at the issue of ethics.

Of course, securing access to the schools was only ever access in principle. Securing and maintaining access to the young people was crucial. In this case, access was not a one off process but an on-going procedure involving the issue of 'trust' which develops a lot more gradually and was further complicated by the 'hidden' nature which the majority of truancy was found to take. This process of negotiating and renegotiating access was much more complex and makes sense to be contextualised in the discussion regarding the methods and

data generation which is detailed later in this chapter. First, ethical considerations are detailed because of the role that they play in gaining and sustaining access to young people before research can take place.

Ethical Considerations

The importance of ethical conduct has become of paramount importance to sociological research, which is increasingly being governed by more and more rigorous ethical guidelines (Bryman 2006). Many of the ethical issues associated with research with adults are common to research with children. Yet, research with children or young people can make these issues more acute and can introduce additional concerns, often based on power relationships (Thomas and O'Kane 1998). Researching truancy involves a multitude of ethical issues which are further complicated by the illicit nature of the activity. Ethical consideration must take place at all stages of the research process, considered at the institutional and individual level. Every attempt was made to adhere to the British Sociological Association's (BSA) and the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) codes of ethical standards. I obtained ethical clearance from Cardiff's School of Social Sciences ethics committee. Ethical reflection took place throughout all stages of the research process, representing more than a one-off process of consideration to gain ethical clearance.

Gaining 'informed' consent from research participants is usually regarded as a fundamental part of ethical practice. Research that involves children or young people makes this issue particularly pertinent because of the potentially 'vulnerable' position which they are thought to occupy. Ordinarily, in order to involve young people in the research process, consent from adult 'gatekeepers' (e.g. parents, teachers etc.) is required, which can limit young people's participation (Hill 2005). There has been considerable confusion over whether children or young people are able to give 'informed' consent for their own participation in research. In the UK, parents (or those in loco parentis) tend to be given the right to consent for their children. As Morrow and Richards (1996) highlight, 'children are to a large extent seen as their parents' property' (p. 95). Parental responsibility for their children is also implicated here. Debates regarding competency to consent often centre on the age of the young people involved (Alderson 1995). Clearly, there is considerable difference between a teenager/adolescent and a younger minor but young people are not a homogenous group,

distinguishable only by chronological age, and thus 'competency' is increasingly based on the notion of 'sufficient understanding', what has come to be known as 'Gillick competence' (Heath et al. 2007). It is now becoming increasingly recognised that, where possible, children should make their own decisions about whether they wish to participate or not, recognising the child's right to self-determination (Cohen and Emanuel 1998), but often parental consent must still be sought. This can have implications for participation as the power relations dictating parental rights to protection and responsibility may reduce the child's right to participate and can undermine the child's capacity for agency (Hood et al. 1996, Homan 2001). However, acquiring parental consent is unavoidable when clearance is required from ethics committees and when research is based in an institution such as the school. The research within this study, thus, required consent from parents and the school. I additionally sought 'informed' consent from the young people themselves, acknowledging their rights to consent, and made their rights to dissent clear to them before any research was undertaken. In the previous section I discussed how three young people had to be excluded because of their parents' refusal to give consent. It is not known whether this was in consultation with their children or not. Consent was also denied by a further parent in another of the schools. All of the other parents consented to their children's participation.

For the study of truancy, the requirement to gain parental consent also raises an additional pertinent issue regarding the appropriateness of seeking parental consent for an issue which the young people may not want their parents to know about. This was a particular concern for me because I did not want the young people's behaviour to change in any way and clearly parental knowledge of truancy may lead to sanction for the young person or/and monitoring of their actions. However, the requirements of the ethics committee meant that parental consent could not be avoided. The decision was thus made to carefully phrase the information and consent forms so as not to confirm that the child was a truant (see appendix 2). The parents were informed that the research was about attendance and absence and I detailed what methods might be involved throughout the year and stated that some of the research might take place when the young people were truanting but that I would not entice the young people to truant in any way. I also stated that the initial sample was to consist of a general cross-section of young people.

Care was taken to ensure that the content of the information sheets and consent forms for the young people were age appropriate. It was important that I felt the young people understood what they were consenting to. As Alderson (2005) suggests 'valid consent is both informed and willing' (2005: 4). I also read the forms out and discussed the process more informally with the young people before asking if they would like to consent or not. This took place before any research commenced but consent was regarded as an on-going issue and so separate information sheets and consent forms were used for each different method that I utilised (see appendix 2). Often the young people indicated to me that they saw this as unnecessary as they had already initially agreed to be involved but I wanted to remind them of the nature of our relationship and the fact that our interactions were been viewed as 'data' by me. Although they seemingly understood that they were being 'researched', the notion of a 'PhD' was an alien term to them. Instead, they would often describe my work as a "Uni project" or would fixate on the idea of the research being undertaken so that I could write a book on them. This was their understanding of what I meant by a thesis and was also picked up on from our discussions regarding the ways in which the research may be disseminated in the future. Thus, they would commonly ask how I was getting on with "writing the book".

Confidentiality, privacy and trust are important ethical issues in any research, and especially in relation to the power imbalance between young people and adults. The illicit and sensitive nature of truancy also introduces a further dimension to these issues. The boundaries of confidentiality were explored with the young people and ascertained before the first stage of the research took place. This included telling them that any truancy they told me about or which I observed would not be revealed to their teachers, parents or others. I also explained how their names would be replaced by "fake names" as would the names of anyone else they discussed and the names of the school and areas in which they lived. I was also clear about how data would be stored and how future research might be disseminated. The promise of confidentiality resulted in one change to the research project. This involved photographs taken by the young people (this method is discussed in the next section) and the associated difficulties in protecting the anonymity of the pupils and the localities which were photographed. This resulted in the decision to exclude the actual images themselves from the thesis. The names of the participants and the schools were anonyomised, through the use of pseudonyms at an early stage of transcription. Identifying names were kept on a separate file

with a unique identifier secured on the University's secure computer network. Trust and mutual respect involves a more gradual process which developed over the course of the year.

Decisions over what methods to use are particularly important when researching young people, with the possibility of improving ethical conduct and enhancing the ethical soundness of the research process. As Alderson (1995) highlights, 'ethical research has to use appropriate and efficient methods' (pp. 28-29). Thomas and O'Kane (1998) have suggested that the use of participatory techniques can overcome many ethical problems in working with children, redressing the power imbalance between adult and young person. I have discussed the importance of recognising young people as competent social actors and my desire to include their 'voices' centrally within this thesis. Developing a range of 'participant centred' techniques that afford the young people a degree of control in the research process was seen as a central part of this endeavour (Punch 2002). The emphasis was on developing knowledge *with* the young people in ways that were relevant and meaningful to them. Young people are similar to adults in many ways but also have different competencies to which methods can be adapted (James et al. 1998, Nesbitt 2000). Deploying a range of different methods and research techniques was also considered useful for sustaining the interest of the young people, throughout the year of study (Hill 1997, Morrow 1999). It is to these methods that the chapter now turns.

Methods and Data Generation

In chapter 2, when discussing starting points, it was argued that there is no clarity about which young people engage in truanting behaviours, and that focusing on the most visibly identifiable 'truants'[20] when researching truancy may sufficiently limit the scope of investigation. It was also argued in chapter 1 that it is the most visible 'truants' which tend to predominate in the dominant and 'official' discourse on truancy. In view of this, I set out to research truancy from a number of different angles with the aim of ensuring that it was not only the most visible that were studied[21]. I needed an approach to data generation which was capable of encompassing different types of truanting behaviours, that could include young

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[20] According to common assumptions regarding who 'truants' are, or by researching only those visibly engaged in the act.
[21] Clearly the visible 'truants' could not be left out of the research process either as this would also provide a partial view of truancy.

people that might not have been immediately identifiable as 'truants'. Selecting methods that would respect young people's agency as social actors and active participants in the creation of their own worlds of meaning was also crucial to the methodological approach taken within this study. The following section provides a comprehensive discussion on the methods selected for data generation.

A qualitative multi-methods approach was adopted so that a range of different starting points could be used and so that a multi-layered understanding of truancy might ensue. In essence acting as a 'promiscuous bricoleur' (Delamont and Atkinson 1995: vi) in addressing the complex and multifaceted issue that is truancy. The methods used in this study allowed data to be generated in both public and private contexts. Some have suggested that 'talk' that takes place in a public/social context (e.g. focus groups) can be potentially less authentic or honest than that which takes place privately (Hollander 2004, Backett and Alexander 1991), with a distinction made between 'public' and 'private' voices (Wilson 1997). However, Atkinson et al. (2003: 134) highlight that 'methodologically speaking we have no warrant for privileging one register of talk over another' and that both contexts are subject to constraints of convention. Utilising a range of different methods in different contexts allows the young people to express different aspects of their experiences enriching my understanding of their social worlds. Clearly as a result this may mean that different information is provided in different contexts as Flick et al. (2004: 179) highlights 'too little attention is paid to the fact that every different method constitutes the issue it seeks to investigate in a different way'. This is not a negative issue. The use of multiple methods can work together in a complementary way to provide a deeper understanding of the issue under study. However, alongside this there was a recognition of the importance of cross-checking views expressed in one context with those expressed in another. Therefore the use of a range of qualitative methods was also deployed to allow for a degree of 'methodological triangulation'.

'Methodological triangulation' was undertaken in order to check and compare data from different methods, clarify meaning, enhance deeper understanding, reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and address some of the problems associated with the veracity of claims made in different settings and among different people. The strategy of triangulation has received much critique, with some arguing that it implies a search for a single 'objective'

'truth' and is thus concurrent with positivist or postpositivist philosophical commitments and thus ontologically and epistemologically at odds with interpretivist modes of thought (e.g. Bloor 1997, Blaikie 1991). However, Seale disputes this arguing that triangulation is a valuable skill that has a place within a variety of paradigms and should therefore be seen as 'autonomous from any paradigm position' (Seale 1999: 472). Others, (e.g. Atkinson et al. 2003, Flick 1998) do not dismiss the value of triangulation but suggest that conceiving of it as a rigid procedural tool for enhancing 'validity' is inadequate. In this study, social reality it not considered to be unproblematic nor is the use of 'between-method' (Denzin 1978) triangulation adopted in an attempt to guarantee a prescriptive sense of accuracy. However, the cross-checking inherent in methodological triangulation is still considered useful for the reasons outlined above, though recognising that doing so does not provide a 'total' picture of the young people's realities (Silverman 1985). This was not a 'truth' searching exercise as such. In addition to the 'cross-checking' I looked at the accounts generated via the different methods and contexts of talk and was mindful to look for contrasting perspectives given by the same pupils but with a view to exploring these complexities analytically rather than expose information as true or false.

It was not possible to triangulate all data gathered from the multiple methods for every informant but for the majority of informants data was triangulated by at least two methods (but often more, as shown in figure 1). Focus groups, technology-mediated communication (TMC), photo elicitation and observation were the main methods employed throughout the year of study. Figure 1 charts each of the data generation methods and details which young people were involved in each of the different data generation stages. Focus groups were used as a point of initial contact with the young people, so all pupils involved in the study participated in these. The other methods were deployed more flexibly, largely dependent upon the types of truancy the different young people were involved in and on their engagement preferences. The entire initial sample did not participate in every stage of the research process. After the initial focus groups, the data generation stages overlapped. They are discussed below in a linear fashion but at any one time an individual could be involved in a number of the different research methods. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with four members of staff (one from each of the schools and an additional staff member in Hillsden High School). The aim of these interviews was to provide some contextual

information about school policies and procedures. As these adult interviews were not the main focus of the research they are not discussed in any further detail below. Each of the methods used when researching the young people are now discussed separately.
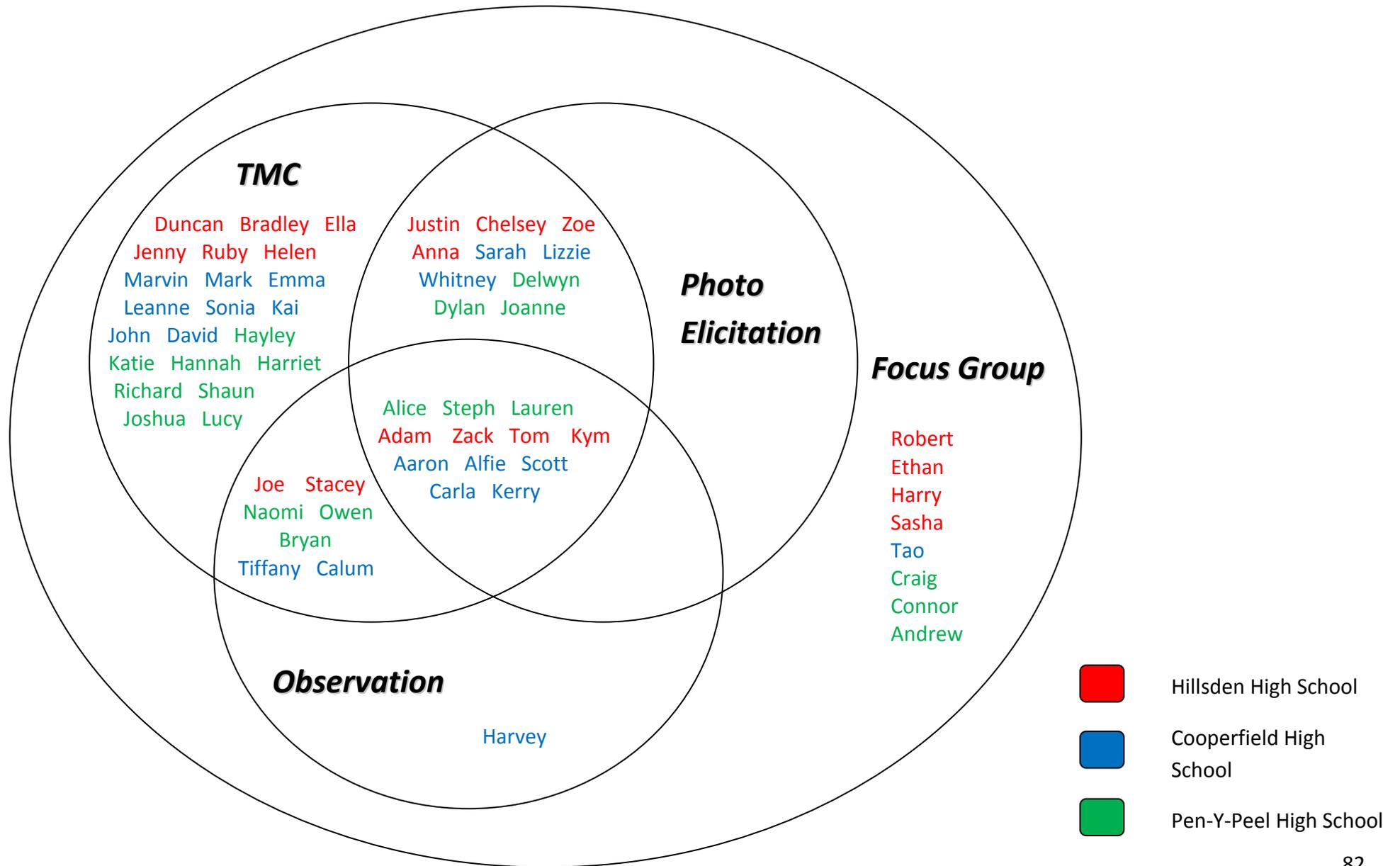
Figure 1: *Individuals involved in each data collection method (N=60)*

Focus groups

Why Focus Groups?

Focus groups have become increasingly popular in the social sciences in recent years, evolving considerably from their initial establishment within the field of sociology in the 1940s and there subsequent dominance in market research (Stewart et al. 2007). The primary role of the focus groups was to provide an initial access strategy to a cross-section of young people, so that the meaning of truancy could be established from the young person's perspective and a sample of truanting young people could be identified for further research[22]. The collective nature of focus groups was considered to be particularly suitable for this purpose. Furthermore, focus groups are used increasingly in research with children (Ringrose and Renold 2012, Drakeford et al. 2009, Riley and Rustique-Forrester 2002, Hoppe et al. 1995, Hurley 1998, Morgan et al. 2002) and thus focus groups were considered an appropriate method to use to elicit pupils' perspectives.

Focus groups allow for the unique opportunity of collective sense making, and meaning attribution in a social context (Bryman 2001). As Morgan (1997) suggests 'The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.' (Morgan 1997: 12). Existing literature on truancy at the secondary school level had depicted it as a predominantly group based activity, thus, if meaning in relation to truancy is generated through social interaction within and amongst groups, focus groups appeared ideal to start exploring such meaning-making (Denscombe 1995). Even if truancy occurred independent of a group, it was felt that any personal experiences in relation to truancy, or feelings on the matter, were more likely to be revealed in the context of a social gathering of pupils rather than individually to an adult 'stranger'.

Morgan (1998) suggests that focus groups are particularly useful for projects with a primary emphasis on exploration and discovery, where the issue of delegating control of the discussion to the group is clearly an advantage (Morgan 1997, 1998). As this focus group research was to represent the first phase of data generation and the initial contact with the

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[22] Although being mindful of the fact that pupils may wish to identify themselves as a truanting young person in the subsequent stages of the research process rather in the initial focus group meeting.

young people, exploration of the topic was vital. Valuable insights can emerge from the direct comparison of similarities and differences of experiences and perspective which participants make. The researcher essentially provides the 'focus' of the research, but it is the group interaction that provides the data (Morgan 1997), with the synergistic effects of the group being crucial to exploration and coverage, and not just the researcher (Morgan and Kreuger: 1993). In this sense, based on the level of interaction and data produced, focus groups are significantly distinguishable from group interviews, of which they are a form. Kitzinger (1994, 1995) argues that interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups because the interaction between participants highlights their views of the world, the language they use about an issue and their values and beliefs about a situation. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences.

Furthermore, focus groups have been recognised as a successful and ethically 'sensitive' strategy in research with young people, due to their potential to reduce adult-child power differentials (e.g. Hoppe et al. 1995, Morgan et al. 2002, Wilson 1997). The less invasive and confrontational nature (Mauthner 1997, Morrow 2005) of the group setting was considered particularly advantageous for eliciting conversation on the issue of truancy, where it was considered likely that individuals may be wary of contributing to discussion given the 'deviant' labelling of the act. There are also suggestions that participants may feel more relaxed in a group atmosphere, with less pressure to answer continuously, which may actually encourage their contribution and the details of their responses (e.g. Hoppe et al. 1995). I was mindful that undertaking the focus groups within the school may exclude pupils who were truanting on the day, but I hoped that at least some young people with experiences of truancy might be present and that they could introduce me to friends who also truanted at a later stage.

Practicalities – who, when and how?
The decision was made to over sample[23] for the focus groups due to the nature of the topic concerned where absence was possible. Twenty-five pupils were therefore chosen from across the year group in each of the three schools, although it was only intended that 20

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[23] Initially select more pupils than I intended to use in the focus groups and to obtain consent from the parents of all of these pupils.

would actually be involved in the focus groups (60 people in total).[24] The groups were stratified in terms of gender, so two groups of girls and two groups of boys took part in separate focus groups within each school[25]. Segregation of groups in terms of gender is thought to be a particularly useful strategy in making young people feel at ease with participation and to allow for equal opportunities of participation, as boys are often considered to over-dominate in conversations in group settings, talking loudly and more frequently (Hoppe et al. 1995, Mauthner 1997). A multiplicity of recommendations regarding the ideal numbers to involve in group discussions was found in the literature. Following the advice from a number of reports which concentrated on focus groups with young people (e.g. Hoppe et al. 1995, Morgan et al. 2002), it was decided that each focus group should consist of five children. This decision was based on the need to ensure productive flow of conversation and also to avoid logistical problems (e.g. poor quality recordings) (Gray 2004). Each focus group took place in an empty classroom, usually free from distraction.

An hour was set aside for the focus groups in order to fit in with the schedule of the school, which included time to set ground rules and ensure comfortability with consent. The young people then created name badges for themselves, which already served to 'break the ice' as they negotiated over colours of the felt tip pens etc. I also attempted to establish a tone of informality at the outset by introducing myself by my first name, as opposed to 'miss', in an effort to position myself as a 'non-authoritarian adult' (Corsaro 1997). The manner and tone in which I spoke to the young people also reflected this, and consideration was given over clothing, purposely selected so as not to reflect that of what I assumed a typical teacher would wear whilst at the same time not seeming inappropriate in front of the teachers (Mandell 1991, Mauthner 1997, Delamont 2002).

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[24] This turned out to be a wise strategy as inevitably pupils from the selected sample were absent on the days when data collection took place. Undertaking four different focus groups in each of the school was also useful to this end, because it meant that pupils who were absent for some of the day could join a different focus group later on.

[25] However, Cooperfield High School insisted that the focus groups take place during in the time allocated for PSHE, which was once a fortnight. The Head of Year was absent on a couple of the days when data collection was supposed to take place. In the end, he proposed that I research all ten girls in one group. I initially rejected this but on the next PSHE session the Head of year was absent again which meant waiting a further two weeks before I could access the girls (after already waiting for over a month) and so on the next meeting I agreed that the girl groups could be merged into one. As a result six focus groups were conducted with boys and five focus groups were conducted with girls.

In line with the heuristic and explorative aims of the research and the desire to elicit the pupils' perspectives and experiences of truancy, it was decided that minimal structure should be used during the conduction of the focus groups. This consisted of a loose topic guide with a number of tentative issues raised in each of the focus groups rather than a more rigid interview schedule. In focus group research the role of the researcher moves from that of interviewer to moderator. It was decided that medium level moderation as suggested by Cronin (2001) should be used to aid rather than determine the direction and focus of the discussion, allowing the participant's agenda to predominate, giving the pupils the opportunity to frame further discussion around the issue of truancy as they wished.

Each group commenced with the use of visual aids in the form of photographs which were used to facilitate discussion on the conceptualisation and meaning of truancy from the young people's perspective. How this was achieved is discussed in chapter 4. Discussion began immediately as the young people explored the meaning of truancy and offered discussions about their own experiences of truancy and articulated their reasons. Such discussions were enhanced through what Kitzinger (1994) has referred to as 'collective remembering' (p. 105), as participants discussed times they had truanted previously. This strategy was particularly beneficial to the depth of data achieved as the young people worked together to elaborate further on the specifics of incidences. The 'tagging on' (Lewis 1992: 416) which occurred when pupils finished each other's sentences or interrupted their interpretation of the situation was problematic. But in these cases I would try and remember to go back to the original contributor to probe for their initial interpretation of the story. In most cases the children talked at length without the need for any intervention, with some children acting as moderators themselves, encouraging discussion from quieter friends. Ordinarily however, there was one or two within each group which tended to dominate, thus moderation was essential to ensure that the voices of the others in the group could be heard. In contrast to some previous research (e.g. Riley and Rustique-Forrester 2002), both the boys and girls seemed equally vocal and open to sharing their experiences with the group.

One technique I used when conversation began to dry up or when I felt that 'quiet ones' were not getting the opportunity to talk, was the 'thought shower'. This rather simply consisted of a piece of A3 coloured card, placed in the middle of the group. I asked the pupils to think

about reasons why pupils might truant from school and then went round the group asking each member and one of the pupils wrote the responses on the card. This also allowed those with little experience of truancy to contribute further. Conversation was then elaborated on the reasons that were given, if they had not already discussed the issue. A further integrative strategy which I used to round-off the focus groups was the prospective postcard method, where I asked the young people to imagine that the Government had asked for their advice on how to reduce the number of people missing school, and how they could get pupils to attend school more. They then individually wrote their answers on the back of a postcard. The idea here was that they could include things that they did not want to say in front of the rest of the group. At the end of the focus groups I asked if any of the young people would like to be involved in further research, and if so, what method was best for me to contact them by.

Reflections and limitations

Methodologically the focus groups were extremely useful in yielding a wealth of rich, complex data, much greater than originally anticipated. The primary benefit of the group context for this research was the 'safety in numbers' aspect which the group discussion of truancy appeared to foster. After one person had been open about their experiences of truancy, others also appeared comfortable to discuss their experiences, seemingly reassured that others had shared the information with me (Wilson 1997 describes a similar climate of disclosure in her research). This, I believe, was subsequently a key factor in the young people's decisions to be involved further within the research process. If I had interviewed the pupils individually, particularly in the school setting, it is likely that they would have been hesitant to divulge such information for fear of reprisal. The focus groups also appeared to act as key way for the young people to test the boundaries of my trust, and the extent to which my role differed from that of their teachers. For example, the young people would openly swear in conversation and then look to me for my reaction etc. Pollard (1985: 105) sums this up when he says there is always 'the issue of proving that what I said I meant'. The focus groups acted as a good way for the young people to test the boundaries of trust in the company of their peers.

Many researchers have expressed concerns about the level of interaction and disclosure possible in group based research. Burgess (1984) for example, has suggested that members

will normally only produce views that can be publicly stated. It is thought (e.g. Walker 1985) that members of the group may withhold information about their behaviour because of social desirability bias, presenting 'officially' acceptable accounts because of the researcher or peer presence. Thus some young people may have been reluctant to reveal information about truancy or their more private views and feelings. The opposite is also possible, young people may claim to have been involved in truancy because they perceived that the group as a whole found it to be a desirable and acceptable behaviour or might have exaggerated their views on certain issues. Kreuger (1998) has highlighted the possibility of outright distortion of the truth. Thus there is always the concern that what participants say they do or feel may not be a true reflection of their behaviour, despite the synergistic benefits. This is an issue associated with the group context but is also perceived as a problem concerning the reliance on language in general, to represent behaviour and thoughts (e.g. Bourdieu 1977). Most of the participants in this research seemed generally comfortable in expressing their views and experiences in my presence and in front of their peers, even where these contrasted. The pupils generally listened to each other and would probe each other in a thoughtful manner and mirror back what had been said in an effort to better understand their peers' accounts. If I sensed exaggeration in the excitement of a group exchange on a particular topic then I ensured that I probed pupils for their individual accounts once the excitement had died down. As a result, pupils were able to elaborate on their own individual interpretation of the particular issue or situation. Clearly it cannot be known to what extent the young people were actually expressing the 'truth'. There were no explicit signals of uncomfortably expressed by any participants although some were more at ease with conversation and dominated more than others. However, it is acknowledged that this form of research may only act as an indicator of thought and behaviour and thus corroboration and triangulation is deemed to be particularly advantageous. The focus groups only marked the beginning of the research process and thus opportunity for further corroboration was possible.

The group interaction of focus groups is analytically advantageous as the similarities and differences in perspectives and experience that are voiced can be analysed contextually, rather than attempting to create this process of comparison and contrast through isolated interviews (Morgan 1998). Thus, allowing for an insight into contextual factors which may influence the young people's truancy. Yet the sheer amount of data produced through focus

groups should not be overlooked. This made transcription particularly lengthy, with the added difficulty when transcribing of trying to remember whose voice was whose and who said what, which can normally be overlooked when the group is the unit of the analysis but I was analysing both the group and the individual. Transcribing the focus groups on the evening of the day they occurred was vital to reduce this. The issue of talking over each other is also problematic, despite efforts to reduce this happening through moderation, inevitably it does occur and in some cases can make voices indistinguishable. With the aim of reflection, on a subsequent occasion I asked the young people about their views on the focus group method. It was frequently suggested that they had found it 'fun' and there were suggestions that they appreciated being able to voice their opinions, feeling and experiences in front of their peers and in turn to see how their peers also felt.

Technology-mediated communication

Why TMC?

It was initially intended that the role of TMC would be to facilitate the other stages of the research process. However, it soon became apparent that TMC could play a much more significant role in data generation than originally anticipated and it was subsequently employed as a research tool in its own right. The predominant forms of TMC referred to in this section are Internet-based messaging (in this case MSN) and to a lesser extent, social networking sites, mobile phone conversations and text messages.

In recent years, young people's increasing use of ICTs has received considerable attention from academics, politicians and the media, some heralding its potential whilst others are decisively hesitant. The degree of this expansion is contested (Facer and Furlong 2001) but there is no denying that communication via ICTs has a persuasive presence in the everyday lives of a vast amount of young people. Murthy (2008) highlights the implications for researchers when he suggests that ''everyday life' for much of the world is becoming increasingly technologically mediated' (Murthy 2008: 849). The use of computer-mediated communication as a means of generating and analysing research data is rapidly developing (See Dicks 2012, Mann and Stewart 2000, Davies 2004). James and Busher (2009) have suggested that the significant impact that the internet has had on the ways individuals construct their everyday lives offers researchers exciting opportunities to develop and adapt traditional methods for the virtual environment. Researching the everyday lives of the young

people involved in this study was fundamental to the interactionist approach taken to understanding the social worlds of the young people from their perspective. Whilst I do not wish to assert that the social lives of these young people exist only online, as this was not the case, what it does highlight is the expansion of new cultures of communication which researchers should be alert to when attempting to engage with young people. Once this study had begun and I witnessed the prevalence of TMC and the centrality of the virtual worlds within my informants' lives it became clear that I needed to think further about how the young people themselves were conceptualising space, place and time. It seemed that for them, the virtual was fundamental thus necessitating the increasing use of TMC as a research method throughout the year of study. Therefore the use of technology-mediated-communication was undertaken in recognition of the changing nature of interaction in contemporary young people's everyday lives and with the hope of the data generation being meaningful to their social worlds.

There is a need also to recognise the increasingly 'mobile' nature of technology-mediated communication and interactions among people. Urry (2007 see also Buscher and Urry 2009) contends that previously social science has been 'a-mobile' neglecting the personal and cultural significance of movement and communication in people's lives and overly focusing on face-to-face interaction and Fincham et al. (2010: 2) have suggested that we have not yet adequately attended to the variety of techniques which could be employed to 'better understand a world in movement.' Urry (2007) argues that research methods need to be 'on the move' to simulate the different forms of movement of 'people, information and objects' (p.39) and capture the significance of intermittent presence and absence, proximity and distance that are an enduring feature of social life. Observation is clearly key to recording the mobility of truancy (this is discussed later in the chapter). However, incorporating technology-mediated communication into the research design also simulates the young people's own usage of such technologies in their everyday lives. In doing so, there was the potential to capture the young people's feelings and experiences as they moved through different spaces and places via mobile phone communication but also via internet communication as their virtual movements entered cyberspace. Utilising 'mobile' technology-mediated communication also allowed for the possibility of overcoming some of the restrictions of accessing and interacting with young people engaged in truanting behaviours as they entered and moved through spaces and places out-of-bounds to a researcher

At the young people's request, the main form of TMC used for data generation was MSN. Instant Messaging is a form of synchronous computer-mediated communication between two or more people. At the time when this study took place MSN was a particularly common form of messenger in the UK. In many ways the interaction that Instant Messaging entails is not too far removed from the behaviour traditionally observed by researchers of face-to-face interaction, as Gross et al. (2002) Illustrates:

> Because of its dyadic, real time and private format, the IM is structurally and functionally comparable to other important and pervasive forms of social interaction in adolescence: 'hanging out' face to face and talking on the phone (Gross et al. 2002: 77).

Indeed, it would seem that there are many similarities between face-to-face communication and technology-mediated communication. Rettie (2009), drawing upon concepts developed by Goffman for face-to-face interaction, has highlighted that synchronous technology-mediated communication creates an intersubjective social experience similar to face-to-face encounters with a shared time frame and mediated co-presence despite being in different locations, whereas asynchronous technology-mediated communication does not. Computer-mediated communication has also developed features that allow for the expression and interpretation of emotion (e.g. smilies, graphics etc.) that have arisen to replace the body language and intonation of face-to-face interactions (Seymour 2001). However, Mann and Stewart (2000) rightly remind us that there are distinct differences also, including the loss of more tacit non-verbal data which could be conveyed via face-to-face interviews. Herring (2004) has pointed out that many young people with Internet access have come to naturalise Instant Messaging as an ordinary part of their lives. Because of the prominence of MSN in the young people lives, almost daily contact could be maintained with the majority of the pupils in this study making this a particularly useful research tool for gaining entry into their social worlds. On-line communication has also been found to be a useful method for reducing problems associated with dominant and shy participants in public contexts such as focus groups (Scott 2004). Therefore, given that this research started with focus groups, incorporating a more 'private' form of communication was thought to be important in order to reach the 'voices' of all participants.

Practicalities – who, when and how?

It was initially felt that TMC, in particular computer-mediated communication, could be useful to keep in contact with the young people after the initial focus groups. However, I was aware

that the drawback of computer usage is that it is restricted to digital 'haves' or at least those with digital social capital, rather than 'have-nots' (Murthy 2008). After the focus groups I asked all of the young people (regardless of whether they had identified themselves as 'truants' or not) if they would like to be involved in the research process and if they did what was their preferred method for maintaining contact. I was willing to adopt a variety of methods. Most suggested that they stayed in contact with friends outside of school via MSN, and that would be the most convenient form of communication for them. A couple suggested that they would prefer to communicate via the social networking site Bebo, one opted for email and a handful said they would prefer to be contacted via telephone because they rarely made use of online communication. Roughly three quarters of the sample supplied multiple contact details, so that it was possible to contact them by different methods if I could not reach them by their preferred method.

On returning from the focus groups, I added the young people's details via MSN and started communication by thanking them for their earlier participation. Following this initial gesture I was surprised how much conversation was suddenly communicated to me in response, especially as we had only just met. It was then that I realised the potential MSN held as a research tool. I also recalled some of the conversations in the focus groups where the pupils had suggested that often when truanting from home they would spend their time on the Internet. I therefore decided to log-on in the day, during school time and sure enough a number of the young people were online and some immediately initiated conversation with me, making no attempt to hide their home-based truancy from me by logging off. Thus, I had stumbled upon a way of maintaining real time contact with young people when they truanted at home, a much more latent form of truancy which would not have been observable to me through other means and which has generally escaped the researcher's gaze. Whilst at the same time MSN also allowed me to communicate with a significant proportion of the sample on an evening, meaning that almost daily contact was maintained with the majority of my initial sample.

The young people seemed to spend a considerable amount of time on MSN 'talking' to a wide network of people and would frequently instigate conversation with me. As a research tool I would basically ask a lot of everyday questions about their interests, what they had been

doing etc. as well as more direct questions about their truancy. My aim was to understand their social worlds, influences that may impact on their decisions to truant, how their decisions to truant were made and how they spent their time when truanting. Many of the conversations that took place on MSN could be described as 'ethnographic chats' or 'conversations with purpose' (Burgess 1988) but these were also interspersed by periods of more direct questioning. They seemed to be happy with this balance. In turn, they would also question me, in a manner which they usually did not when I spoke to them through face-to-face communication. Towards the end of the research project, a couple of the participants had got mobile phones that enabled them to access MSN through their mobile phones for free, so contact with these young people could be maintained at any time and place. In this case, the girls in question also held conversations with me whilst they were on the school grounds and on a couple of occasions messages were exchanged when they were participating in in-school truancy. However, I generally kept such conversations short, so as not to encourage their continuing absence from lessons.

Contact was maintained with six young people by mobile phone calls. This method proved less effective. Five of these young people had suggested that it was their preferred means of communication and so I made the decision to try and contact them in this way once a week. In reality, phone calls took place less frequently than this. The pupils seemed happy to talk in this way when they were free, but there was often considerable background noise, such that trying to maintain conversation was difficult. For the first couple of months I maintained these once a week phone calls but as the other methods were deployed, the usage of the telephone as a research tool declined. Some of these young people also rang me on their own accord from time-to-time throughout the year. Text messages were also exchanged with 16 members of the initial sample but this was usually to arrange face-to-face meetings rather than for data generation per se.

Reflections and limitations

The use of MSN as a method for sustaining contact with the young people and as an interviewing tool was a vital addition to the research process. The specific strength of this form of research, within the context of the study of truancy, was the way in which it was possible to remain in daily contact with those who truanted in a less visible manner.

Researching young people, there are few other ways that situational contact could have been maintained whilst the pupils were truanting within their homes, for reasons of ethics and safety. This method also allowed me to generate significant information about the day-to-day lives and social worlds of the young people because of the frequency of contact that was maintained through the use of MSN. The depth of conversation I was able to engage in with the boys over MSN was another advantage. Cross gender conversations are common place via MSN and the data generated in this means, seemed richer than that which occurred during my time observing the boys. Also some of those who had appeared 'shy' and quiet in the focus groups suddenly came to life in our MSN conversations, one girl in particular (Chelsey) seemed to transform under such methods. The textual rather than physical embodied nature of computer-mediated communication is often cited as one if its main benefits for such reasons (Scott 2004). The lack of visual clues certainly seemed to foster an environment where participants talked openly about their feelings and emotions and about more illicit encounters they had been involved in. Computer-mediated conversation holds the potential for reducing distortion of accounts based on participants interpretations of the researchers social characteristics and their judgements about the desired responses required of them (Mann and Stewart 2000, James and Busher 2006). As I had already met and held focus groups with these young people and continued to meet with them off-line over the course of the year, this benefit would not have been effective. Nevertheless, pupil's conversations with me did seem to be more familiar and informal over MSN. Conversations over MSN also seemed to be broader and more open via this means of communication, perhaps relating to the 'private' context of MSN or the ethical benefits that computer-mediated communication can have.

It did seem that the more 'private' context of the communication which took place over MSN generated more personal disclosure than was evident in the 'public' context of the focus group setting. This is not to say that I felt more confident in the veracity of the on-line data when compared to the focus group data, rather the different contexts seemed to be shaped by different conventions regarding 'appropriate' topics to be discussed in 'private' and 'public' settings. This disclosure usually concerned discussion about family life and personal relationships. However, attitudes to school did not seem to vary by context, the pupils seemed to be comfortable articulating the same views in both contexts. The interpersonal

work which was developed through the face-to-face focus groups did seem to be advantageous in helping to convey rapport and trustworthiness in the mediated context, aspects which Seymour reports having found more complicated to convey in the body-less medium (Seymour 2001). My relationships with the students also developed further over the course of the year, strengthening rapport, which might have also influenced the personal disclosure evident in our online conversations. A wealth of data was generated via MSN because of the frequency of interaction between myself and the participants that this method allowed. However, because of the speed of communication that is typical of instant messaging short answer responses were generally elicited, contrasting significantly from the in-depth reflective accounts that were elicited via the photo elicitation interviews and the in some cases the focus groups. Arskey and Knight (1991) note that similar responses can be typical of telephone interviewing also. The conversations that took place via the telephone in this study provided slightly more depth than the MSN conversations. However, interruptions and background noise often made such conversations difficult to sustain. The duration of our MSN conversations over the course of a year was however particularly beneficial in allowing underdeveloped points or short responses to be returned to in later conversations. James and Busher (2006), in reference to their use of asynchronous email interviews, note the importance of this iterative and reflective process for establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of research.

Ethically the pupils had the upper hand here to some degree. As Bonebrake (2002) asserts 'The Internet provides a unique environment for relationship development; it can be very personal yet at the same time, a feeling of personal space can be maintained' (p. 553). The young people had the option to log off whenever they no longer wanted to talk to me. There was also the option of 'appearing off-line' where they could remain logged on but would appear offline to me. For participants the use of MSN may exert less pressure than face-to-face methods as they can leave and re-enter the conversation whenever they want to and participate from locations of their choice, whilst continuing their usual day-to-day activities. MSN (and text messaging) also allows the possibility to think about and review responses during the conversation enhancing reflection. However, the reduced sense of social presence that computer-mediated conversations can offer, alongside the tendency for holding multiple simultaneous conversations, does hold the possibility that pupils might have felt disinhibited

to the extent that they disclosed information that they might have later come to regret (Scott 2004). It is however hoped that the duration of this communication and my continued relationships with these pupils over the course of the year might have reduced this possibility, by providing subsequent opportunity for such concerns to be raised. Pupils were told that they could withdraw from the study at any point and ask for any data related to them to be withdrawn also.

However, there were some limitations arising from the use of MSN. Three of the initial sample were lost after the focus group stage because it was not possible to decipher their MSN addresses which they had noted down for me. I regained contact with one of these during my observations, but did not regain contact with the other two. Additionally, some of the young people only used MSN occasionally, logging-in once a week at most, thus the level of contact achieved was less than that which was achieved with those who used MSN on a daily basis. A couple also had no internet for periods of the year and were only contactable via MSN when they were using another computer or when their home internet had been reconnected. Additionally, others would go through phases of intensive MSN usage and then infrequent usage. The lack of social presence when using TMC can also potentially lead to feelings of disinhibition which can result in people saying things that they may later regret or to act in ways that they would be unlikely to during face-to-face interaction (Scott 2004). This was only made evident to me on one occasion when one of the boys from the sample tried to instigate an indecent conversation with me. The decision was made to discontinue conversation with him via MSN. Therein lies a further issue for researchers, it can rarely be known for certain whether the person sitting down at the keyboard is the participant or another person who has access to the participant's account (Allan 1996). However, the corroboratory nature of this research did reduce the impact of this concern. A further limitation of this research, also noted in Rettie's (2009) research, is the possibility of multiple simultaneous conversations being held at the same time and hence the degree to which participants are fully concentrating on what they are saying. But this is no different to other forms of face-to-face conversation where immediate surroundings can cause distraction. As a researcher, when attempting to maintain contact with a number of people, the pressure from having a number of open conversations and requests for further conversations at any one

time can be trying. On a practical level though, one particularly beneficial element of using MSN is that conversations are automatically 'transcribed' for you.

The representation of MSN conversations in the written thesis may also be seen as problematic. In order to maintain the authenticity of the young people's communication via this method the decision was made to present the young people's account verbatim. However, the 'net speak' that is often used by young people when communicating via MSN can be difficult to read and understand, particularly for readers who may not be familiar with this style of communication. The young people also often tend to use animated graphics and static graphics which cannot be displayed in written text. For ease of reading a lot of these graphics have had to be removed from the young people's accounts.

The potential for TMC to enhance the research process when working with young people should not be overlooked, especially for those attempting to communicate with young people in ways which are meaningful and relevant to them and their worlds. Yet, it is important to realise the quickly obsolete nature of particular forms of interaction. Just as Baron (1998: 164) warned of emails being a 'technology in transition', the same is certainly true of other forms of TMC including mobile telephony and Instant Messaging platforms. As discussed, towards the end of the study some of the young people were using mobile phones which allowed for free internet usage which meant that MSN conversations could take place when on the move. This appears to be a trend on the increase. Additionally, in the closing weeks of the research year, more and more of the young people were making the transition to the use of the social networking site 'Facebook', which most were not using at the start of the study. Thus, whilst it seems useful to attempt to research young people in ways that are meaningful to their lives, one must keep abreast of the changes in popular TMC. Forms of communication meaningful to young people at one stage may be significantly meaningless at another.

Photo elicitation interviews

Why photo elicitation research?

There has been a significantly rapid growth in interest in visual research over the past decade. Interest in visual methods started to grow in the 1970s yet retained a somewhat marginalised and contested position. By the 1980s there was increasing acceptance influenced by

postmodern turns. Visual methods are now considered relatively mainstream, influenced by digital technology advancement and theoretical shifts relating to the mobility paradigm (Pink 2012). Pink (2007) asserts that visual images should be seen as a meaningful mode of research that can enlighten and complement the often dominant mode of research and representation in the form of words. There is a wide range of different 'visual methods' of which the use of photographs represents just one. Indeed, there are also many ways that photographs can be incorporated into qualitative research. In this study photo elicitation research was used, also referred to as 'reflexive photography' (Douglas 1998) 'photo interviewing' (Hurworth, 2003) and 'photovoice' (Darbyshire et al. 2005, Wang and Burris 1997). It is based on the premise of using photographs in research interviews. The image maker can vary, with either the participant responsible for taking the photographs or the researcher, who might take the photographs or source them from archives (Harper 2002). Participant-driven photo research has been highlighted as advantageous by a multitude of studies that have researched with young people. Holland et al. (2010) in their '(Extra)ordinary lives' project which aimed to enable a group of young people 'in care' to produce their own accounts and representations of their everyday lives, gave the young people a choice of a range of means and media for generating data. This included digital cameras which were used by the children in various different ways (e.g. photo diaries etc.). Holland et al. (2010) suggest that the visual data generated provided rich insights into the participants' everyday routines, relationships and sense of self. Mannay (2010), in her study of mothers and daughters in South Wales, used participant-driven visual data production to elicit her participants' impressions and interpretations of their local environment. She describes the method as a useful way of exploring previously taken for granted assumptions for the researcher and participants (a view also shared by Felstead et al. 2004) and making the familiar strange. Wright et al. (2010) used participant-driven photography in attempt to get excluded Afro-Caribbean participants to talk about their experiences of exclusion in their own terms. Indeed Allen (2012) suggests that participant-driven photo-elicitation has been especially popular in research that looks at social inclusion and exclusion because of the potential to facilitate 'inclusion' in the research process. Asking participants to take images of their lives, identity or communities has been an increasingly common focus of participant-driven photo elicitation projects (e.g. Heath and Cleaver, 2004, Renold et al. 2008).

Two photo elicitation projects were used in this study both of which were participant-driven. The first photo elicitation project was used in an attempt to gather more information about the biographies of the young people and to encourage greater reflection on their personal lives. In the focus groups the young people talked at length about the institution of the school but were relatively less informative about their home lives and biographies, perhaps because of the social context. Accounts from the focus groups and MSN also relied heavily on the verbal or textual. Including a visual element to the research offered a different mode of representation and another layer into the complex and multifaceted phenomena of truancy. The benefits of this are succinctly highlighted by Croghan et al. (2008) when they suggest that photo elicitation offers young people the chance to 'show rather than 'tell' aspects of their identity that might of otherwise remained hidden' (p. 345). Harper (2002) notes the effective use of photo elicitation for bridging the interplay between structure and agency, 'elicitation interviews connect core definitions of the self to society, culture and history' (p.18). There are also suggestions (see Collier and Collier 1986; Samuels 2004) that by incorporating the visual into the research process, response is likely to be more emotionally reflexive. Furthermore, by giving the young people control over the content of their photos, power imbalances between researcher and participant can be reduced as a result of their increased agency in the research process (Allen 2012, Phoenix 2010). The level of pupil agency possible through this method was considered to be particularly important as my approach to the study of truancy centred upon eliciting the pupil's perspective.

The second photo elicitation project was undertaken in an attempt to gain further reflection on the young people's use of space, place and time when truanting. At this stage a considerable amount of data had already been generated on this issue, via the focus group research, the TMC and in my observations of truancy in outside space (discussed in the next section). However, photo elicitation offered the possibility for a greater level of reflection and allowed me to test some of the substantive codes that had arisen. It was intended that these photographs were to be taken when the young people were actually truanting and so the method was also used as a way of generating data on the young people's in situ reflections of space and place[26]. By allowing the young people to take the role of researcher when taking their photographs it also removed the influence of my presence.

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[26] This was particularly important for those that I had not been able to observe in situ.

Moreover, it was hoped that using photography in the research process may be more relevant and meaningful for the young people themselves, giving consideration to the frequent use of images by young people in their everyday lives, where photos are commonly shared among social networking sites and by other means. The objective of this research was thus to explore in more depth the issues generated, to open up new areas for analysis and to test the emerging concepts from the other sources of data.

Practicalities – who, when and how?

Thirteen pupils were involved in the photo elicitation stage of the research, five from Hillsden High School, four from Pen-Y-Peel High School and four from Cooperfield High School. I asked the young people if they would like to take part in this phase of the research, via MSN or by phone conversation. This was important, as I wanted to prioritise the intended 'participatory' nature of the research and distinguish it from appearing as mandatory 'school work'. Parental consent was sought. Two parents refused their consent reducing the intended 15 to 13. The young people were initially asked to take photos of things, places or people that were important to their life and who they are (good or bad). I prepared a research pack for them which was a sealed envelope including a single-use disposable camera with 24 frames and an information sheet with research instructions (see appendix 2). I made it clear that they could take as many or as little photographs as they wished, so they did not feel under pressure to use the whole of the film. They were given a week in which to take the photos and were instructed that I would pick the camera up from a place which was most convenient for them. Some of the young people subsequently asked if they could take the photographs using their own cameras or mobile phones and that they would then send me the photographs via MSN. In doing so two of the young people who had used MSN decided to elaborate on the task by sending photographs they already had stored on their computers, as well as the ones that they had taken specifically for the task. This did have benefits allowing their photographs to represent a greater temporal range but in doing so also changed the nature of the task. Getting the cameras back after the initial week proved difficult and in reality it took a lot

longer, in some cases a couple of months[27]. The young people that had used their own mobile phones to take the photographs returned their pictures much quicker, via MSN.

The young people were interviewed at a location of their choice. For most this was their school. Access to the school was re-negotiated with school personnel, this was done with relative ease owing to the small number of pupils and the individual nature of the interviews. One school insisted that pupils were only to be taken out of PSHE lessons, whereas the other two schools attempted to accommodate the interviews all in one day. Interestingly, many of the pupils tried negotiating with the school teacher for their interview to be held at the time of lessons they disliked, some were successful, others were not, yet they did not appear to begrudge my use of their time. In reality the interviews were not all carried out on one day, some were inevitably absent on the day of the interview. For the occasional truants if they were not there on one day it was not too difficult to re-arrange another day with them, especially if I consulted them. Yet for some of the more persistent truants, arranging to interview them in school was difficult. Some would tell me what days they were likely to be in, but then arranging access into their schools on these days sometimes proved difficult. The schools needed advance notice. Yet decisions over whether or not to truant were often made on a day-to-day basis. For most this cycle of arranging interviews and re-arranging interviews eventually paid off. For a few it became evident that an alternative location for interview should be sought, especially as the failed interviews were beginning to highlight some of the participants' continuous absence to their teachers. As a result, one interview took place in a participant's home, one in the park and one as a last resort took place over MSN.

When the disposable cameras were returned, two sets were developed or printed, one which was promised to the participants for their own use and the other for the use of the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and tended to last between 45 – 70 minutes. Consent to record was acquired at the start of the interview and before commencing the interview I let them look through the photographs and take out any which they wanted to dispose of. The photographs were then laid out in front of myself and the participant (accept in the interview which took place in the park). I then asked the participants which photo they would like to talk about first and they then went through each photo discussing it with me. For each

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[27] Pupils often wanted more time to take photographs of events that were coming up (e.g. football matches) or they simply kept forgetting their cameras.

participant I did create a list of probes for each photograph prior to the interview but initially I wanted to facilitate a period of free narration from the participants, so that their interpretations of their photograph would remain the focus of the discussion and take precedence over my research questions or preconceptions. I adopted the role of 'active listener' (Whyte and Whyte 1984), facilitating the narration through 'paralinguistic' encouragement and non-verbal gestures. In many ways silence can be as effective a strategy as questioning in an interview (Fetterman 1998). After the photographs were discussed I then asked whether there was anything missing from the photographs that were important to their lives. This opened up discussions on the limitations of the disposal camera and the photo elicitation method in general but also allowed for further detailed narration on things that they had not taken photographs of. Hence, what is missing from the photographs can be just as important as what is actually captured by the photographs.

Through the course of the photo elicitation interviews far more was revealed than initially anticipated, participants provided thoughtful, insightful and amusing accounts of their lives and localities. The photographs included favoured activities (e.g. football, biking, shopping, computers), places (e.g. their school, their house, parks, their neighbourhood, a police station), consumer goods and identity markers (e.g. trainers, earrings, clothes), money and pictures of friends, family members, pets and inspirational others (e.g. footballers, actors, teachers). The range and scope of discussion about their lives that was possible from these photos was vast. By using a single interview prompt , 'tell me about this photo' the young people recounted positive and negative transformative periods in their lives, catalytic events, future aspirations, gratifications and dislikes and much more besides. Much of this information could not possibly have been known from interpreting the photographs without the pupils' personal elicitations of them. This clearly accentuates Becker's (1995) assertion that a photograph has no meaning in and of itself.

Some of the young people reported difficulties in their participant researcher role but developed strategies to get around the constraints they faced. For instance, the young people often reported that they wanted to take photographs of their parents but they refused because they disliked having their photographs taken. A common improvisation was to take a picture of their house instead, as a site of family influence, or to photograph an existing

photograph of their significant relative. This allowed them to elaborate on the significance of family relationships in the photo elicitation interview. One girl took a photo of herself and when discussing the photo she said she took it because her parents "made her". Significantly, the discussion of this photograph and her mother's dislike of having her photograph taken, uncovered her mother's illness which led on to a discussion about how she often truanted to help her mother at home. This was something that she had not previously revealed in the focus group context or in our MSN conversations but clearly was particularly relevant to why she truanted from school.

A fair amount of the discussions elicited from these interviews were not directly related to the young people's truancy but afforded me a more nuanced insight into their lives away from school and their conceptions of self that was essential to my understanding of their social and personal worlds which their truancy was located within. The discussions elicited from these photographs were longer and more comprehensive than received through any of the other methods, indicating how the visual and linguistic can enrich one and another. Yet it also no doubt helped that by the time the photo elicitation interviews took place, I had established a fairly substantial rapport with these participants through the other research methods. This was particularly the case for the second photo elicitation project which took place a lot later in the year.

Eleven young people took part in the second photo elicitation project, four from Cooperfield High School, three from Pen-Y-Peel High School and four from Hillsden High School. Three of these people had also taken part in the first project[28]. All of the interviews took place in the school. This time the young people were asked to take photographs of what they did when truanting and where they went. I stated a preference that these photographs were to be taken when they were actually truanting and therefore gave the young people a couple of months before asking for the cameras back. I asked those that had not truanted in this time to take photos of the places that they had been before when they truanted, as well as any activities that they had been involved in[29]. The same difficulties associated with the first project also occurred in the second project (e.g. the length of time taken before the young

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[28] Parental consent was again sought and four parents refused to give consent for their child's participation.
[29] I repeatedly stressed to the young people that they should not truant specifically to take the photographs.

people returned their cameras etc.). These interviews also produced considerably more data than that specifically concerned with space, place and time.

Reflections and limitations

One issue with the use of participant produced photos is the extent to which they can be regarded as valid representations of participants' lives. Croghan et al. (2008) have highlighted the social construction of participant produced photographs, demonstrating how participants can exploit the photographic image to influence the representation of identity, questioning the authenticity of identities that photographs are able to capture. Punch (2002) has suggested that there may be a tendency to take photographs of spontaneous images or events, leading to an over-emphasis of importance for that event. To a degree, some of these concerns were evident within this research. It was clear that some of the young people had thought about what makes a 'good' photograph. There were many pictures taken of the young people posing and some photographed aspects of places that were more visually effective. For example, one girl took a picture of a park but focused her camera at the graffiti. However, when she elaborated on the picture within the interview the graffiti had no importance to the photo, rather it was the park itself that was of importance to her. Many of these issues were addressed by the accompanying photo elicitation interviews, where the young people elaborated on what had been taken. It was not necessarily the pictures themselves that were especially important to the research process, it was the importance of the photographs for facilitating discussion about these aspects of their lives and the pupils' use of space, place and time when truanting.

Collier (1957: 858) has previously noted how photographs can help to overcome the 'fatigue and repetition' of more traditional interviews. I would agree, and add that they also help to reinvigorate the research topic for young people when perceived research saturation appears likely, re-engaging their interest. There was also a sense that the photographs can be empowering for young people, allowing a visual representation of their participatory research efforts. Many of the young people seemed particularly proud of their efforts when their photographs were given back to them.

Ethically, one of the problems that remain with photographs is their representation in the subsequent writing of the thesis. Photo-imaging software makes it possible to disguise the identity of faces and more obvious identity markers. Yet the more subtle clues of location or identity are difficult to remove when one has only novice imaging capabilities. Altering too much of the content of the photograph would also mean reducing its authenticity and distancing it from the original intentions of the young people. Nutbrown (2011) has highlighted how the increasing tendency to pixilate photographs of young people for inclusion in research may serve to 'other' young people in research. Initially it was intended that some of the young people's photographs would be used throughout the thesis to help bring the data to life. It was also intended that the photographs that were taken of the young people's use of space, place and time, could be used to map the proximities and distances of truancy from school. However, when the photographs were developed it became clear that the identities of the young people and their locales could not be sufficiently protected despite the image manipulation that was made possible through computer software. My concerns around this issue were also heightened when I attended a research seminar on visual methods which presented participant-driven visual data from young children. Despite the researchers' very thorough attempts to disguise the locality of the data generated by the young people, the locality was immediately obvious to myself. The degree to which this crucially matters largely depends upon the specific research project and topic under study. Managing such an issue is clearly complex as Wiles et al. (2008: 34) discuss, they suggest that 'visual researchers need to carefully consider these issues in order to take seriously the promises they have made to their study participants'. Given my research topic and the potentially negative consequences that could arise from being identified as a 'truant', I remained very concerned about compromising the identity of my informants and the localities of their truancy. I was also particularly concerned about breaking their trust if their identities or spaces of truancy did become known. Consent was obtained for the representation of the images in the public domain but this was based on an assurance that I would attempt to protect their identities. Indeed, Pink (2007: 166) suggests that researchers must consider the 'political, social and cultural contexts' in which images might be viewed and interpreted even if participants do not share or recognise such concerns. It might also be the case that consent for image sharing is not seen as problematic by the young people in the present, but could be at a later date as their circumstances changes (Barrett 2004). Researchers have also noted a number of

ramifications arising from the inclusion of images of places, even when absent of people (See Crow and Wiles 2008). Thus, a decision was made to exclude all of the photographs from the thesis. Since the main purpose of the photographs was to add a further layer of understanding into the young people's social worlds, it was felt that the decision to exclude these photos has not restricted this aim. However, it might be argued that the participant's agency in the research process was curtailed by the exclusion of their photos. The agency possible through participant driven photo-elicitation was an important reason why the method was selected for incorporation in the research design. Therefore the exclusion of the young people's photos in this sense was a considerable drawback. The data (re)presented in this thesis thus relates primarily to analysis of the interviews about the photographs and the information about the young people's everyday lives which this generated, rather than analysis of the visual photographs per se.

Observation

Why Observation?

The last method of data generation, used throughout the research process, is observation. As a starting point on its own the observation of truancy would have been problematic because only the more visible forms of truancy are generally accessible by this means. However, although I wanted to ensure that the methods of data generation that I employed were capable of accessing different forms of truancy, this does not mean that I intended to ignore the visible 'truants' altogether. Clearly, visible truancy also has an important contribution to make to our understanding of truancy. But observation had to be undertaken alongside other methods of data generation, with different starting points. Furthermore, although visible 'truants' are particularly prevalent in the dominant and 'official' discourse on truancy, few studies have actually attempted to explore truancy in situ. Prolonged observation can offer an insight into the routine and every day. This was particularly appealing given the sensationalisation of the behaviour of truanting young people which often occurs.

DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) define participant observation as:

> A method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. (p. 1)

In practice, whilst participant observation is often heralded as the purest form of observation for interactionists, Woods (1986) has suggested that non-participant observation has tended to be more commonplace within British educational research. For many, observation in practice has a tendency to exist on what Guare and Walsh (1998: 101) have termed an 'observational continuum', from detached observation to full participant observation. I could not become a full participant in the act of truancy, because I was not present in the school or in the pupils' homes when the decisions to truant were made nor could I experience the truancy in these locations and I clearly could not adopt the role of pupil. My observation was therefore participatory in terms of what Pollard has called 'participatory by interaction' (1987: 103). As Hall (2001) maintains:

> Research is participant insofar as the researcher him or herself constitutes the primary research tool, participating in social activity in order to gain a close an unforced understanding of people's lived experiences. (p. 51)

I could not truant in the same way that the young people of this study could, but, by observing the truancy that occurred in outside space and interacting with these young people as they moved through different space as places, I could participate in their worlds when the act of truancy was occurring. In this way I could gain a greater insight into the young people's lived experience. Fincham et al. (2010) and Murray (2010) recognise the importance of 'being there' as fundamental to enhancing our understanding of peoples social worlds and highlight the importance of not only researching in different spatial contexts but also capturing the mobility which connects these different contexts (Hall (2009) emphasises the importance of not ignoring the significance of place in doing so). Murray (2010: 24) suggests that doing so 'can enhance knowledge about how we 'do' and how we experience what we do in different contexts' and 'being with' participants in this way can allow the researcher a greater understanding of the 'more intricate sociality and emotionality of the journey'. Urry (2007) suggests that observation is a particularly useful tool for capturing mobile experiences.

Practicalities – who, when and how?

I started my observation of truancy after the initial focus groups had taken place. The majority of my observation took place outside the school in outside space. Truancy, by its very nature, rarely tends to occur in one setting, rather truants are often mobile. This meant that decisions about where, who and what to observe were important. The three schools were spread

across Cardiff and so I also had three different areas to contend with. Ethically, I could not entice pupils out of school, nor could I contact them to see where they were just in case this encouraged them to truant from school or distracted them from school work. At first I decided to dedicate three weeks to observing each of the schools, for a week at a time. I arrived at the start of the school day and the 'lurking and watching' began (Delamont 1984: 27). The loneliness of the novice researcher is often documented (see Ball 1984, Delamont 2002), and in these early stages ten minutes felt like hours. There was a constant nagging sense of 'elsewhere syndrome' (Woods 1986), as I wondered whether I was in the right place at the right time, and whether more vital action was occurring elsewhere. I wandered around the outside perimeter of the schools, yet became very conscious that an adult intensively watching over a school looked somewhat conspicuous. Mobility was thus important, and I developed strategies for being able to watch places without drawing too much attention to myself. One of the most useful of these was to wait in bus stops. In this way, I could pretend to wait for a bus whilst actually observing areas for a good 20 minutes before looking out of place. These attempts at disarming suspicion by converting my actual behaviour into something similar but innocuous may be seen as akin to what Goffman (1971) has referred to as 'circumspection gloss'.

In these initial periods most of my time was spent noting common truanting temporal patterns. For example, it was almost certain that on most days you could observe a handful of individuals and groups of pupils who had made it to school on time in the morning, yet left before lessons had begun. Similarly, it was usually common to see a handful of people leaving at break time and at lunch time and these breaks also appeared to provide ideal times for those who had missed earlier bits of the day to return back to school. At the end of the school day, pupils who had been truanting throughout the day either for specific lessons or for the whole day could also be seen meeting school friends who had attended school that day. These coming and goings could be observed from a number of vantage points around the perimeter of the school. Some pupils would leave through various school gates whilst others opted for more fugitive escape attempts such as scrambling through bushes or over fences. While these early data were an important contribution to my understanding of truancy, I also wanted to spend time with these truants rather than simply observe their comings and goings. Yet the decision had been made that I should only attempt to interact with pupils

from the initial 60 that took part in the focus group research. The problem was that whole days could go by where I was able to observe other truants but not the truants from my sample. Thus, my observations and interactions inevitably came to include these truants as well as those from my initial sample and their friends[30]. During these three weeks it was winter and although I persisted with my observation I quickly came to realise that rainy days meant very few truants were openly visible for observation and interaction. After these initial three weeks, I shared my time between observation and the other methods outlined within this section. Sometimes I observed in solid blocks whilst at other times I would only be able to spend one day a week observing. The intensity of observation was seasonal to an extent, in that, as I got to know the young people, I realised that on days when the weather was bad, if they decided to truant it would be either in-school or would entail whole-day truancy at home. Winter that year was relatively harsh with significant snow fall at times. Whilst observation did not cease altogether during these months, more did occur in the spring months. As is discussed in chapter 6, much of the young people's truancy in outside space was occasional and occurred for specific lessons. Thus time spent with the same set of young people rarely lasted longer than an hour to two hours at most. Truancy did occur for longer periods but the home was then usually sought as a space for truancy rather than the public space which I had access to.

Numerous ethnographers have recounted the difficulties experienced during initial observation periods, with those under study being duly suspicious about the researcher's presence and intentions (see Karp 1980). Meeting the participants via the school in the focus group was purposely designed to reduce some of this suspicion. The more my relationship developed with these pupils, through their participation in the other methods utilised, the more comfortable they seemed to be around me when I was directly observing them. Initially, friends that accompanied them appeared suspicious of my presence but the assurance from their friends that I was 'alright' and thus could be trusted, appeared to dissolve this suspicion. Throughout, the year, as my presence became more familiar, people beyond those from my

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[30] Due to issues regarding consent, the observations or content of the conversations with these young people, have not been included within this thesis. However, this was clearly important data which I could not overlook. I therefore decided to view such encounters in a corroboratory or non-corroboratory sense. They essentially confirmed to me that what I was seeing and hearing through interaction with my own sample appeared to be no different for those outside my sample. Had I seen different behaviour, I may have enquired further and possibly attempted to 'legitimately' include these data by seeking the consent of those involved, but I did not witness any behaviour that challenged the data which I was obtaining.

initial sample also began approaching me if they saw me when truanting. Thus, although I tried to remain detached when observing other young people, interaction could not be withheld. My time spent observing and interacting with these young people in situ involved a variety of different formats, such as chatting to them as they walked the streets, watching them play football, sitting in the woods, accompanying them to the shops etc. The precise nature of how they spent their time is discussed in chapter 6 but what they often did and thus what I did was encompassed by what they called 'chillin', basically not doing much at all except talking, sitting and wandering around. As I got more familiar with their movements, it was possible to go directly to particularly popular spaces that they frequented when truanting (e.g. the park, the river) and thus the time spent waiting alone looking for 'truants' to enter particular settings was reduced. On a few occasions some also texted me the location of their whereabouts. However, I tried to resist such efforts where possible for fear of encouraging the young people to truant. On two occasions, I happened to tag on to groups of young people en route to one of their empty houses, (one was a female group of two and the other was a boy group of four) and was invited to come along. Although this might have been a useful experience for me, I decided in each case not to go inside their houses with them, in case of reprisal if a parent should come back and find me there and because I did not want to enter their parents' house without prior permission or put myself in a questionable position. Thus, inevitably there were restrictions to what I could observe.

A lot of the conversations that I had with the young people when truanting could be described as 'small talk', particularly initially. They were not in any sense hostile to sharing information about their lives and their feelings, but I had to be responsive to how they felt on particular days. Some days they wanted to talk and talk, whilst on other days they were little more than mono-syllabic with me as well as with their friends. Interaction here was markedly different to that which took place when using the other methods. This was not especially detrimental as most of the young people that I was observing were also taking part in the other research methods where greater length and depth of discussion could be elicited. Thus, often it was about 'active listening' (Whyte and Whyte 1984), which also at times transcended into 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess 1988: 153), where my research interests could be probed a little more.

A small amount of observation took place inside the school grounds. On my visits to the school I was always observing what was going on in the corridors and on the playing fields whilst I awaited interviews with pupils or members of staff. I was mostly left alone, to my own devices, within the school for between 5 and 20 minutes but there were cases where I was left for over an hour when issues arose within the school that called staff away. A lot of observation could occur in these times. When in 'Reception' it was possible to watch those signing in late and in one school the waiting area provided a perfect vantage point to watch a space used by smokers during lesson times. A whole host of in-school truancy was in fact observable to me during these periods. Disciplinary incidents between teachers and pupils were also observable in the 'backstages' of the school corridors and waiting rooms, as well as the hustle and bustle of every day school interaction. In these cases my role as observer took a more detached position.

The recording of data is also an important part of the research process. It is in the process of recording that observations become data. Every attempt was made to make comprehensive field recordings yet in reality much of what one sees or hears will escape documentation but the impressions and tacit understandings gained through the field work process remain. To a certain degree, how one records observations whilst in the field is inevitably unique to them, opted for through a necessary process of trial and error and very much context dependant. For instance, Hammersley (1984) reports jotting down notes on a newspaper. Most are then subsequently turned or interpreted into elaborated textual 'notes' at a later stage. Although I was by no means a covert observer, in the settings which I was frequenting, openly making field notes in the more traditional paper notebook was not really appropriate and somewhat obtrusive. So in the initial days of the research process I was relying heavily on my memory and then jotting notes down at places where doing so looked less conspicuous e.g. in bus stops or on the bus home, providing no one was sitting too close. The sheer wealth of potential data one is exposed to when observing can be overwhelming to say the least. Moreover, when the observation became more participatory I did not want note-taking to interfere with such interactions or to amplify my researcher presence. What worked best for me was to write down little reminder notes on my mobile phone throughout the day. In this way, it looked as though I was merely sending text messages rather than note-taking and it fitted in perfectly within the culture of the young people who were constantly tapping away.

It is also the case that I can type quicker on a phone than write and it additionally eliminated the problem of not being able to read my often indecipherable scrawling. Occasionally, when I was by myself I would also take photographs and draw sketches to prompt my memory of particular settings, although only a snap shot, such recordings can provide important visual prompts which other forms of recordings cannot. Writing up the field recordings in full on an evening was especially important and in cases where this was not possible the quality tended to lapse as a result, particularly when memory was relied on.

Reflection and limitations

The primary advantage of using observation to study truancy was the situational perspectives and insights which it can afford. I was able to experience first-hand why the pupils needed to keep mobile at times, to take particular routes through certain areas or to truant in particular places. As Thrift (1996) and Fincham et al. (2010) have made clear we experience the world differently on the move from when are still. My understanding of the young people's engagement with space and place when truanting was enhanced by having experienced it myself. The mobility inherent in the observation of young people when truanting also introduced new topics of conversation in relation to the different spaces which we transgressed that may not have otherwise arisen if our conversation had remained static and off location. The reasons they gave for their truancy were also more situational as the decision had recently been made. While my time spent directly observing truancy also afforded me an insight into the situational dynamics involved between groups of young people when deciding when they should go back to school and what they should do. At times the observation was fun and exciting but at other times it became quite boring. These feelings, which I noted in my field notes, seemed very much akin to the contradictory feelings that the young people articulated to me, when discussing how they themselves felt when truanting. On days when the weather was particularly bad there is no doubt that that I was less optimistic about the benefits of observation. Being mobile with the young people as they engaged in truanting behaviours also had the further important advantage of seemingly increasing the rapport between myself and some of the young people. As Kusenbach (2012: 261) suggests, being mobile in this way can foster a 'special connection resulting from sharing space, time and experience'. The shared experiences of hiding in various different places,

sheltering from bad weather conditions and running away from potential threats certainly seemed to contribute to our research relationship(s) in this way.

One major concern with observation is how far the researcher's presence affects the behaviour of those under study. Is this behaviour witnessed 'normal behaviour' or does it produce an unknown change? This is a concern shared by many observers (e.g. Whyte 1943). For instance, perhaps the young people's behaviour was curtailed for fear of reprisal or perhaps it is the case that they would not behave in an overly 'deviant' way in my company. The relationships developed with many of them across the year, through the additional usage of the other research methods went some way to strengthening the sense of rapport experienced, although, it was clear that some were more comfortable in my presence than others. The fact that they shared information with me about the more 'risky' behaviours that they were involved in on some evenings (such as graffiti, drinking, fighting, intimate encounters) went some way to appease my concerns that they may have acted otherwise whilst truanting if I had not been there. They certainly did not seem concerned with hiding this side of their lives from me. There is no way to ascertain exactly how far my presence affected how the young people behaved, though assuredly the same kinds of behaviour were observed repeatedly across the year, and were also discussed by them when participating in the other methods. Much of this behaviour was also observable in the behaviours of other truants. The fact that I could not arrange any fixed observation times with them also meant that my entrance usually came with the element of surprise.

Of similar concern is the extent to which my presence and interest in their behaviour may have served as an enticement for their truancy. The fact that they could never really be sure exactly when I was going to turn up in particular settings went some way to ensuring that they were less likely to truant specifically for this purpose. Also, there was little that I offered as way of incentive for allowing my observation of their truancy. Some of the young people did initially attempt to utilise my adult status to their own advantage, for example, asking me if I would buy cigarettes for them. Clearly, these attempts had to be declined, but importantly, the relationships established with them did not appear to suffer as a result and they seemed to understand the constraints placed on me.

The purposely sporadic nature of my entrances within each of the different areas when truanting could also raise the possibility that my observations were superficial. I could not possibly be there every hour of every day and the necessary distance was needed to reduce the ethical implications of my presence. I also needed to spend sufficient time at a computer so that that I could interact with the less visible truants on MSN. In this sense, the insight to be gained through observation was essentially a partial understanding. This method of research also lent itself best to observing collective truancy, as those truanting alone in outside spaces were often on their way home and thus only brief conversation and interaction could be sustained as they passed through. In order to understand the different forms of truancy, the triangulation with the other methods deployed was vital.

Data Analysis

Data analysis should be seen as an ongoing feature of qualitative data, it is not a separate or distinct stage of the research process but a continual process which informs data collection and findings should be continually reflected upon (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Tesch 1990). This section provides an overview of this analytical process in relation to the procedures and principles that were undertaken for this thesis.

An inductive and iterative approach was taken to the analysis of data throughout the research process whereby themes, patterns, categories, differences, relationships and areas of potential interest emerged out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection (Patton 1990). The data were transcribed as soon as possible after they were collected, (ordinarily on the same day, although sometimes this was not achievable) and were coded line-by line. Data did not just come in the form of transcripts but also involved annotations, diagrams, photographs, memos, mind maps etc. these were all compared alongside the data from the transcriptions. In the initial stages of the research, this early analysis of the data enabled 'sensitizing concepts' to arise which provided a general sense of guidance and deepened my perception as I successively attempted to interpret what was going on in the research context (Blumer 1954). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 164) describe these sensitizing concepts as the potential 'germ of the analysis' and they similarly highlight how such early data can be a useful starting point to 'think with'. The emerging concepts and categories included 'observer-identified concepts' applied by me, (some of

which were borrowed from social science literature, others were my own), and others were from the young people themselves (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 210). The emerging nature of this coding and categorising meant that new categories resulted in the need to recode to see if examples from new codes were present. In such instances I would go back through the data for each informant. As I successively analysed and interpreted the data, I was also mindful to search for differences, contradictions and irregularities as suggested by Delamont (2002) and to explore alternative links. This also formed part of the triangulation process as I successively checked and re-checked data for each informant against the data which arose from the different methods utilised.

At times the volume of the data and the analytical procedures which needed to be undertaken were overwhelming, heightened by the pressure to do justice to the dynamic processes that I was witnessing. Such is the nature of truancy that a whole manner of theoretical possibilities presented themselves. Grounding my analysis in the data resulted in a 'progressive focusing' (Wolcott 1994: 19) or 'funnelling' (Agar 1980: 136) which eventually lead to theory abstraction. In some ways this approach was similar to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory but much less prescriptive as I embraced the often 'messy' reality of qualitative data collection.

There is now an increasing amount of specialised computer software specifically designed to analyse qualitative data with a surge in interest evident since the 1980s (Weaver and Atkinson 1994, Weitzman 2003, Lee and Fielding 2004, Stewart 2012). There are many benefits to be derived from this management and organisation of data. CAQDAS packages like NVivo, NUD*IST and Atlas.ti have the ability to store, organise, manage and analyse data by coding and retrieving themes of interview transcripts, field notes etc and many packages also now support the storage, coding and annotation of non textual sources (e.g. photos). Many also support the exploration of different types of data in various visual forms (e.g. of graphical displays, tree diagrams etc.). CAQDAS packages can significantly speed up the process of coding and retrieval, facilitate complex and overlapping searches, can effectively manage voluminous data and can enhance the transparency of the data analysis process (Fielding and Lee 2004, Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Weitzman 2003, Basit 2003). Although there does seem to be general agreement among researchers about the benefits of the development of

CAQDAS packages for qualitative analysis, there are reservations. For instance, Mason (1996) raises a concern that such packages can might lead to the types of analysis more suited to quantitative data and Seidel (1991: 107) suggests that such packages can lead to research behaviour which might be described as 'analytic madness' including: '1) an infatuation with the volume of data one can deal with, leading to a sacrifice of resolution for scope; 2) reification of the relationship between the researcher and the data; 3) distancing of the researcher from the data.'

A specific CAQDAS package was not used in this research but this is not to say that I disagree with its use, as discussed it is recognised that there is much value to be derived from contemporary computer-assisted strategies to analysis. At the time I had received training on ATLAS:ti and Nvivo and started out by using ATLAS:ti. However, I initially found this quite constraining and repeated crashing and loss of work led to frustration which ultimately led me to reconsider my use of CAQDAS for this study. This decision was supported by the constant concern, which remained with me throughout, about the level of closeness to the data that CAQDAS packages can facilitate. Closeness to ones data is clearly vital, however my concern was that CAQDAS packages can lead to 'over-coding' or 'over-fragmentation' and that being too close to the data might not allow for the analytic distance which is necessary to see the bigger picture a concern also noted by Gilbert (2002), Fielding and Lee (1998), Seidel and Kelle (1995) and Coffey and Atkinson (1996). I therefore adopted a balance between manual pen and paper analysis and computer assisted analysis via Microsoft Word. Stanley and Temple's (1995) and La Pelle's (2004) conclusions that Microsoft Word is sufficient enough to carry out most analytical tasks needed by researchers also influenced and supported this decision. Indeed as Stewart (2012: 504) highlights 'the software ameliorates the technical and clerical tasks whilst the researcher is, and must still be, in charge of thinking about the data'. She adds 'focusing on the CAQDAS versus manual decision may suggest the tool is the main determinant of the research, rather than the methodology' (Stewart 2012: 504). The CAQDAS packages do not perform the analysis in and of itself (MacMillan and Koenig 2012). My analysis remained driven by my methodology and computer assistance was used to aid this. The seduction of CAQDAS packages to perform tasks that could be achieved either through the use of Microsoft Word or manually was not considered to hamper my ability to think analytically. If at any stage I had felt that the analytical process was being

unduly limited by my decision not to use a CAQDAS package then I would have subsequently used a dedicated CAQDAS package to address such restrictions. For the purposes of this study I found that using Microsoft word had sufficient enough functionality to enhance analytic capacity and rigour in the analytical process. It allowed me to store transcripts, highlight and annotate them, create memos, cut and paste, retrieve and collect and create different documents and folders for sorting and sifting the data in relation to patterns, themes, differences and relationships. Alongside this, as part of the analysis process, I also produced hand-drawn diagrams and in order to continuously familiarise myself with the data I printed transcripts and repeatedly re-read and annotated them and used them to think with, what Dey (1993: 88) refers to as 'interactive reading'. This also helped retain the original context in the analytical process. Throughout the analysis process I would often switch back and forth between the analytical material and the original data, the importance of which is advocated by Fielding and Lee (1998).

Conclusion

At the heart of this research is one central aim, which is to explore the social worlds of truanting young people. Thus, understanding the pupil's perspective was a central consideration. This chapter has outlined the methods used to ensure this aim was realised and that the subsequent research questions were answered effectively. I have discussed the merits to be achieved from a qualitative multi-methods approach and explained why I considered this form of research to be the most effective in pursuit of my central research aim. I also drew attention to the varying ethical considerations encountered throughout the research process. A detailed description of the methods deployed was also discussed as a basis for the subsequent chapters. The next chapter will provide some further contextual information on the schools and their locales and the pupils, beginning the documentation of the empirical findings.

Chapter 4:

The Schools & The Pupils

Introduction

This chapter provides contextual information in order to set the scene for the reader and also begins the documentation of the empirical findings. The schools and the pupils within this study are discussed. The first section presents descriptive information about each of the three schools, their intakes, the practices and procedures related to attendance, and their surrounding locales. A brief examination of the 60 pupils which took part in this study is then provided. What truancy is, is then explored and the young people's definitions of the activity are presented. The final section looks at the young people in the study that claimed to have engaged in truanting behaviours. Analysis focuses upon gender, social class, set position and special educational needs (SEN). The chapter ends by exploring the prevalence of truancy.

The Schools and their Locales

This section provides contextual information on the city in which the research took place, the schools from which the pupils were drawn and the locales surrounding these schools. The three schools were all located in the suburbs of Cardiff. As discussed, they were primarily selected because of their different 'official' absence rates and because of their different locations. They were not, however, chosen in order to be comparable. They are all maintained, 'community focused' secondary schools and are co-educational. The information on the absence procedures for each specific school is based upon interviews with members of staff within the schools. This included an Attendance Officer at Pen-Y-Peel High School, an Education Welfare Officer at Cooperfield High School and a senior Learning Leader and a Learning Support Leader in Hillsden High School. Formal practices are outlined and some of the practicalities of dealing with attendance are also highlighted. It is clearly worth noting, though, that in reality formal practices, rules and policies are likely to vary from classroom to classroom and in different situations as well as between schools. This outline should, therefore, only be seen as a brief introduction.

Cardiff

All of the research took place in Cardiff, which is a medium sized city in South Wales in the UK. Each of the three schools within the study are located within the suburbs of Cardiff and all

of the young people involved in the research process live there also. It is a city that has seen a lot of changes in recent years, involving industrial transformation and economic restructuring. It is also a city with a diverse population. The level of overall deprivation varies across Cardiff. The city contains the fourth most deprived lower super output area[31] in Wales as well as the least deprived (StatsWales 2011a). 26% of Cardiff's child population (i.e. 0-15 years of age) live in the most deprived decile of multiple deprivation in Wales, 18% live in the least deprived decile (StatsWales 2011b). Cardiff's share of the all-Wales population living in the most deprived communities for the overall deprivation Index is 18.4%. However, the majority of Cardiff's areas are less deprived than the Wales average (StatsWales 2011a). 19.1% of Cardiff's secondary school pupils[32] are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM), compared to 15.6% in Wales as a whole (StatsWales 2011c).

As discussed in chapters 1 and 3, South Wales has a history of high 'official' school absence rates and Cardiff is notable for repeatedly topping these figures (see appendix 1). Table 1 details the 'official' percentage absence rates for Cardiff and Wales in order to contextualise the rates of the schools in this study.

Table 1: *Absences by pupils of compulsory school age in maintained secondary schools, by year*

Year	Percentage sessions missed to unauthorised absences		Percentage sessions missed to authorised absences		Percentage sessions missed to all absences	
	Cardiff	Wales	Cardiff	Wales	Cardiff	Wales
2005/06	3.4	1.7	7.7	8.1	11.1	9.8
2006/07	3.7	1.8	6.9	7.5	10.6	9.3
2007/08	3.3	1.8	6.4	7.3	9.7	9.0
2008/09	2.9	1.7	6.6	7.3	9.5	9.0
2009/10	2.8	1.6	6.8	7.3	9.6	8.9

Source: data derived from StatsWales (2011d)

Each of the schools are now considered in turn and an indication of their 'official' absence rates are provided[33].

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[31] A lower super output area is a geographical area designed by the Office of National Statistics and used for the collection and publication of small area statistics. Unlike electoral wards super output areas are consistent in size and are not susceptible to regular boundary changes (ONS 2005).

[32] Pupils in Local Education Authority schools.

[33] The decision was made to only provide a rough indication of the schools 'official' absence rates (and FSM levels) as it is felt that revealing specific numbers would make the schools easily identifiable because absence statistics for all the schools in Wales are publicly accessible and I did not want to jeopardise the confidentiality of the schools or the pupils.

Pen-Y-Peel High School

Pen-Y-Peel High School is a medium sized school. The proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals is above 35%. The performance of pupils at the end of key stage 3 and key stage 4 is determined as being below local and national averages based on comparative data available. Performance was roughly average when compared to similar schools. The exterior of the school building is fairly dated and the same can be said of much of the interior, although some areas are more modern and the school is well decorated with a number of wall displays. The school has a large enclosed playing field, with an enclosed all-weather playing field at one side of it. However, at the time of study, there were holes at the back of the playing field which pupils would use to exit the school, among some shrubbery, to get into the bordering grasslands. The school also has a CCTV system covering some areas of the school grounds. The school has extended out-of-school hours facilities and provisions, offering breakfast, additional learning support and resources and extra curricula clubs. There are also a number of mentoring programmes and a strong school counselling service. The school seemed to emphasise pastoral care as well as discipline. There is no sixth-form provision at the school or in neighbouring schools. However, some pupils do make use of the sixth-form at two schools further afield within the city (one of which is Hillsden High school), although most pupils seeking education post 16 attend the larger city centre college that also offers a range of vocational courses.

Pen-Y-Peel High School has a high 'official' percentage absence rate, with an all absence figure above 15% (but below 20%), significantly higher than the local and national averages and the highest out of the three schools within this study. At the time of study, Pen-Y-Peel High School had the highest unauthorised absence rates out of all the schools in Cardiff, above 9.0 percent of sessions missed. This is also significantly higher than the national averages. The school has its own designated and extremely committed Attendance Officer who sees it as his personal mission to "pin down non-attenders". He is extremely focused on reducing the school's absence statistics and has seen a recent 1% improvement of overall attendance which he speaks of proudly. The school's Education Welfare Officer and a school secretary help him with this endeavour. He personally sifts through the absence data that are sent through the electronic registration system, on a daily basis. They have a first day response system in place, whereby the parents of pupils that are absent without prior authorisation are

sent a text message to their mobile phone. He recognises the loopholes in this practice, as he suggests that some parents do not have mobile phones and the number that the school does have can, very often, be out of date. A daily list of those who have not responded and/or are still absent on the second day is also printed out. All of these pupils' parents are then supposed to receive a phone call from him, which is repeated on the third day if there is still no reply and the pupil remains absent. If they are absent for a fourth day, a letter is to be sent to their homes. In practice, however, the attendance officer claimed that when looking down the list he often disregards half of these as he "knows the score" with regards to their likely reason for absence which he suspects to be an unauthorised reason and thus they do not receive a phone call or letter. The electronic registration system also collects data on specific lesson absences but he suggests that these absences are usually not followed up in the same way, owing to a lack of time. Additionally, when attendance levels fall below 85%, the school sends a letter to the pupil's home explaining the impact that poor attendance can have on academic achievement. For those caught visibly truanting, reports, time cards and detentions are mainly used as forms of punishment. Monthly attendance figures for each pupil are also displayed in the school entrance hall for everyone to see. These are tied to class incentives, such as school trips, and are implemented in an attempt to evoke a collective responsibility for absence rates.

Pen-Y-Peel itself is a small suburb of the research city. The majority of the young people from the Pen-Y-Peel High School sample live in Pen-Y-Peel or in the neighbouring district which is a similar area in most respects. Both areas are in the 10% most deprived in Wales, in terms of overall poverty and child poverty (StatsWales 2011a, b). The housing in Pen-Y-Peel primarily consists of large council estates that appear to dominate much of the landscape, some of which are among the oldest within the city. Although in the immediate locality surrounding Pen-y-Peel High School there is a large park, with a small skate park and playground within it, and an extensive wooded area and a river. There are a few shops located within the estate that borders one side of the school and a nearby youth centre which some of the young people attend. A short walk out of this estate brings you to a central road which consists of a larger range and number of shops, and a supermarket. Beyond this vicinity, and into the neighbouring area, there are a number of other facilities available, including more shops, eateries, pubs, social clubs, youth centres, a leisure centre and more housing estates.

Hillsden High School

Hillsden High School is a large school, double the size of the other two schools. The school's catchment includes both relatively prosperous and economically disadvantaged areas, although the latter areas are in the minority. The school is oversubscribed in all year groups. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is around 10%. Pupil performance at key stage 3 and 4 compares favourably with the local and national averages, as well as with similar schools. The school exterior is slightly dated. There are two main entrances to the school which lead onto the surrounding streets and are quite open. The interior varies considerably, from grand and orderly, to modern and smart, and to drab and uninspiring. The school has a good range of facilities and is generally well equipped. It also has a good pastoral support centre and there are a range of internal and external mentoring schemes. The school has a sizeable sixth form. The size of the school means moving between a number of different buildings for lessons.

Hillsden High School had a relatively low 'official' percentage absence rate, which was below the local and national averages. This is true for both unauthorised absence and all absence. The school has rigorous procedures regarding the monitoring of absence, devoting significant resources and a number of staff, including designated attendance secretaries, to such ends. An electronic registration system is used and a 'truancy call' is implemented for first day absences. Specific lesson absences are also monitored and followed up. A meeting was held every fortnight with the Education Welfare Officer, where pupil absence data were scrutinised for emerging patterns. It was suggested that the school took a "zero tolerance" approach to truancy, with those caught truanting automatically going on school report and receiving an after-school detention or a day in the learning support centre (which was referred to as an 'inclusion' when used for negative sanction). The Learning Leaders suggested that 'truancy', was only thought to consist of those who came to school and then absented themselves during the day. Whole-day absences were referred to as 'non-attendance' and there was less clarity upon how such absences were dealt with, though, welfare visits from Education Welfare Officers are conducted for the more persistent non-attenders. Prosecution was sought for the most serious non-attenders, which included one of the girls from the study sample in the research year. A range of motivational rewards were also used in order to encourage good attendance, including school trips and certificates.

The locality known as Hillsden is often referred to as Hillsden Village, but following the expansion of the city is actually a suburb. Thus, the "village" reference is often used to depict the area immediately surrounding the main shopping street that runs through the centre of the suburb. It is relatively sizeable and as an electoral division (rather than 'place') is much bigger than Pen-Y-Peel or Cooperfield. According to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2008, StatWales 2011a), Hillsden is one of the least deprived areas in the whole of Wales. Hillsden is surrounded by a number of similarly affluent suburbs, with one notable exception (a locale considered to be a pocket of deprivation). The school is situated in a considerably built up area, although there are small parks close by. The closest shop to the school is an isolated chip shop but a short two minute walk up from the school is the centre of Hillsden. Here, there is the main shopping street which consists of small local and high street shops, restaurants, cafes, pubs and other businesses.

Cooperfield High School

Cooperfield High School is a relatively small school, with a declining pupil roll. The school has a look of neglect both inside and out. Many of the rooms were visibly dilapidated. The school mainly serves the surrounding council estates, though pupils also come from the neighbouring districts. At the time when the research was undertaken, the future of the school was uncertain. Above 30% of pupils were entitled to free school meals. The performance of pupils at the end of key stage 3 and key stage 4 was determined as being below local and national averages based on comparative data available, although, performance in the core subjects was above average for schools with a similar intake. There was a wide range of vocational and academic options post 14, including an 'extended opportunities' programme and an alternative curriculum scheme. There was also a youth centre on-site but detached from the main school buildings. The school had a large playing field, with additional astro-turf provision. CCTV was installed inside and outside the school. The school has no sixth form. There are some extended school hours options, which included provision for the community.

Cooperfield High School's 'official' percentage all absence rate was above 10% (but below 15%), which is higher than the local and national averages. However, the school had a relatively low rate of unauthorised absence when compared to its levels of authorised absence. Unauthorised absence was below 3% which is higher than the national averages but

lower than the Cardiff averages. The school has a dedicated Education Welfare Officer who is the main member of staff that deals with attendance issues within the school. They have a first day response system in place, where the parents of absent pupils receive text messages. Though, the EWO felt that this was of little effect and the messages were generally "disregarded". A school secretary would telephone some pupils' homes if they did not have a number which a text could be sent to. This was felt to be a better strategy. However, only half a day was to be spent following up on attendance, and the EWO suggested that the system was less than rigorous and that ideally a full day was needed. Pupils known for persistent truancy were not phoned. For pupils that were caught truanting, the school inclusion unit was often used as a form of punishment, whereby the children were placed in there for a day and their normal lessons were halted. Detentions and reports were also used. However, if it was the first time the pupil had been caught they would receive a warning and no further punishment would be given. There is also a system of rewards and incentives for good and improved attendance. Welfare visits were made to the houses of more persistent non-attenders. Those with attendance levels below 50% were susceptible to court action.

Cooperfield is a largely residential suburb on the periphery of Cardiff. Parts of Cooperfield fall in the 10% most deprived lower super output areas in Wales, although Cooperfield as a whole is less deprived than Pen-Y-Peel (StatsWales 2011a). Cooperfield is a hilly area, predominantly composed of large 1950s council estates, though interspersed with considerable open grassland and more concealed woodlands and a river. There are a few shops dotted around the estates, and a larger (though still small) shopping precinct with a range of shops. The school is situated within a housing estate though is also bordered by woods and grassland on the other side. The local police maintain a visible presence in the area. The districts that neighbour Cooperfield also contain high levels of deprivation. The closest neighbouring area to the school is a suburb that is larger in size and offers a larger range of shops and facilities.

The Pupils

The starting point of this study was cross-sectional. Sixty pupils were involved in the research, ten boys and ten girls from each school all aged 13-14. Appendix 3 provides contextual information for each young person, including their gender, frequency of truancy, class background, and set position. As discussed in the previous chapter, the schools were asked to

randomly select the majority of these pupils. Appendix 3 documents the diverse range of backgrounds which resulted.

Social class has a variety of different meanings and is increasingly difficult to categorise (see Reay 1998, Crompton 1998, Stanworth 1984), mindful of this though bounded by the availability of the data, parental occupation was used to categorise the class backgrounds of the young people based upon their socio-economic classification (NS-SEC)[34]. These data were collected after the focus group stage so were only available for the 52 pupils that were involved in the subsequent research stages. The young people were categorised into the threefold 'simplified' analytic classifications of 'professional & managerial', 'intermediate' and 'routine & manual' (ONS 2010). In Pen-Y-Peel High school 1 out of the 20 informants in the study was from a 'professional & managerial' background, 8 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 8 were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds. In Hillsden High School 9 out of the 20 informants in the study were from 'professional & managerial' backgrounds, 3 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 4 were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds. In Cooperfield High School, 5 out of the 20 informants in the study were from 'professional & managerial' backgrounds, 9 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 5 were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds. The informants from each school covers the range of social class backgrounds although there are more pupils with 'professional & managerial' backgrounds in Hillsden High School than in Cooperfield High School or Pen-Y-Peel High School. Only one informant from Pen-Y-Peel High school was from a 'professional & managerial' background. The informants that took part in this study are in no way representative of the wider school populations. However, the differences in the social class composition of the informants in the study broadly reflect the general differences in intake of the schools. In the sense that Hillsden High school is located in a more prosperous area of Cardiff and has a much lower level of pupils entitled to FSM. Only two members of the sample were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, again reflecting the locations in which the schools are situated and the BME compositions of the schools. Wales as a whole has a substantially lower BME population than England. However, Cardiff is an ethnically diverse city but

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[34] Material and cultural signifiers were also noted as part of the ethnographic process but parental occupation was considered to be the most comprehensive indicator collected.

representation tends to be highly concentrated within particular pockets of the city[35]. Nine young people have known special educational needs. These are behavioural for four pupils (Stacey, Aaron, Sarah and Owen). The table in appendix 3 also includes information on the young people's different set positions and indicates that the informants that took part in this study cover a range of different set positions[36]. A distinction is made between 'low', 'middle' and 'high' set positions. I categorised pupils who were in the top sets (and second to top set if there were more than three sets for a subject) as being in 'high' set positions. Those in a mixture of top and bottom sets or in the middle sets for most were categorised as being in 'middle' set positions and those in the bottom sets for most were categorised as being in 'low' set positions. The categorisations of the young people by socio-economic classification and by set position are used as basic heuristic devices to display the differences and similarities between the young people that took part in this study and to highlight the diversity of their backgrounds. It is acknowledged that such indicators are likely to be much more fluid and the categories themselves are constructions with limitations. Relationships between these categories and the pupils that reported having engaged in truanting behaviours are discussed later in this chapter.

What is Truancy?

This section explores the first research question of this study: what is truancy? It is based upon the young people's definitions of the activity. Once the schools and the young people were selected, initial focus groups were carried out. In the focus groups the young people's understanding of truancy was sought. This was more difficult than it may seem, as I wanted to avoid using the specific adult terminology of 'truancy' because, as discussed in chapter 2, there is no consensus on the meaning of truancy and introducing a pre-formulated definition might have limited the exploration of the issue. There was also the possibility that using the term itself would evoke negative and emotive connotations which could also restrict exploration of the issue. In any case, it was suspected that some pupils might not be familiar

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[35] The 2001 census reported that 6.7% of Cardiff's populations came from BME backgrounds. However, 10 years on, this figure is likely to have changed.

[36] The young people's set positions may be seen as an indicator of academic ability. However, studies have highlighted the social class bias associated with ability set allocations (see Ball 1981) and positioning in different sets can arise because of a number of different factors such as effort and behaviour. Therefore, set position should only be seen as a very partial indicator of academic ability. Some pupils also shared with me the results of their class tests and Year 9 exams, as well as information from teacher reports. This information is a better indicator of academic ability but information regarding set positioning was collected more systematically.

with the actual word. This suspicion was confirmed in one of the initial focus groups, as highlighted in the conversation below:

> Duncan: Sometimes they ring home to tell them you're not in school, truant call.
> PJ: So what's truancy then? You said truant call didn't you? Is that the same as mitching?
> Justin: No erh.. yeah truanting. I don't think I've ever said truanting so like...
> Ethan: Yeah it's just like what teachers say.
> Justin: Yeah, yeah "you've been truanting".
> Duncan: I thought it was just when they phone home to tell your mum and dad.
> Harry: Like when form teachers say, "the office will give you a truant call".
> Justin: Yeah, "you're going to get a truancy call". That's the only time I've heard it. When people say they're going off, they say they're mitching tomorrow.
> (Boys Focus Group, Hillsden High School)

For the same reasons, it was also thought necessary to avoid using the demotic terminology for truancy which I had been accustomed to using when at school (which was 'skiving'). Each focus group commenced with the use of photographs. These were photographs of various different types of behaviour that could be associated with truancy, in different locations and among different ages, with or without parents, alone or in groups (see appendix 4). These were used as a method of eliciting conversation on the issue without using adult terminology. A range of different photographs were used to avoid typecasting truancy or focusing attention on a specific type of truancy at the expense of other possible forms. By presenting the photographs to the young people, they immediately began discussion on the issue using their specific demotic terms to do so. The terms most commonly used across the three schools were 'mitching' and 'on the knock' and there was the rare usage of 'bunking-off' and 'skiving'[37]. This then led the young people to reflect on their own experiences of truancy. From there it was possible to probe for the meaning of the terms that they were using and to decipher through their discussions what kind of behaviour the terms encompassed. In their discussions, they also reflected on how their experiences were like or unlike those reported within the pictures and whether they resembled their understanding of 'mitching' or not. Some pictures did and some did not. In this way it is felt that the adult imposition of definition was reduced.

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[37] The demotic terminologies that the young people of this study used to describe their truancy are local terms that would not necessarily be found in usage in other parts of the country. There are, indeed, a plethora of demotic terms thought to be in usage across the world. For example, O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) note the additional terms, 'wagging', 'sagging', 'cutting', 'sluff' and 'ditch'. Le Riche (1995) adds 'hooky', 'nicking off' and 'twanging'.

There was no distinction made between the specific terminologies that the young people used. 'Mitching' and 'on the knock' were thought to mean the same thing and could be used interchangeably, although 'mitching' was the more commonly used out of the two. The young people mostly defined 'mitching' and 'on the knock' in a broad and all-encompassing manner:

> Kerry: Well basically mitching is like when you go off like.
> Sarah: You're just not in or if you go to school you don't go to lessons. That's mitching.
> Carla: And basically you haven't got a valid reason to stay off.
> Kerry: Or you haven't got a valid reason but you pretend you do like, like you take a note saying you had the dentist or something. That's mitching.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

> Aaron: If you go to school and get your mark and then just say, "aw I can't be bothered doing games" then that's mitching or if you just don't go to school but your mum sent you then that's mitching or if you just stay off school all day with your mum and ring up and say I got a bad cough then that's mitching.
> Alfie: Teachers mostly call it truanting.
> Aaron: It's the same thing.
> (Boys Focus Group, Cooperfield High School).

> Hannah: On the knock means you just don't come to school or you come to school and hide, that's classed as on the knock or mitching.
> Lauren: Or you come to school and then go on the knock, say if you don't like French.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Not having a 'valid reason' was often referred to by the pupils, echoing 'official' classifications between authorised and unauthorised absence. Many, particularly those who engaged in truanting behaviours more often, seemed to have a good understanding of the protocols regarding unauthorised absence and authorised absence and the types of absences that were likely to be included in each category. They were keen to point out that a lot of their 'mitching' is recorded as authorised:

> Andrew: Basically they've got to put authorised or unauthorised. Authorised is like holidays, dentist, doctors ...broken arm, tonsillitis, bad cold and you've got to have a note. Unauthorised is when you don't have a valid reason, basically if you're mitching or you don't have a note ....Well sometimes you don't really need a note they just trust you.
> Bryan: Most people just take a fake note anyway.
> Andrew: Mmm it's a bit pointless really.
> Craig: But holidays can be unauthorised if you don't fill out that form, you're allowed two weeks off but you just got to fill out the form.
> (Boys Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

You just have to get it authorised then they don't think it's mitching and you can't get done… it's still mitching … like we knows it's mitching but they don't, you know? (Scott, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Sarah: But it's a bit dumb actually cos most people just lie and say they were ill. As long as you take a note then its authorised it doesn't matter if it's true like. But you've just got to have a note. They don't really care as long as you have a note they just believe you.
Carla: You just blag it like.
Emma: I just tell them anyway and they believe me.
(Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

Deception is clearly raised by the young people, where they suggest that you can receive an 'authorised' mark from the school even when 'mitching', specifically because of the deployment of fabricated excuses. The techniques the young people used in order to have their absences authorised by their teachers are discussed in chapter 6.

The pupils' definitions also incorporated a number of different types of truanting behaviours as Kerry and Tiffany highlight:

Kerry: There's the type where you just don't to go to school, you're just not in for like a day or a week and then there's ones where you do go to school…
Tiffany: You just don't go to lesson.
Kerry: You like go in, then go off for like R.E or half a day or something.
Leanne: Sometimes you go to school but you're just not in lessons.
Sarah: You stay on the school grounds.
Tiffany: Or like miss first lesson then come in.
(Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

I refer to these different types of truanting behaviours as *part-day truancy* and *whole-day truancy*. Part-day truancy is when pupils go to school and then leave their classes or the school grounds at some point in the day, or a pupil may truant before going to school. The term part-day truancy is of course similar to the notion of post-registration truancy but part-day truancy is preferred because pupils do not necessarily truant after registration. However, part-day truancy would encompass post-registration truancy, as well as in-school truancy and specific lesson truancy, examples of which are provided by the young people below:

Mostly I'm in school I'm just not in lesson if you get me? I sort of go in class and then go out again after 5 minutes, just like walking round and talking and that. Every time I have Music, R.E. things like that. (Sarah, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

I came to school then left. Then I went back for my other lesson. (Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

I've hardly been going to form that much. I'm just on the field then I go in for first lesson. (Lucy, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

Whole-day truancy very simply refers to when a pupil does not attend school for the entire day. It is a term that is synonymous with O'Keeffe and Stoll's (1995) notion of 'blanket truancy'. Whole-day truancy may occur for one day or more.

I just mitch the whole day and stay at home. (Anna, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I don't do it like when you go in the classroom and walk out. I just don't usually come to school. (Lizzie, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

Most pupils tended to engage in truanting behaviours for a combination of whole and part days:

Sometimes I just do a lesson, go over the field or something. Sometimes I don't come in at all. It depends. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I just walk out or don't come in all day or come in at lunch time.
(Zack, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

I do it for whole days and I just do like half or two [lessons].
(Kym, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

However, from the accounts of the young people and from my observations, it seemed that slightly more whole-day truancy was undertaken than part-day truancy.

I haven't mitched off in the day loads of times, not for ages. I've just like mitched off the whole day, not skipping lessons just the whole day. (Andrew, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

I'd say I do whole days more than just lessons like. It's a bit harder going on the knock for just one lesson innit. You've got more chance of getting caught and that. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

The reasons for this are discussed in chapter 6. Pupils also pointed to the existence of *solo truancy* and *collective truancy*[38]. Solo truancy is when a pupil engages in truanting behaviours alone. Collective truancy refers to when a collection of young people engage in truanting behaviours together. More solo truancy seemed to be undertaken than collective truancy because it was connected to whole-day truancy and the desire to avoid detection. The young

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[38] These are not terms used by the young people themselves. They are terms that I developed based on the pupils' discussions.

people's definitions of 'mitching'/'on the knock' also commonly included parental-condoned truancy.

The pupils' definitions of truancy were most akin to the broader definitions of truancy presented in chapter 2 (e.g. pp. 15-16). Based upon the pupils discussions it was possible to formulate a basic working definition of truancy to encompass the types and forms of truancy which the young people had shared with me. This was as follows:

> Absence from school, lessons or class, that is unauthorised legally by the school or which occurs by deception on the part of the pupil or their parents[39].

Deception is a key addition to this definition, recognising how many would attempt to receive 'authorisation' for their absences so that their truancy would go undetected. Whole-day truancy and part-day truancy are recognised within this definition, including an acknowledgement that a young person may engage in truanting behaviours but remain on the school grounds, absenting him or herself from a lesson or class. Clearly, this definition requires a measurement of intent which could only really be deciphered through the young person's own acknowledgment of the intent to deceive. The truancy which this thesis is based upon *only* includes the experiences that the young people described as 'mitching'/'on the knock'. No attempt has been made to judge a young person's absence and refer to it as truancy (or 'mitching'/ 'on the knock') without their acknowledgment that this is the case. In chapter 7 a further distinction is made between the informants that seemed to be publically identified as 'truants' and those who engaged in truanting behaviours but did not seem to be labelled in this way. I also remained open to the possibility of alternative definitions being raised by the young people throughout the year. However, this did not happen.

Who are the young people that engaged in truanting behaviours?

This section explores the second research question of this study, who are the young people that engage in truanting behaviours? It refers to the young people in the cross-sectional sample who reported having truanted. The young people's gender, social class backgrounds

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[39] A caveat here is that some schools refuse to authorise holidays during school time which would then be marked as unauthorised absence. If the school knew the pupil was on holiday and the pupil or parent had attempted to authorise this absence but the school had then marked this as unauthorised, either before or after the holiday, then it is debatable whether this would be truancy or not. Though, if a holiday was undertaken covertly without the school's knowledge and a different reason had been given for the young person's absence, then this could be seen as truancy because of the deception involved.

and set positions are examined. The prevalence of truancy is then explored. The frequency of the pupils' truancy is used to further examine social class, set position and SEN before considering the young people's views on the widespread nature of truancy within their schools. Again, this section makes no claims of representativeness. It simply provides details of the informants within this study and highlights some of the differences and similarities between them.

Despite starting with a cross-section of young people (rather than sampling for 'truants') from a variety of backgrounds, 57 out of 60 pupils claimed that they truanted from school. This is a strikingly high proportion of the informants and points to the widespread nature of truancy. Twenty-nine of the informants were male and twenty-eight were female. Thus, within this study it did not seem to be the case that boys disproportionately outweighed girls as suggested in the 'official' discourse which tends to depict truancy as a particularly male activity. Fifteen of the informants in this study that claimed to engage in truanting behaviours were from 'professional & managerial' backgrounds, 19 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 17 were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds. There did not therefore seem to be a significant class dimension among the informants that reported engaging in truanting behaviours in this study. Young people from all three social class backgrounds reported having truanted. Notably, this includes pupils from 'professional & managerial' class backgrounds. Again, this stands in contrast to the dominant and 'official' discourse on truancy, where 'truants' are commonly depicted as predominantly working class. In terms of set positions, 14 of the informants that claimed to have engaged in truanting behaviours were in high set positions, 22 were in middle set positions and 15 were in low set positions (data on set position was not available for 6 pupils). Most of the young people who claimed they truanted in this study were from middle set positions, whereas the number in the highest sets and lowest sets were virtually even. This is a departure from the cultural, school-based studies, discussed in chapter 2 (e.g. Lacey 1970, Hargreaves 1967), which point to the negative effects of educational stratification practices on pupil orientation to school and that have highlighted truancy as a manifestation of negative orientation to school. By looking at the informants in this way it quickly became apparent that anyone could seemingly engage in truanting behaviours. Nothing marked these pupils out as particularly 'different' in terms of gender, social class background, or set position. In contrast to the dominant discourse on truancy, the young people who truanted within this sample were not predominantly male or

working class. Truancy is clearly widespread among the informants in this study. However, when frequency of truancy is examined the matter becomes more complicated.

Prevalence of truancy

Truancy would seem to be widespread in the cross-sectional sample of this study. However, it is also important to consider the different degrees of truanting behaviours engaged in by the informants of this study. The young people were categorised in terms of persistent truancy and occasional truancy[40]. The majority of the young people within this study can be regarded as having engaged in occasional truanting behaviours, 39 in total, whereas 18 engaged in persistent truanting behaviours. Distinguishing between 'occasional' and 'persistent' was a difficult and problematic task. Chapter 2 discussed some of the ways that this distinction has been made previously and highlighted some of the difficulties that researchers face when categorising truanting behaviours in this way. I was mindful of these limitations but bound by the need to provide some form of indicator. I therefore based my categorisation on the 'official' DCSF definition of a 'persistent absentee' (i.e. pupils with absences totalling 20% or more of the available sessions per school year), using information obtained from the school registers acquired at the end of the school year and supplemented this information with data from my own study.

The DCSF definition of persistent absence includes authorised and unauthorised absence, so not all absences recorded are necessarily attributable to truancy. I wanted to provide an indicator of frequency of *truancy* rather than all absence. Therefore, the categorisation of persistent truancy in table 8 and appendix 3 was basically derived from using the pupils' unauthorised absence figures, and their authorised absence figures, *if* I knew that they had reported fabricated excuses to the school so that their absence through truancy would receive authorisation. For instance, it was 'officially' recorded that John had been absent for 23 % of possible sessions but none of this absence was recorded as unauthorised. However, John had told me that the vast majority of his absence occurred through truancy but that he pretended to be ill so that he could receive authorisation for his absence. This was indeed a very common strategy deployed by the young people (see chapter 6 for examples). On top of this he also had, at times, truanted post-registration. I therefore categorised John as having

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[40] A two-category rather than multiple-category distinction is used in order to mirror the majority of other studies on truancy, to allow for a cumulative research base.

engaged in 'persistent' truanting behaviours based on this knowledge. As it happens, all those that were recorded as 'persistent absentees' by the DCSF definition were also categorised as 'persistent' in my study, based on the information from my data generation. However, in addition, post-registration truancy had to be accounted for. Knowledge of this was based solely on the young people's accounts of when they had truanted and on my observations. For most, this alone, did not amount to persistent truancy apart from in one case. Sarah has been categorised as having engaged in 'persistent' truanting behaviours even though 'officially' the amount of absence that was recorded for her by the school registers was below the 'persistent' level (as defined by DSCF). The reason for this was because of Sarah's extremely frequent in-school truancy[41]. The pupils that were absent the most were Owen and Chelsey who were absent for over 60% of possible sessions, followed by Sonia who was absent for over 50% and Stacey who was absent for over 45%. At the other end of the scale there were pupils with 'official' absences as low as 2% (Sean, Harriet, Kai and Harry).

It may also be worth noting that, throughout the year, pupils did move in and out of these categories. For instance, pupils would truant persistently for a block period of time but then only truant very occasionally for the rest of the time, and some pupils missed one day per week but this accumulated to persistent truancy when absence levels for the whole year were taken into consideration.

> Carla: Aw well we've definitely gotta mitch at least once a week.
> Whitney: And we like to leave early.
> Kerry: Well it's mostly like once a week but sometimes you don't do it once a week cos you just can't be bothered and then sometimes it's like more than once a week. Sometimes it's like every day for two weeks.
> Carla: Not often though.
> Kerry: No, not every day like.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

The categorisation of occasional and persistent truancy clearly has a number of significant limitations and should, again, primarily be regarded as a heuristic device, used to provide a basic indicator of the frequency of truancy among the different pupils in this study.

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[41] Determining the amount of sessions truanted by those who primarily truanted in-school was especially difficult because truancy often occurred in shorter blocks and for less than a full lesson. However, Sarah suggested that she truanted in this way very frequently and she continued to report her frequent participation in this form of truancy throughout the year.

When we look at the different degrees of truanting behaviours alongside the social class backgrounds of the informants of this study a more notable class dimension is evident. Eleven of the informants that engaged in occasional truanting behaviours were from 'professional & managerial' backgrounds, 15 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 8 were from 'routine & manual backgrounds'. Four of the young people that claimed to have engaged in persistent truanting behaviours were from 'professional & managerial' backgrounds, 4 were from 'intermediate' backgrounds and 9 were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds. Therefore half of the informants within this study that claimed to have engaged in persistent truanting behaviours were from 'routine & manual' class backgrounds. This conforms more closely with the wealth of academic research and dominant discourse on truancy that has linked truancy to pupils of working class backgrounds. Clearly, it is also important to acknowledge that half of the young people from 'routine & manual' backgrounds did *not* engage in persistent truanting behaviours and that there *are* pupils who truanted persistently truants in the 'professional & managerial' and 'intermediate' categories. The implications of persistent and occasional truancy are discussed in chapter 7 and the extent to which persistent truancy is a problem is explored. In this study, the informants from middle set positions were more likely to persistently truant, not those in the lowest set positions as previous research (e.g. Lacey 1970, Hargreaves 1967) indicates. However, pupils in the high sets were less likely to persistently truant than those in the middle and low sets. Again, the implications of this are further explored in chapter 7.

In addition to accounts of their own truancy, pupils also indicated that truancy was widespread among the rest of their year group and in the school as a whole.

> Adam: There's a lot of mitching in every year.
> Zack: Year 7s don't do it much. It's like as soon as you turn year 8...
> Adam: Everyone's starts it.
> Tom: I reckon most people try it.
> (Boys Focus Group, Hillsden High School)

> A lot of people do go on the knock but I think people are bit more sneaky about it in this school. I mean you don't exactly get loads of people running off and vandalising bus shelters, like you probably would in Hepton or somewhere.
> (Ella, Hillsden High School- Girls Focus Group)

Alice: There's <u>loads</u>[42] of people that mitch in this school. In year 7 you're kind of settling in so at first not many people dare but then you try it and you just carry on.
Naomi: Yeah not like year 7 but mostly all the rest of the years.
Lucy: Loads of years 10 and 11 do but loads of year 9 and 8 do too.
Alice: Year 9, our attendance is like the lowest out of the whole of the school.
(Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Cobain: <u>Everyone</u> does it here.
Scott: Yeah.
David: Everyone's got something they don't like.
John: Or someone.
Scott: You get a lot of year 11s cos they think they're hard.
Dewi: A lot of year 10s.
Cobain: 9.
David: It's common in most years really, even if you don't see it because a lot of people are at home or they've got different hiding places and things.
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Lizzie: You get a lot in year 10.
Sonia: I think you get more in year 11.
Emma: I think most years.
Carla: Year 9's quite common as well.
Sonia: Yeah we go home a lot.
Whitney: Yeah exactly, you get a lot in every year but people go to different places.
(Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

Thus, truancy seemed to be prevalent in each of the three schools despite their different 'official' absence rates, at least in an occasional form. As a few of the young people indicated in the above quotes, the way this truancy was enacted did not necessarily equate with the stereotypical assumptions often associated with truancy or the dominant image projected in the dominant and 'official' discourse. This is a pertinent issue which is taken up throughout this thesis.

In the whole, truanting behaviours were widespread among the informants that took part in this study. A similar finding was presented by O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) in their survey of secondary schools in England, and Guare and Cooper (2003) in the US. These findings stand in contrast to the literature discussed in chapter 2 (particularly the early literature) which depicted truancy as a pathological trait of a deficient minority or as a response adopted by deviant, anti-school working class boys. The diverse backgrounds of the young people that

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[42] I have underlined the word 'loads' to indicate emphasis in the young person's original account. In all following quotes, words that are underlined will also indicate emphasis.

claimed to have engaged in truanting behaviours within this sample, and the indications of the widespread but occasional nature of truancy, suggests that truancy is more than this.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided contextual information as a foundation for the subsequent empirical chapters and has begun the documentation of the empirical findings. Background information on the schools (from which the sample of young people were drawn) and their locales was presented. The cross-sectional sample of pupils that took part in this study was discussed in relation to their gender, social class background, set position, ethnicity and SEN. The views of these pupils on what truancy is were then presented and a fluid working definition of truancy was put forward based upon the young people's discussions. The chapter then looked at who the young people are that engaged in truanting behaviours within this study, looking at their gender, social class background and set positions. Based on this information, it was suggested that truanting behaviours are widespread among the informants of this study and are not predominantly undertaken by males or pupils from working class backgrounds. Females and pupils from higher socio-economic classifications also truanted. These findings stand in contrast to depictions of truancy presented in the dominant and 'official' discourse and in much academic literature. However, findings in chapter 7 complicate this when a closer look at the young people in this study with public and personal identities as 'truants' are explored. In the following chapters, I present the empirical findings which resulted from my sustained interaction with the young people. Their reasons for choosing to truant are presented, how the pupils enact truancy is explored and how the majority of the truancy within this study is 'contained' is discussed. It is the first of these areas which is examined in the following chapter.

Introduction

This chapter presents the intentions and motives given by the young people when recounting their reasons for truanting. In doing so an attempt is made to make clear to the reader the young people's own interpretations of the situation, on which their decisions to engage in truanting behaviours were based. The chapter also draws attention to the more tacit elements of the young people's accounts and observed actions. The young people's reasons for choosing to truant are divided in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors and are set out as such within this chapter. Institutional 'push' factors are predominantly given by the young people for their truancy. The chapter then moves on to discuss the issue of control and the struggle for agency and autonomy which seems to be central to the pupils' accounts. Goffman's concept of 'secondary adjustment' is used to make sense of the young people's truancy and the dynamic between embracement and resistance.

Push Factors

There are two discernible strands of reasoning evident within the young people's accounts of why they engage in truanting behaviours. These are categorised as 'push' and 'pull' factors. Push factors are those associated with the school or institution that essentially drive pupils away, whereas pull factors are personal or social factors which attract or create a need for pupils to stay away from school.

At any one time, the pupil's decisions to engage in truanting behaviours appeared to involve an interplay of factors, where trade-offs, advantages, disadvantages and 'risks' associated with a decision to truant were weighed-up. The factors outlined in this section are those which they attributed as their primary motive. The push factors far outweighed the pull factors in terms of the frequency in which they were articulated by individual pupils and across the sample as a whole. 'Teachers' and 'lessons' were the main push factors discussed but 'tests', 'bullying', 'time' and being embarrassed by their school were also cited as reasons why the young people chose to truant and are each examined within this section.

'Teachers'

Featuring prominently in the young people's decisions to truant were teachers. This is not especially surprising given the centrality of teachers within the institution and classroom context of the school. Although essentially institutionally bound (e.g. see Woods 1979), teachers are certainly entrusted with a great deal of power and control over the pupils' school lives, imbued with authority over knowledge, time, behaviour, appearance etc. (Delamont 1976). This power is not however unidirectional in all instances. Pupils certainly manage to maintain considerable bargaining power, albeit it mostly illegitimate, and for the most part classroom life operates on the premise of 'negotiation' between teacher and pupil (Strauss et al. 1964). This has been previously depicted in the representations of classroom ethnographers, such a Woods (1979) and Delamont (1976). Yet similarly, what has also been highlighted by such studies is the delicate and intricate balancing act which, when tipped in favour of teacher or pupil, can lead to conflict. For the young people involved in truanting behaviours within this study, a sense of conflict between themselves and particular teachers was strongly manifest in their narratives. This section explores the young people's articulations on being 'singled out' by teachers, on truanting in order to avoid getting into trouble and on classroom management.

Singling out

One of the most common reasons the young people of the study gave for their decisions to truant was the perceived sense of injustice they felt from being singled out by a teacher and embarrassed in front of their peers. The young people were extremely critical about the unfair ways in which they felt particular teachers treated them. Woods (1979) outlines how such 'showings-up' can have a number of practical benefits for teachers and can thus be employed as a technique useful for mass classroom management. Many of the incidences which the young people discussed were based on humour, jokes gone awry. Joking was often described as part and parcel of classroom life and the teacher's ability to 'have a laugh' was rated highly amongst the characteristics which they most liked in their teachers. Yet, when the humour was directed at the pupils personally, when they were the focus of the joke, it was not always seen in such a positive light. The young people's narratives were full of disgruntled complaints about how they had been shown up in front of their friends by a

teacher. In most cases this did not lead to truancy, but when it occurred frequently, when it hit a particularly sensitive note or when their fellow pupils exacerbated the situation, truancy was sought.

Adam, for example, attributed his frequent truancy from his Textiles lessons due to a negative relationship that had developed between him and his teacher, in which he highlights how she singles him out and shows him up:

> She hates me...It's just me... She's always like "ahh look at you", trying to make me look stupid in front of everyone... Cheekin' me, and like "aww look at your hair" or "erh look how he's sat" and I'm just sitting there...the way I talk... and I feel like, <u>argh</u> ...I don't know. She like, she like thinks cos she's a teacher she can just say anything. She's sneaky, she just tries to cause agro but I'd rather not go to school than get myself into trouble. (Adam, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

It appears that partly implicated within this example is an assault on Adam's presentation of self (Geer 1977, Goffman 1959, 1961). His descriptions of the situations in which he felt as though he had been singled out and shown-up by this teacher, were generally, no more severe than similar incidents with other teachers. However, it was the frequency of these 'assaults on the self' (Geer 1977) that appeared to result in his truancy. By absenting himself from these lessons, his truancy serves as a means of self-preservation and he also points to his desire to avoid the manifestation of overt conflict within the classroom (which was his initial response to such incidences). Adam further points to the sense in which it may be the institution which encroaches on his sense of self and not just specific teachers:

> School does annoy me…. you can't really be yourself at all, you just get punished for it. You get all the teachers just shouting at you.
> (Adam, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Other pupils suggested that it was not humour gone awry that had led to their truancy but rather, they felt, that they were being vindictively singled out by the teacher or teachers (this issue was also raised by Adam, in the example above).

> It was because of Miss Jones, she can be nice sometimes but she can be also be bit of a cow "if you don't be quiet you're staying behind". And that time she was being a big cow. She came over like screaming in my face in front of everyone, when I didn't even do anything and then she had this big smirk on her face and it's like "whatever" and I just thought I'm not having that so I didn't go in on the Thursday and then I think I missed the next one as well. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The feeling that teachers held particular grudges, for no apparent reason, was also widely articulated.

> We've got this one teacher right, Miss Jones, in Maths and now she's made me really, really hate Maths. She always picks on me. I hate her so much. She just picks and picks on me for no reason. She doesn't pick on everyone. It's just me for the whole lesson in front of everyone. (Hayley, Pen-Y-Peel High - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Like even if I say "aww what's that miss" or something, it's "Zack, shut-up, get outside the classroom!" just for saying something. It's like pathetic sometimes, the stuff they do to get rid of me. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> But it's like some of the teachers…the only reason why we went on the knock is cos they were horrible to us for no reason...just us. So that's the only reason why we didn't go to class. (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Similarly, it was suggested that teachers would insult pupils:

> Alfie: You can like a subject but just hate a teacher.
> Marvin: Yeah, cos they make it as hard as possible for you to actually learn.
> Alfie: History?
> Marvin: Hmm (nodds and laughs) and Geography with Mr. Milner. Yesterday he goes "aw waste of space" and called me an idiot cos I'm dyslexic. There's no point arguing cos they win, cos it's just my word against theirs.
> (Boys focus group – Cooperfield High School)

> Bishop right, he was like "you know where the door is, I don't care about you" like, "you don't matter, you shouldn't even be in this school" and that, "there's a door right there" and it got me so mad like, cos that's really bad innit like? He shouldn't say that. So I did, I just stormed out. I shoulda stayed just to piss him off but I was like 'ah'. I weren't in for ages I think about a week or something...erh it could have been two actually...well I came in for like a day then just walked back out again.
> (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Excessive punishment or discipline was also reportedly used by some teachers:

> Sonia: Some teachers just don't like you and they'll pick on you.
> Sarah: Yeah they like shout and shout at you for pathetic things and make you feel like rubbish. (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

> Some teachers just scream at you for no reason. They're always screaming and sometimes I just think, do I really want to go just to be screamed at, and I think nah I can't bothered with that like. (Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

But mostly for me it's just cos of certain teachers I don't like... shouting a lot... I can't be doing with it me. (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

For most pupils, truancy followed a particular incident with a specific teacher, yet a smaller minority, as in Zack's case, felt that that the majority of teachers targeted them, resulting in a wider sense of antagonism. Clearly, interpreting these perspectives requires much caution. There may be many reasons why teachers need to sanction, discipline or focus on the behaviour of one person within a class. Incidences which the young people perceive to be unfair may have been warranted in the specific situation. Inevitably, the young people only report the way they felt at the time and their perspective with regards to the teacher's actions, although, research by Riley and Docking (2004) included teacher's reflections on how they resort to purposely humiliating pupils with poor behaviour. Further, as Delamont (1976) contends, teachers seemingly have the right to talk to pupils in ways that would not be acceptable in the norms of everyday conversation. It was not always clear whether the teacher's reactions may have been the consequence of the pupil's misconduct, although it would appear to be the case in some examples. The young people seemed to attribute a significant degree of resentment in these cases. For them the sense of injustice or humiliation they felt at these particular times took on a high level of importance. The situation as they defined it was 'real' for them. In Thomas' phrase, if people 'define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (1928: 572).

There appeared to be a sense in which many of the young people held a tacit boundary regarding their expectations of the 'role' of teacher. As Adam indicated:

She's too cheeky for a teacher. She's cocky and sneaky…There's like a limit, and she always crosses it. (Adam, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

The young people's expectations were not always uniformly agreed upon though, and were not always consistent. Control seems to be central here. In most cases, the young people acknowledged the need for the teachers to implement control and discipline of the classroom, regarding it as both legitimate and desirable (in this respect, teachers that were regarded as 'weak' were also looked upon unfavourably). However, as Adam suggests, there was "a limit" and truancy was deemed to be warranted in situations where it was felt that the teacher's abused their right to control. Thus, in these situations, there appeared to be an

evident struggle between pupil and teacher with regards to power and control. This is a point also raised in the example below:

> They thinks they can just like do anything, they can control you no matter what, they're in charge. They are, but sometimes they just take it too far. I think they've got too much power ... I like to always be in control (laughs). (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Thus, truancy in some instances also appeared to be regarded as a means of redressing the power equilibrium. This is also made evident by those that explicitly attributed their decisions to truant as an act of revenge.

> Seriously, Smithy's got his favourites, then he's got the ones who he hates and I'm one that he hates. When he's screaming at you, it makes you really hate him and you want to get back at him...so I'm off (laughs). Seriously, I'm not going to stay there for him to talk to me like that...then he won't see me for like a week and that shows him then (laughs). (Kerry, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

Hargreaves has previously highlighted the latent affects which may arise as a result of similar teacher strategies, when discussing what he calls the 'punishment illusion' (1972). While, interestingly, Tattum (1982) has suggested that reactive pupil behaviour, may be regarded as a response which reflects the school's own value system, where care, respect and just treatment are expected, although, clearly this is a somewhat idealised representation of the institution.

In some instances, the pupils' accounts seemed to point to a simple dislike of certain teachers, rather than the extent to which they felt singled out by them.

> Sometimes I just can't be bothered going to History cos the teacher's a ...b.i.t.c.h. She's actually a real nasty piece of work. (Carla, Cooperfield High School - Girls Focus Group)

> I just hates the Art teacher, Miss Roberts...You'd jump out of the window to avoid her. She just does my nut in. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School - Boys Focus Group)

> Mainly it's just some teachers that I don't like. You get nasty ones and mouthy ones, so I can't be bothered with 'em. (Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

> I mitch cooking a lot...aw I hate cooking. I like cooking but I hate the teacher cos she's like all of two foot nothing and tells me what to do. She looks about 12. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

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However, the decisions to truant when based on a simple dislike of particular teachers seemed only to be taken if others shared a similar definition of the situation and would accompany them when truanting. It was usually not considered reason enough on its own to 'push' a pupil into solo truancy.

Avoidance of trouble

Truancy was also opted for in circumstances where pupils wanted to avoid 'getting into trouble' from teachers who they knew would take a hard line on their non-compliance to school rules or particular instructions. For instance, decisions to truant from a specific teacher's lesson because homework had not been completed or it had been forgotten were common. The young people seemed adept at 'sizing-up' (Delamont 1976) their teachers, working out which teachers were more likely to follow the disciplinary rules in response to their non-compliance and which teachers would be more lenient or understanding if the truth was given. On the occasions when homework was not completed for those teachers who they knew stuck closely to the school rules and official lines of punishment, or when they were on a final warning, some recounted how they regarded it as more logical to take a chance truanting from the teacher's lesson with the possibility that they would not be caught. Thus truancy was deployed in order to avoid reprimand but also as a face-saving measure.

> I hadn't done my homework for lesson and it's like the third time I hadn't done it, so like I knew I'd get in trouble so I just like walked out. It was the lesson after lunch, so I went half way through lunch and then came in after that lesson.
> (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Wanting to avoid the wrath of 'strict teachers' when arriving at school late was also given as a frequent reason for truancy.

> Lauren: Some teachers, like, if you're late you might as well just go on the mitch cos like Mr Pring for instance he sends you straight back out anyway.
> Hannah: Aw that's his favourite. He makes you stand outside like an idiot don't he.
> Joanne: Or they like scream at you. You might as well just not go and then get in to less trouble than you would when you go.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Truanting because of forgetting P.E. kit was mentioned frequently by the boys of Cooperfield High School, whose teacher gave an automatic detention to those who forgot their kit and a

stern telling-off. On the first occasion which I met the second group of boys in the initial focus groups, two of them declared that the only reason they were in school was because I was taking a focus group with them. They usually had P.E. at this time and had both forgotten their kits and were about to disappear over to the "back field" before "Smithy" spotted them but then they were told they would be joining me for the lesson.

Although the pupils directed their reasons for truancy at the specific teachers, it was more precisely punishment for their flouting of the organisational rules which they were trying to avoid by opting to truant. Yet the teachers as the implementers of the institution's rules were seen as the problem by the pupils. There were teachers at the other end of the scale, who they perceived to side with them against the institution, overlooking their non-compliance, as Justin highlights.

> He could just forget it, let you off once like instead of going mental all the time. Some teachers are safe like... Ashworth, Howell...Mr Howell is well safe he lets us sit at the back of the lesson and text and he doesn't care if you forget your homework. Then you've got the horrible ones that ball at you just for forgetting your homework like once. It's tight. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The existence of these teachers was often held in comparison to those who followed disciplinary rules more rigidly and appeared to exacerbate the sense of unfairness felt. Teachers who were perceived to be *too* soft, however, were also cited as a cause of truancy.

'Can't control the class'

Teachers who were unable to maintain control over a class, from the pupils' perspective, were frequently referred to by the young people of the study when reasons for their truancy were given. Supply teachers featured particularly predominantly in such discussions. Although pupils disliked relinquishing total control to the teachers and what they deemed inappropriate use of control was not popular, they did recognise that teachers needed a certain amount of power to maintain order within the classroom.

Supply teachers are in a particularly difficult position when covering a teacher's class, for the pupils have already negotiated and subsequently established a specific shared meaning of classroom rules and interaction with their usual teacher (Ball 1980). These informal norms are likely to be alien to the incoming supply teacher, as is knowledge about pupils' behaviour. The

supply teachers' fleeting presence within the school reinforces their predicament, with pupils less likely to invest in establishing shared meaning and creating relationships with these supply teachers and with a length of time that would be impossible to establish such relationships, in any case. Pupils realise the predicament which supply teachers face and take advantage of the situation in a manner in which they would not typically display in their usual classroom setting. They attempt to colonize the situation, seeing how far they can push the teacher's boundaries of tolerance. Behaviour like this is not dissimilar to that described by classroom ethnographers that have looked at initial classroom encounters (e.g. Beynon 1985, Ball 1980). It was suggested that disruptive truancy was more likely to occur in the presence of a supply teacher:

> Carla: I mean sometimes we do go into lessons and destruct them (laughs) when we've got a supply cos they don't know it's us.
> All: (Laugh)
> Carla: You can talk (points at Whitney)! You did it with me the other day, winding up that Tristan Kid. Yeah exactly! Then we was off by the back stairs.
> Whitney: And running round block four (laughs).
> (Girls Focus group, Cooperfield High School)

> Ah supplies aren't proper teachers. They're all crap like... They can't control anyone. If you see a supply you knows it's mess around time. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Supply teachers were regarded as holding a position of powerlessness and the legitimacy of their role as teachers was commonly called into question. It was considered safe to behave disruptively in front of supply teachers because of their temporary presence in the school.

Cooperfield High School had a lot of supply teachers. As a result, pupils expressed a strong, shared definition of the situation when it came to supply teachers. The young people commonly suggested that lessons with supply teachers were a 'waste of time' because disruptive pupil behaviour often took over and as a result, learning was made difficult.

> Leanne: I came hme earli cz [sic][43]we had a supply
> PJ: how come?
> Leanne: waste of time init we dont do anyfin
> (Leanne, Cooperfield High School – MSN)[44]

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[43] 'cz' is used here to mean 'because'.
[44] I have reproduced this MSN quote (and all following MSN quotes) verbatim, including errors.

There's just no point in going when there's a supply. We don't learn anything. Like what's the point in just sitting there when everyone's messing about and they can't control anyone or like teach us anything. (John, Cooperfield High School - Boys Focus Group)

Support for truancy when a supply was present was strong and the pupils' truancy seemed to be a lot more visible than when truanting for other reasons.

David and John suggested that the chaos that often ensued under the presence of a supply teacher left them feeling the need to truant out of fear from the way in which they would be treated by their fellow class members.

David: When the teacher can't control the class and it's just like a riot ..
John: Yeah when the class is naughty
David: Like, you feel for your safety…like people punching you and like mental stuff as well. (Boys Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

Alice from Pen-Y-Peel High School also raised a similar point:

Yesterday we had this lady in and she just let everyone get away with picking on me, so I was off. (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

As Alice highlights, the lack of classroom control occurring in the presence of supply teachers also seemed to be an issue in Pen-Y-Peel High School, although it was mentioned less frequently than in Cooperfield High School. Some of the girls raised an additional point that lessons provided by supply teachers warranted truancy because they were unengaging:

Lauren: There's this one substitute that comes in when the teachers go on a course or summat and <u>ah</u> I just hate her <u>ergh</u>. Like our French teacher was on a course the other week and we had this teacher and she takes about half hour just to explain.
Hayley: We were doing this crossword and she spends half an hour talking about what a crossword is!
Lauren: As soon as we go to the door and see her in there, nobody goes to the lesson.
(Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

In contrast, Hillsden High School seemed to have fewer supply teachers. The legitimacy of the supply teacher's role was still called into question by the Hillsden High School pupils but the presence of a supply teacher was rarely given as a reason for truancy. Rather, many suggested that they welcomed the times when supply teachers covered their lessons as it provided them with the chance to do "easier work". Although when there was a 'pull' from outside the school beckoning pupils to truant, it was acknowledged that truancy was easier when a supply

teacher was present. A recent National Behaviour and Attendance Review commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government (DCELLS 2008a) also found similar findings with regards to perceptions over supply teachers and the detrimental effects on behaviour and attendance.

There is a sense in which many of the young people's accounts of choosing to truant because of their teachers can be read as resistance to authority. There is certainly an evident power struggle occurring between teacher and pupil. However, despite disliking some teachers the majority of pupils had at least a couple of teachers who they particularly liked. Moreover, most did seem to recognise and acknowledge the legitimacy of teacher authority and control:

> It's fair enough like, they've gotta do their job. They need to be in charge but some of them can be really horrible. (Zack, Hillsden High School –Photo Elicitation Interview)

It was when the pupils' tacit boundaries were overstepped that resentment bred. Importantly, however, teachers did not only have a negative effect on pupils' attendance. A few pupils discussed 'transformative' teachers whose newly placed faith in the pupils led to a conscious decision to reduce their truancy as Kym highlights:

> I've promised Mr. Miller and Miss Rogers that I won't do it again. I want to prove to them that I can change. I want them to believe in me. When something happens now they're like "I don't think she done it", because they knows I've been listening to them. It used to be like "aw it's Kym she would do it wouldn't she". So I want them to trust me now. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Positive relationships with teachers were also vital in maintaining the attendance of pupils who found other aspects of the lessons or schooling experience inadequate, the interpersonal relationship contributing to their attendance when assessing specific situations.

'Lessons'

Lessons commonly featured in the young people's accounts of why they truanted from school. The term 'lesson' was often used to denote more than just school subjects. Rather, encapsulated in their reference to 'lessons' was the curriculum content, the pedagogic process and formal functionary aspects of school life (e.g. assemblies, registration period). Classroom ethnographies have provided numerous examples of how pupils perceive their lessons and have highlighted how pupils do not just receive and absorb what is transmitted by

the institution. Pupils evaluate and negotiate what is expected of them[45]. Their reactions are enacted in a number of ways such as 'having a laugh' etc. (See Woods 1979). Truancy is also one such option, which ethnographic studies have briefly presented (e.g. See Furlong 1976, Willis 1977). In the existing school truancy and absenteeism literature, pupil truancy has been linked to curriculum and pedagogy on numerous occasions (e.g. Kinder at al. 1996, O'Keeffe and Stoll 1995, Davies and Lee 2006). In this section, the young people's articulations on 'pointless' lessons, 'boring' lessons and 'hard' lessons as reasons for truancy are examined, referring consecutively to relevance, the teaching and learning process and specific difficulties in comprehension. The pupils are seen to make evaluations and judgements with regards to the quality, value and effectiveness of their lessons. It is argued that truancy can be seen as way for pupils to contest and negotiate the institution's legitimacy, control and imposition.

'Pointless' lessons

Choosing to truant because a lesson was seen as 'pointless' was a common reason articulated by the young people. Lessons that were described as 'pointless' or a 'waste of time' seemed to be those which were perceived to have little relevance or usefulness to the young people's lives, with a particular emphasis on instrumental value. Lessons seemed to be ordered in a hierarchal fashion, with an evident distinction between low value lessons and high value lessons. There was not a single subject in the current National Curriculum that was completely free from truancy. Nevertheless, it did seem that attendance was regarded as more important in high value lessons than in low value lessons, which, consequently, were more frequently truanted from. The young people's evaluations of their lessons are clearly not uniformly consistent across the whole sample, individuals had personal preferences, but there were certain subjects commonly evident within the extremes of the pupils ordering.

High value lessons were generally those which were seen to have instrumental job value. Almost all pupils agreed that Maths, English and Science were the most important subjects because they were necessary for securing 'good jobs'. Pupils with a clear understanding about what they needed academically for their desired careers also had their own lesson preferences which were valued highly. This is explored in detail in chapter 7 when the young people's self-management of truancy is discussed. Some pupils still truanted from the high

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[45] As do teachers.

value lessons, but this occurred very infrequently and they seemed to make a conscious effort not to. At times the young people struggled to see how the content of these subjects related to their everyday world about them and they were confused by the abstract nature of some topics[46]:

> I don't mind Biology but Physics is like a whole new world like squares with numbers and things and like weird stuff like t x s = d. It's like no it doesn't. it's confusing.
> (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)
>
> It's like algebra and equations and things like that, we're not going to really need them are we? I mean we might if we ever come across them but when will we? As long as we know how to count and add up then that's enough.
> (Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)
>
> You do need Maths for simple adding, subtracting, timetables, off the top of your head stuff, but not the other stuff you do in it.
> (Mark, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)
>
> Some things are just pointless anyway, like who needs to know about Shakespeare. It's like they're stuck in 50 years ago or something.
> (Adam, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

These were cited as reasons why truancy from these lessons had occurred on the odd occasion[47]. Nevertheless, for the vast majority of the time, the instrumental value of English, Maths and Science seemed to outweigh the pupils' negative perceptions and experiences, at least where attendance is concerned.

'Pointless' lessons were those which were regarded to be of low value and these were frequently truanted from by pupils in each of the three schools. Religious Education (R.E.) was the most common of these. Pupils generally saw R.E. as 'pointless' because it was unlikely to be useful to possible future careers or employment prospects and because the majority of pupils did not see themselves as religious:

> Kerry: Like R.E you don't need it really do you?
> Carla: Ah no.

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[46] Recent additions to the National Curriculum such as financial education, implemented after the 'field work' for this study took place, might have some benefits in this regards, helping students to make links between maths and one aspect of its potential real world application.

[47] Truancy from English, Maths or Science also occasionally took place following acute disagreements with teachers or if pupils had had grown particularly tired of the lack of variety offered as part of the pedagogic process, or if they had truanted for a whole day for an alternative reason.

Kerry: Unless you're gonna be a church assistant or whatever they're called or like a vicar

Carla: And I don't think anyone in this school is gonna be that! (laughs) So we can't be bothered with that like.

Kerry: (laughs) We're hardly ever in it, more like!

Carla: Well, yeah.

(...)

Whitney: I tells my mum sometimes I mitch stupid lessons, she don't mind.

Kerry: Aw my mum don't mind like R.E. as long as I don't get caught cos no one likes R.E do they, apart from like Christians….I hate R.E.

(Girls Focus group - Cooperfield High School)

I'd say I mitch R.E. the most. It's just like a pointless subject really. It's not like a subject that looks good on your record or anything…You don't really need it for anything to be honest. (Jenny, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Like R.E, I don't believe in god so what's the point in me going. I can't be arsed like. (Richard, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

Aww R.E.'s the worst ever! That really is just a waste of our time. Seriously like what can you actually do with R.E? (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Wen on da knock for RE 2da *[sic]*[48] lik
waste ov time innit
(Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

Music lessons were also commonly truanted from and again the instrumental value of the subject was questioned:

Connor: I just mitch the rubbish lessons like Music.

PJ: Why Music?

Connor: Erh..I don't really see the point in it. You can't do anything with it, less you want to be in a band or something, huh.. or like some crazy classical kind of person.

Shaun: You could be a Music teacher (laughs).

Connor: Uh yeah <u>funny.</u>

(Boy Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Sarah: Every time I have Music and things like that, I'm out of there [the classroom].

Carla: Yeah Music's rubbish.

Sarah: Music's a crap lesson. It's a waste of time. We never do anything decent.

Kerry: I don't mind music me. Sometimes I'll mitch it cos it doesn't really matter like, but it can be quite funny when you get to mess around on the instruments and all that. It's better than writing.

(Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

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[48] '2da' is used here to mean 'today'.

However, as Kerry mentioned, Music did have some appeal because of its practical nature, which seemed to place it an advantage over R.E, but its usefulness was still doubted. Music lessons also seemed to be out of touch with the young people's interests, despite years of curriculum development in Music education (Ross 1995) and recent attempts by the Welsh Government to make National Curriculum Music lessons relevant to the twenty-first century (DCELLS 2008b). A lot of the young people were extremely passionate about music outside of school and it was central to the identities of many of the pupils, but this was not their preferred kind of music:

> I hate Music…well I don't hate Music, like real Music. I hate Music lessons, like our lessons... learning about boring composers and shit like that. I like it when we do singing though. (Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

> I love music but not their music. I'm trying to make it as a rapper not a ...erh I dunno whatever you call them, erh ..you knows what I mean. They could teach you how to rap and that, like proper, and you could learn like all different things like. But I can't exactly imagine Miss Hector doing that (laughs). That would be proper funny actually (laughs) I'd pay to see it. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The irrelevancy of Art was also raised:

> I loves Art. Like graffiti, I love it. I like, like bright colours and that but we don't do that at school…. graffiti is art though, we did an art project in Tiperly youth club, spraying these boards like. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I like Art. I'm quite good at drawing and that but I don't like it when we're learning about artists and things like that. (Carla, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I mitch Art, cos I'm not really bothered about it. I've got no need for it. I just mess around in it really. Sometimes it's alright but it's like I don't want to do a clay face. (Anna, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Although the issue of instrumental value is highlighted, it also seems that in Art (as with Music) relevance was judged in terms of how tasks related to the pupils' real world interests. However, in contrast to R.E. and Music, Art lessons were valued highly by at least four of the pupils in this study, as two of them highlight:

> I want to be an Artist so I pretty much always go to Art.
> (Marvin, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

> Art's fun. I never mitch Art. I'm probably going to take it at college.

(Ella, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

P.E. and Games lessons provide an interesting departure, seeming to divide opinion. For the majority of pupils[49], these lessons had no direct instrumental relevance post 16 and were not examined. However, they seemed to be valued highly, especially by a lot of the boys:

> I like Games. If I've got my kit I like Games. If you haven't you know your gonna get detention so I don't go but it's not like a lesson I want to miss if you get me? It's fun and I'm pretty good at it. I likes Rugby and all that, Football...There's not many people that are better than me at Rugby to be honest...Baseball yeah, but not Rugby that's my sport. I've played since I was little and I play for Bramthorpe. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I likes doing Games and P.E. but that's it really and I don't mind IT cos it's computers innit. Games is just exercise and there's nothing wrong with that. (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

> I hardly ever miss Games or P.E. cos I like keeping fit. I don't want to be fat. I pretty much spend all my time playing sports outside of school anyway erh..so it's kind of the same. I like most sports really, Football, Trampoline...Dodgeball's funny. But they're not really lessons, not like serious lessons like where you have to write. It's just like you're doing exercise and erh having a play about. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

It seemed that these lessons were valued because they were fun and offered a change in schoolwork, more akin to their leisure interests outside of school. The boys also appeared to be positively influenced by contemporary discourses about the health benefits of exercise, perhaps also reflecting the Welsh Government's policies on 'fitness' as a cross-cutting theme in the implementation of the National Curriculum (DCELLS 2008b). Adam's keenness on rugby and the status he attributes to it might also in part be influenced by locality, in that Davies et al. (1997) have argued that rugby in Wales is used to promote welsh nationalism and as such male pupils are encouraged to participate in the sport to show allegiance with Welsh heritage and tradition. Paechter (2000 (after the 1988 ERA)) has also highlighted how boys often use P.E. to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity and Mac an Ghaill (1994) point out that participation in sport is often read as a cultural indicator of what it means to be a 'real' boy, whereas lack of participation is often associated with being a bit of a 'poof'. Indeed, both

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[49] Four of the pupils, Adam, Justin, Joe and Shaun (and Aaron was scouted at the end of the year) were members of professional sports teams and so Games lessons were considered to have some instrumental relevance should they pursue this as a career option. Eight pupils were also considering some form of sports training or P.E. option for further education.

Adam and Owen seemed to be particularly keen to demonstrate and assert their masculinity in many areas of schools life (this is discussed in chapter 7) and hence the value they attached to P.E. would seem to reflect this. In contrast Paechter (2000) suggests that girls commonly assert their femininity through a rejection of P.E. (see also Sherlock 1987, Scraton 1992). In this study it did seem that more girls truanted from Games and/or P.E. than boys. In contrast to the boys, the girls seemed to position Games and P.E. as low value subjects. Clarke (2009: 612 (after the 1988 ERA)) has highlighted how 'the mind–body dualism continues to value forms of disembodied academic achievement over other accomplishments, knowledges and practices' and as such the current educational climate of achievement and educational emphasis on jobs and training often left physical education positioned at the bottom of girls' priorities in her study (see also Flintoff and Scraton 2001). In contrast, research on boys has suggested that their academic commitment might be jeopardized by their aspirations of sporting glory (Swain 2000, Clark 2009). For the girls in this study truanting from these lessons was not considered detrimental to their education and lots of the girls suggested that they had made excuses so that they did not have to participate:

> Emma: I hardly ever go to P.E. and if I do, I just take a note in and sit at the side. I hate it.
> PJ: Why do you hate it?
> Emma: Ah it's horrible and I don't really see what you get that's good from it? It's not one that matters...I like trampolining but nothing else.
> (Emma, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

One particular girl, Chelsey, had an especially strong dislike of P.E. and Games lessons that seemed to combine a number of factors, many of which have been highlighted in numerous studies that have noted an incompatibility of physical education and femininity, such as a dislike of displaying her body, a dislike of kit, perceived incompetence, a dislike of participating in front of boys etc. (Coakley and White 1992, Scraton 1992). As a result Chelsey rarely attended school on Wednesdays or Thursdays.

> I just hate Games and P.E. That's why my dad had a letter saying he's got to go to court. They always makes us run round for ages and you feel like collapsing. I don't like it. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Both genders reported truanting from P.E. and Games when the weather was particularly bad, if the lesson was to take place outside:

I hate it when you come to school if it's raining and you've got games first lesson. You get all muddy and you've got to walk round the school all soaking. It's pathetic. I'd rather have a lie in, innit? (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Zoe: I was off Wednesday and Thursday because we had P.E. and Games.
PJ: Why was that?
Zoe: Aw like the time before she made me run like 200m and all I was thinking in my head is you cow! I don't mind running inside but it's when they make us run on cold wet grass. (Zoe, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

Specific lessons were not the only part of the school day that the pupils regarded as low value. Periods which had no obvious extrinsic reward, or which served alternative functions such as integrative functions, were ranked especially low, perceived as a considerable drain on their time. Indeed Paechter (2000) has noted that in an educational context dominated by high stakes assessment and a schooling experience where many activities come under the examination gaze, areas that do not come under this gaze tend to be treated as unimportant. The pupils Registration period was very commonly truanted from, specifically because it was viewed as a pointless use of their time.

I don't go to form. There's no point in having it, extra time in bed for me.
(Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

But Reg. is like every day, it's no wonder we get fed up with it really is it. It's always the same thing. They just force it on us. It's not even a lesson. I don't even know why we have it. (Ella, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

No one hardly goes to form anyway. You don't need to, so it's a waste of time really.
(Sarah, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

This is interesting, given that one of the main functions of the Registration period is to record pupil attendance. However, by turning up at their first subject lesson of the day, they could usually receive a 'present' (late) mark for the morning, or alternatively some signed in late at the school office (as discussed on p. 139). Similar reactions were articulated with regards to school assemblies:

Rhys: I probably mitch form lessons the most.
Mark: Yeah.
Alfie: Assemblies.
Mark: They're boring.
Alfie: And you get a dead bum.
Mark: It's annoying listening to teachers going on and on and on.
Alfie: Yeah they say the same thing like a hundred times.

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Rhys: There's no actual point to them like.
(Boys Focus Group - Cooperfield High School)

Lessons on the last day of the school term were also commonly truanted from in each of the three schools. Although the aim of these days was to provide fun days for pupils, with the usual formal lessons halted, for many they were considered 'pointless' days for precisely this reason. The whole day was often discarded or pupils truanted for some of the lessons or left early, as the examples below illustrate:

It's a pointless day really. There's no point in being in school cos all you do is watch films. So I'd rather be outside. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Im not goin in 2moro, it's non school uniform, home at 4th lesson, whats the point?? Have an early break inihh. (Carla, Cooperfield High School - MSN)

There was only one lesson left and all we were doing was just drawing. We weren't even doing no work or anything, well we were doing work but we weren't so there was no point. (Ruby, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Adam: We done it on the last day. Went for the morning, then came back but we were just watching films so it's like it doesn't really matter.
PJ: Don't you like watching films?
Adam: Yeah I do but not at school. I if I want to watch a film I'll watch one any time not in lesson. Getting told, "You're going to watch a film now so you've got to be quiet". It's hardly fun. And it's like, you can wear non-uniform but only on that day because they're telling you it's OK. It should be like every day or they could let you wear trainers when you want. That's hardly a big deal is it?
(Adam, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The institution's control over time seemed to be an additional factor here. The informal nature of the last day of term can be regarded as an official means of allowing pupils to bring aspects of their lives and personal identities external to the school into the school. However, in specifying and controlling when this was to be allowed, the desire was lost.

In line with the pupils' desire for more relevant lesson content, some pupils suggested that they would like to see a better balance of subjects within the curriculum, to include a greater amount of practical, applied or vocational subjects in *addition* to their existing subjects. This desire was articulated by pupils from all three socio-economic classifications and by pupils from all of the set positions. For instance, Zoe reflected upon the need for a greater mixture of subjects lower down the school.

I'd prefer a mixture of subjects... that'd make school a bit more interesting. Like next year I'm taking Applied Science and I'm doing Media at college and I was going to take Art because I like photography but apparently it's like drawing and modelling which I don't want to do but apparently you can take photography in Media. So I can do two things in one. I think I'll focus on Media a lot and on History and English and things like that. You need a balance I think. You can only pick one vocational from the column but it's a better mixture then what we have now because you can do like Applied Science as well which is more practical. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Tom said he would like to see more subjects which had obvious practical application:

I think it'd be good if we could do like mechanics and things like that... like straight away in year 7 because you can actually learn things then that you can use later on, like when we leave school. Erh..I don't want to be mechanic but it would be useful to know and erh.. it'd probably make school a bit more interesting. I don't mean make all our lessons vocational because then we wouldn't get into Uni and we might turn out a bit thick... but you know just a bit... erh a little of both kind of thing.
(Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Similar views were also articulated by Steph and Scott:

Steph: Sometimes I really like school but sometimes I don't. It's like half and half for me.
PJ: What don't you like about it?
Steph: We don't really get to do anything fun we just always do the same thing. Year 10s have got it better.
PJ: Why's that?
Steph: They get to do more fun stuff like all different things and we just do the boring stuff. I can't wait till year 10 then we can do what we want... I'm gonna be doing Drama, Child Development... erh I forgot what else... It's gonna be more better cos we can do different things and the same things together. Like Child Development will help you when you're older, some stuff like erh… Science probably won't help, but you gotta do it if you wanna be like good and all that. And I quite likes Science.
(Steph, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

We need more practical, I really do think that. It should be like the core subjects and Geography and P.E. and Games but then have more practical subjects as well like ... Well it's like 9D [the behavioural set] they get to do loads of fun stuff, like they can even play pool and that but we don't get nothing like that and I think we should get some of that too.....Not pool because we actually want to learn but maybe learn about construction something like that. (Scott, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

As Scott alludes to, the young people were keen to see an inclusion of more applied, vocational and practical subjects, not as 'alternative', 'modified' or 'extended' provision but

central to the mainstream curriculum. But, as Tom highlighted, this is not necessarily because they want to pursue a career in these subjects, rather they simply thought that the skills acquired through practical or vocational subjects could have some utility in the real world. Indeed the Nuffield Review of 14-19 education and training in England and Wales, carried out over a 6 year period, highlighted that 'learning programmes are too often purely 'academic', failing to acknowledge practical and experiential learning' (Pring et al. 2009: 204). It would seem that this is particularly the case for Key Stage 3 pupils who cannot benefit from the 'Learning Pathways for 14-19' or the 'foundation phase' which are challenging traditional conceptions of learning opportunities in Wales, distinct from England. It might be that the seemingly widespread desire for a broader curriculum among these young people has been partly influenced by the changes that they have witnessed in the provision and opportunities available for other year groups.

There were also suggestions by the young people that they would like to choose what subjects they studied lower down the school.

> I think we should choose what lessons we do. We're picking our options now but like it would be better if we got to pick our options before we came up [to secondary school]..maybe not in year 7 cos we wouldn't really know what there is like but like half way through year 7 so we'd be ready for year 8. Still do the main ones, like we have to in year 9 but more choice and you wouldn't have to do R.E. or Drama if you didn't want. If we could choose I think hardly anyone would mitch because you're doing what you chose to do....except if you had a row with the teacher or something but there'd be hardly any mitching.
> (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> We should get to pick our own lessons (Ella, Hillsden High School – Postcard Method)[50]

> There could be better lessions and we should chose what ones we do (Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard Method)

> Choose what lessons we want to do (Bradley, Hillsden High School – Postcard Method)

In this way, the pupils could tailor their subject choices to their personal interests, eschewing the lessons they regarded as overly 'pointless'. However, most pupils did not completely oppose the current curriculum provision. Their occasional truancy simply allowed them to appease their disgruntlements from time to time, giving them a sense of control and agency.

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[50] All quotes from the postcard method have been reproduced verbatim, including errors.

A small minority wanted the distribution of applied, vocational and practical subjects to significantly outweigh the more traditional academic subjects. These pupils (who are notably from 'routine & manual' backgrounds, with the exception of one) were more generally disillusioned with the curriculum as a whole. Zack, for instance, made no secret of the fact that he was not interested in the majority of lessons that the school currently offered him. He was in a variety of set positions including some top sets and seemed to perform relatively well in exams but claimed that when he did attend school he was put-off by the lessons currently available.

> I just don't like any of the lessons. They're boring it's not what I like. I like practical. We should have had more practical stuff, then I'd be in more. We hardly do anything good. If the lessons were more funner, you could do more stuff innit, but I'm not sitting there bored out my brain. We should do like electronics and that, like next year. (Zack, Hillsden High – Photo Elicitation Interview)

For Zack, it was the lack of relevance in his current subjects and the lack of variety in the learning process which he disliked, whereas, he claimed that in year 10 he would really begin to focus and was likely to truant a lot less. Year 10 was to mark a distinct change for him, offering him the subjects that he perceived were to be directly relevant to his future and which importantly were more practically based. He wanted to be an electrician (like his father) and in year 10 he could take electronics as a subject within the school. The school also made arrangements for pupils to attend an off-site college where they were permitted to take one vocational subject. He chose mechanics. He was very enthusiastic about the change in knowledge and teaching that the college would offer him:

> It's good cos we went up there today and they got like all the welding machines and they'll tell you how to fix the cars and everything and repair, take stuff off and put stuff back on and it teaches you how to undent stuff, and stuff like that. It's a good college up there. It's good cos I'm going to be doing more practical work in upper [school]. You do loads of practical stuff. I'd rather practical than writing all the time. Like you can do Applied Science with loads of experiments or you can do Core Science which is loads of writing, so I chose Applied….all my stuff is practical work. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Zack did however recognise the importance of continuing to study English, Maths and Science.

You need Maths and Science to be an electrician. Like if I could choose I'd still do them but like make them more practical cos they can be boring like...and you'd need English so you can write and for your record but they're the only ones you actually need. (Zack, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

In contrast, Owen, Aaron, Stacey and Naomi were the only pupils that said they would prefer a purely vocationally orientated curriculum. Aaron had his preferences in the current curriculum, for instance, he liked Games, P.E., Maths and Science. However, he felt that he had learnt all that he needed to from the current curriculum and instead wanted to pursue a predominantly vocational course, specifically related to building because he aspired to be a builder:

I don't reckon I need to learn anymore to be honest, I'm not being cocky but I do actually know quite a lot. I know enough for what I want to do... They should make it more interesting, more hands on like, go outside more, and we should get to do building work as well. (Aaron, Cooperfield High, Boys Focus Group)

I just don't really see the point in school, not for me. I can do it, I just don't want to do it. I just wanna do building like. We should get to choose and I would choose pure building like. Sometimes it would be in the school but then you could also go on site as well. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Aaron also highlights a desire to have some lessons take place outside of the school in the workplace. Naomi and Stacey both wanted to pursue full time courses in Hair and Beauty:

Naomi: My attendance is pretty bad I thik it only 77 or 78 I think buhh I am gonna do better nxt year wen we do hair and beauty cuzz thats what I want to do
PJ: As a job?
Naomi: ye hair and beauty
I choose it for nxt year
I think we shud just do hair and beauty all the time nothing elsee :D
PJ: nothing else at all?
Naomi: nopee ther all crap
(Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

Stacey: The reason I mitch is cos we never do anything good at school.
PJ: How do you mean?
Stacey: well we just do rubbish things. Like they just tells you how to read books and like boring things, like all about god and Germans. It's stupid. They should teach us good stuff like how to do Hair and Beauty so we can actually learn something.
PJ: What else would you want to do?
Stacey: Nothing, just Hair and Beauty if I could choose. Cooking's ok erh... but I just hate school there's nothing I like.
PJ: What would be good about Hair and Beauty then?

> Stacey: Well that's what I wanna do, so it'd help you get a job. If we did it all the time you'd have more of a chance like.
> (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Owen was less clear about what he wanted to do in his future but was certain that the current curriculum was not relevant for him and that a more practical curriculum would be more beneficial:

> Owen: I hate school it's no good for nothing. It's a waste of time innit. We don't do nothing like. What's the point in sitting in school all day? We learn fuck all.
> PJ: How do you mean?
> Owen: It's crap innit, always sitting down writing innit. I like to be active, d'ya know what I mean? We should just do like construction or summat where you actually learn d'ya know what I mean? More active.
> Bryan: Yeah more active.
> PJ: Is that what you want to do when you're older?
> Owen: I dunno, probably not. But like d'ya know? more things you're gonna need like innit.
> (Boys Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Indeed Paechter (2000) has noted that subjects that incorporate physical labour are likely to be highly valued by working class boys because of the importance of physical labour to hypermasculinites. In this sense boys like Owen and Aaron certainly shared commonalities with Willis's (1977) lads despite his study having taken place 30 years prior to this study. Furthermore, Paechter (2000) has noted how the vocational curriculum is extremely gender-segregated and it is certainly notable that the boys and girls had very gender typical preferences with regards to vocational routes. The desire for a more active approach to learning is also emphasised by Owen. This was a common theme among a wide majority of the pupils and is related to the pedagogical process, discussed in the next section. Owen, Stacey, Naomi, Aaron and Zack (to a lesser extent) clearly articulate views which are at the furthest end of the instrumentalism spectrum, believing that education should be about training them for a specific job. All of these pupils engaged in persistent truanting behaviours and Stacey and Owen seemed to be considerably more disengaged from the school as a whole, when compared to the rest of the sample. Their more acute resistance to the curriculum is clearly more worrying than the hierarchical ordering and consequently selective truancy of the majority.

What is clear from the data presented in this section is that the majority of the sample held strongly instrumental views with regards to the purpose of education. Commentators on truancy often suggest that truanting young people hold anti-school attitudes, resisting the institutions main aims and goals. However, one of the main goals of the school, which pupils have historically been socialised into accepting from an early age, is that schooling prepares pupils for the work place and their allocation within it. The young people's truancy from low value lessons which they perceive as irrelevant to future careers, does not represent non-compliance with this. Additionally, when the pupils reflected upon why they *did* attend school the primary reason given by the majority of the sample was "to get a good job". Moreover, the pupils' conscious efforts to avoid truanting from high value lessons because of their instrumental worth, demonstrates how 'official' goals and values can coalesce with the interests of young people rather than meeting uniform opposition, echoing earlier findings by Measor (1984 (pre 1988 ERA)). Clearly, however, the 'instrumental credentialist' (where education and training is not valued for itself but for the qualification it brings) orientations apparent in the young people's accounts is more at odds with intrinsic education and the sustainability of 'lifelong learning' in a so-called 'learning society' (Fevre et al. 1999 (post 1988 ERA)).

'Boring lessons'

A further reason that the pupils articulated for why they chose to truant was that they were put off lessons because of 'boring' aspects of the teaching and learning process. Most pupils were not turned-off learning in general but articulated specific grievances. In this case, it was not the subjects per se that the young people scrutinised, rather it was specific learning tasks or teaching methods that was the source of their disaffection. As a result, occasional truancy from a broad range of subjects was evident.

In all three schools the young people complained about a lack of variety in the teaching and learning process. They particularly disliked excessive copying from the board, text books or worksheets, didactic teaching and passive learning.

> Some lessons are just <u>so</u> <u>boring</u> though. Like me, I don't mind History, I like learning about all stuff like that but it's like it would be better if it wasn't just the same thing <u>all</u> the <u>time</u>. Like always copying out of books, copying copying copying again and <u>again</u>

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and <u>again</u>. That makes you mitch cos it's like why should I just sit here copying. (Shaun, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

When we do the same thing every day that makes me mitch. Like when we're just copying from books everyday it's really really boring, you can't put your own ideas in and I don't think I actually learn anything like that to be honest. So I don't see the point going in. (Tiffany, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Kai: In school like, you're like stuck in a classroom, and you're just sitting around doing nothing, just copying off the board or something.
Scott: And copying out of books.
Kai: And outside, cos you're on the mitch you can do whatever you want.
Scott: We do copying out of books a lot.
Calum: Like Maths, say you finish the first sheet, they'll give you like another 10. It's so boring.
Kai: Yeah if you do like an equation or whatever it's called and you finish the sheet and they'll give you another one. You finish that one and you'll get another one.
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

I just had to get out of class, like my first lesson was just copying, no talking, no fun, silent work and then the next lesson was the same and it was so boring. So I was like, right, next lesson I've got to get out. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Bryan: Cudnt be botherd goin in
PJ: Why?
Bryan: bad lessons jsut sitin copyin out
(Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

Like Geography, if we're just copying all lesson I can't be bothered, so I'll mitch. Like I'll go see what we're doing and if I don't like it I'll just walk out. Like yesterday we were just copying out of a book and I was like "come on Miss are you taking the mick? I wanna do some proper work". So I just said "bye" and walked out.
(Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Instead, pupils called for more variety in the teaching and learning process, including more activities within their current subjects, stating a preference for active and participatory lessons.

We've got to be able to speak and work together and stuff, not just keep our heads down and work 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

If we did activities and stuff that would be better. Like we could do games, like in Maths we could do little Maths games. (Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

It's better when we do group work and everyone says what they think instead of sitting still and not talking to nobody.. just falling asleep cos the teachers <u>so</u> boring. (Joanne, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The call for more variety in their lessons was an especially dominant issue raised in the postcard method, with virtually all pupils suggesting this as a way to get young people to attend school more:

Make some lessons more exciting and more interactive so students will enjoy them more (Jenny, Hillsden High School – Post card method)

Do less writing and more activitys (Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard method)

More fun lessons, more activities (Lucy, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard method)

Do more activities in lessons (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard method)

There should be better lessons – more excitin (Richard, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard method)

Make lessons fun (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Postcard method)

Lessons should combine different activities (Harry, Hillsden High School – Postcard method)

Make lessons seem more interesting and do fun stuff (Kym, Hillsden High School – Postcard method)

Do more practical stuff then you wont be so board (Dewi, Cooperfield High School, postcard method)

There were also suggestions that pupils preferred heuristic approaches to learning that allowed them greater autonomy over the learning process.

In Science we had this project and we had to build this like beast thing and I learnt loads from that like, cos you had to research about it and everyone in my class said you learn better like that. So now in Science our teacher keeps giving us practical things and it'd be better if all the lessons done that. (Scott, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Lessons should be more enjoyable not boring – do research ourselves and listen to our ideas (Anna, Hillsden High School – Postcard method)

I don't like it when they just tell us what to do all the time. I like it when we do little project things, like researching things in groups and when we get to use the computers for research. You learn more cos everyone shares ideas and works things out together

and it's funner. It should be like that all the time...but we hardly ever get to do it.
(Hannah, Pen-Y-Peel High – Girls Focus Group)

Here it seemed that the pupils wanted increased responsibility and autonomy over aspects of the learning process. Pupils also said they would be more engaged if lessons took place in a wider variety of settings.

We should go outside more. We do sometimes but not that much. I seriously think I learn better like that...not so stuck inside all the time.
(Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

John: For Geography we should go outside and stuff like that.
Dewi: Like if you do one lesson, say like English, then for the next lesson you go outside.
Calum: Yeah cos if you're stuck inside all the time then your gonna want to escape aren't you. If you did some lessons outside then it wouldn't be so bad.
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Although, importantly, the desire to be outside for lessons was seemingly weather dependant, as in the earlier case where pupils discussed truanting from Games when the weather was bad.

This is by no means the first study to highlight young people's discontent with aspects of the teaching and learning process, it is a well established, cumulative finding in the pupil voice literature for instance (e.g. Harland 2002, Rudduck and Flutter 1998). It would seem that neither the school curriculum nor teachers have yet given reality to the 'student centred learning' which is so commonly trumpeted as the basis of contemporary pedagogic processes. The truancy of the young people from this study indicates that this was not the reality for them. When truancy was based on perceived inadequacy of what the schools were offering in terms of curriculum and teaching and learning styles, the students recounted feeling particularly powerful and in control as they took charge of the situation.

'Hard' lessons
A few of the young people suggested that their decisions regarding truancy from specific lessons was more to do with the difficulties that they had in the lessons, rather than relevancy of the subject or the learning process itself. Calum, Carla and Tiffany claimed to have difficulties in French and Welsh:

Calum: I just can't be bothered with hard ones like Welsh and French.
PJ: What makes them hard?
Calum: It's just hard to learn it and to speak it.
(Calum, Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Carla: Some things I just can't do though, so it's like I just can't be bothered.
Tiffany: In Welsh they give you a paper and you can't even understand it cos it's all in Welsh, they're telling you to do it, but you can't understand it.
Carla: But like Welsh, languages like that, it just makes your brain say you can't learn it.
Tiffany: Yeah you can't learn it.
Carla: You say it so many times, that you can't do Welsh, that you get used to not being able to do Welsh. So you just sit there and you can't be bothered learning cos you knows you can't do it, or you just mitch cos you knows you can't do it anyway so there's no point.
(Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Interestingly, Carla was in the top set for Welsh, yet still cited her difficulty in comprehending the subject as a reason for truancy. Welsh is a compulsory 'core' National Curriculum subject in Wales. However, students generally positioned the subject as being difficult and furthermore it did not seem to benefit from the same value status as English did. In relation to English, Paechter (2000) notes that hierarchically it often receives high status because it relates to the national language. Despite the push in recent years to raise the profile of the Welsh language in Wales this did not seem to be reflected in the young people's accounts. Instead, Welsh was generally attributed a medium value status and truancy from it was seen as warranted when difficulties were experienced. With regards to French, the perceived difficulty of foreign language subjects among young people has been raised in other studies (Duckworth and Entwistle 1974) and the findings from the large scale English survey carried out by O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) found French to be one of the most frequently truanted subjects.

Richard suggested that he found lessons more difficult in general and at times the pressure arising from a lack of understanding was considered to be too much for him. This is highlighted in an example from a discussion regarding his whole day truancy which was occurring at the time.

I jus dont like the lessons, they wont help you or anyfin they jus say do this and I dont have a clue what to do (Richard, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

Whilst Harvey and Alfie suggested that their difficulties were exacerbated by a perceived unhelpfulness from their teachers:

> Harvey: I only go over the field if I don't like the lesson though.
> PJ: What don't you like about them?
> Harvey: They just don't explain the work, like what we're doing.
> Alfie: They'll say it all and then like at the end of their speech, it's like I don't know what to do. (Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

In each of these cases it seems that truancy allows the young people a sense of agency when faced with difficulties. Their truancy might also be seen as a way for pupils to avoid the exposure of their 'performing self' arising from a failure to live up to the expectations of their 'official self' (Goffman 1961). A similar interpretation may also be made of those who attributed their truancy to pressures arising from school tests.

'Tests'

Two pupils indicated that they chose to truant so that they did not have to take part in school tests. Missing exams or tests to truant was consciously avoided by the majority of the young people in this study[51] but Hayley and David said that the pressure arising from school tests had led to their truancy. Both Hayley and David are pupils from high set positions. In each case the worry and embarrassment associated with underperforming was highlighted. Whole-day truancy was undertaken by both of the pupils, which was facilitated by pretending to be ill.

> I had a Welsh test. It was like a Welsh speaking test and you had to like speak in front of the whole class, a paragraph and like memorise it and I just couldn't do it so I pretended I was sick and my mum rang the school. (Hayley, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

> David: It was stressing me out, like we were having too many tests and I just wanted to get away from it all.
> PJ: What kind of tests?
> David: Erh end of year exams, like going into another set it can make you stressed.
> PJ: How do you mean?
> David: It's like pressure because if you don't do well you might end up in another set but I only did it once or twice.

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[51] Further discussion on this issue is included in chapter 7, where the young people's attempts at reducing the risks associated with their truancy are outlined.

Denscombe (2000) has argued how the significance of GCSEs and their associated stress should be seen in the context of their contribution to the self-identities of young people. Clearly, class tests and end of year exams only compare lightly to the significance of GCSEs, but there is certainly a sense in which Hayley's and David's truancy from their tests may be related to issues associated with their identities and sense of self. Taking Goffman's distinction between the 'performing self' and the 'official self' once again, their truancy might be seen as a way for them to avoid jeopardising the heightened expectations of the 'pupil' role placed upon them. To do badly in these tests would highlight them as performers of the 'pupil' role, and thus, out of sync with the 'official self' rather than at one with its demands and expectations. David and Hayley's high set positions and 'professional & managerial' class backgrounds may exacerbate this. In pretending to be ill they can avoid this threat to the self and the possible challenge to their identity.

'Embarrassed' by the school

Pupils from Cooperfield High School claimed that being embarrassed by the physical environment of their school and its reputation led to their decisions to truant on some occasions:

> Carla: I mitch cos I hate this place. It's a shit hole.
> Kerry: It's a cow shed.
> Carla: Look at the state of it!!
> Kerry: It's falling apart, look (points to the ceiling where lots of the roof tiles are missing, leaving holes in the ceiling).
> PJ: But does that really not make you want to go to school?
> Kerry: Yeah cos you're like embarrassed.
> Whitney: It's embarrassing.
> Sonia: And it's freezing in here. I'd much rather be in my nice warm house, in my bed.
> Sarah: It's embarrassing wearing this uniform cos people know you go to a drippy and horrible school.
> Carla: And the teachers are like so far stuck up their arse they think that this is a perfect school and they pretend everything's fine when it's not.
> (Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Here, it is not 'school' itself that the young people are necessarily discontent with, rather it is *their* school which they take issue with. They also emphasise a particular concern about how they will be identified outside of the school as a result of this. Their views stand in contrast to

articulations made by some of the young people from the other schools, who seemed to hold a more positive view of their schools:

> This is a good school. It's better than most in Cardiff innit.
> (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Our school's a good school not like Lintcroft that's rough. We've got better people, better sports teams and you can do better things here and it's not exactly a dump. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> But I like this school. It's like we've always got to be in competition with Upton but we win cos our school's nicer than there's and bad people go there, bad people go here but most are alright like. (Steph, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

These pupils seem to identify more favourably with their schools. There were other ways that the pupils of Cooperfield High School demonstrated their belonging to their school, for example, through membership of school sports teams, going to out-of-hours school clubs etc. Nevertheless, when referring specifically to the schools image, the girls suggested they were embarrassed by their school and being associated with it and this was manifest in their decision to truant.

'Time'

A further factor evident within the young people's accounts of why they chose to truant was the issue of time, and more specifically, the institution's structuring and control of their time.

> We're kids, we can't learn all the time. We've got to have time to ourselves too.
> (Carla, Cooperfield High School - Girls focus group)

> Sometimes, you just want a bit more time off though…We don't get enough weekend. We haven't got enough time. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High - Girls Focus Group)

> It's like we're always told what we've got to do, where we've got to go. We should get to decide what time we start, but it's like you've got to go to Maths, you've got to go to French, you can't have a break when you want. Sometimes you need a break. (Delwyn, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Some also suggested that they wanted to see more flexibility with regards to their hours of schooling.

> School's just too long, like the day drags. I'd rather come in early and go home early. Like come in at 6 and go home at 12 or something. Like if I could choose, I'd still want

to come cos I'd have to learn but I just wish school wasn't five days a week, they could shorten it. (Adam, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

What they should do is, you'd have to do 6 hours a day to go to school right, but you can do it whenever you want to. You didn't have to do 9 till 3 like. You could do it like in the night. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

The pupils point to a desire for greater temporal autonomy, challenging the legitimacy of the institution's control over their time. However, importantly, the pupils emphasise that they are *not* opposed to attendance at school altogether. The issue of time is, in many ways, clearly implicated throughout this study, given that truancy by its very nature involves the (re)appropriation of time. However, only on a few occasions was it suggested that this was specifically why the decision to truant was made. Thus, although time was centrally implicated within the pupils' discussions and actions, their truancy seemed to involve more than a desire for the reclamation of their time.

'Bullying'[52]

Bullying, in the widest sense of the term (e.g. Askew 1989: 61), was a recurring reason given for truancy by a small number of the pupils within each of the three schools, namely David, Steph, Alice, Mark and Chelsey. Thus, indicating that negative relationships with fellow pupils, not just with teachers, impacted upon pupil absence. Experiences of physical, verbal and psychological bullying were shared. On some occasions truancy was used as an immediate response following a confrontation:

They were like smacking me and swearing at me and all that. So I just walked out and went home. (Mark, Cooperfield High School – Boy Focus Group)

They were like talking about my family again and wouldn't stop picking on me, so I just kind of went mad and stormed out of class completely and went on the knock. (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I got beaten up by Nicola and Cassandra Houseman and this other girl and they broke my arm. So now if they starts, I goes straight home. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

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[52] It is difficult to know how to account for truancy that occurs because of bullying, specifically where it should be placed in a list of push and pull factors and whether it actually counts as a push or pull factor at all. The pupils are clearly being pushed into truancy but it is not entirely an institutional push. Rather, it is the actions of fellow pupils that push these pupils into truancy. Nevertheless, mindful of these issues, the decision was made to account for bullying in the push section because it often initially arises on the site of the institution and as a result of the mass grouping of pupils within the schools.

Truancy was also used as a method of avoidance. This occurred for specific lessons in classes where an encounter was thought likely and for whole-days, out of fear and as a form of respite in periods where bullying had been unremitting:

> Im avin 2da off coz tha girl is bullying me again
> Its a night mare realy
> Slaping me kikin me pushing and every thing
> (Steph, Pen-Y-Peel High School – MSN)
>
> I'd just wake up and not feel like going in…If I'd had enough of it all. You know you're safe. No one can get at you. (David, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Clearly the extent to which these young people *choose* to truant is datable. It would seem that truancy can certainly be involuntary at times, although, it does allow the pupils some degree of agency and control over the situation.

Pull Factors

In contrast to the push factors listed by the young people, the pull factors they gave were less numerous and articulated less frequently. What is notable is that all the young people who cited pull factors as reasons for some of their truancy also cited push factors at other times. This section examines the young people's decisions to truant based upon 'friends', 'family' factors, and 'work'. There is also a brief consideration of interests and activities outside the school that occasionally served as pull factors.

'Friends'

In much of the sub- and counter-cultural literature discussed in chapter 2, truancy is commonly depicted as an act which is significantly influenced by the peer group. It has also been suggested in the truancy literature that peer pressure can coerce pupils into truancy (e.g. Kinder et al. 1996, Cullingford and Morrison 1997, Le Riche 1995). In contrast, in this study the influence of friends when making the decision to truant was only purported to be minor.

There appeared to be little evidence of any clearly defined pupil subcultures. Rather the pupils were keen to highlight the variability of their friendship networks and associations.

None of the young people saw themselves a part of a consistent 'group' as such, instead they suggested that although they did have a typical set of friends which they were more likely to spend their time with, their interactions and relationships were by no means fixed and statically located within these groups. Most suggested they had friends beyond those whom they would typically 'hang around with' and would 'mingle' with a broad range of people. The social and educational backgrounds, interests and orientations of the young people they might usually spend their time with were also generally quite diverse. It was not, therefore, generally possible to delineate a consistent set of norms and values among these friends (as other researchers have e.g. Hargreaves 1967, Lacey 1970, Willis 1977) that might be held as explicable for the pupils' actions with respect to status-seeking or culture conforming behaviour.

When collectively truanting, the pupils suggested that the people they went with tended to vary. According to the pupils, those present when collectively truanting seemed to be those who defined the situation in a similar way, communicated this amongst each other and decided on truancy as the appropriate course of action.

> It's like if we're going to Art or something and you say "awww I really can't be bothered with Jenkins today" and someone else says, "Same here". Then like someone else will kind of go, "Shall we mitch?" and then you're like, "Hmmm yeah", cos you really can't be bothered and then other people probably hear what you're doing and then kind of tag along cos they weren't feeling it either. So everyone just decides to do it together kind of thing. But some people will be like, "Nah I like Art, I'm going". So it's just like the people that want to go, go and if they don't, they don't.
> (Alfie, Cooperfield High school – Photo Elicitation Interview)
>
> Sometimes it's with people I know, sometimes it's not, it like changes. Like, sometimes it's me Danny, Trin and Pete, erhh... sometimes Dylan and sometimes people who I don't even really know like, like people I don't hang around with...erh like Steve's been with us...Harry... and sometimes some of the girls come. Sometimes there's loads of us like ... It depends who wants to go really and who's there like. Like who's in the lesson when we're deciding if we should do it and all that.
> (Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School - Telephone Interview)

However, just because their friends were going it did not necessarily mean that they always chose to truant, as Alfie alluded to and as Carla highlights below:

Carla: I goes with her (points to Kerry) quite a lot but if she asks me and I don't want to go, then I won't. Like the other day she wanted to miss Art cos she was in a strop with Miss Jenkins, but she hadn't done anything to me and I likes Art so I didn't go with her.
Kerry: Yeah and I didn't go with you over the field the other day either did I?
Carla: Nope.
Kerry: I weren't freezing my arse off.
(Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

Sometimes the pupils' reasons for wanting to avoid a particular lesson were not the same but they seemed to communicate their desire or need to avoid the lesson and agree that truancy should be the action undertaken:

Steph: But sometimes we have different reasons don't we?
Alice: Yeah it's like half and half.
Steph: Like when we had History and it was Mr Brown and I don't like him and you were...
Alice: Yeah and I went cos I was getting bullied by Lexi.
Steph: So we just wanted to go.
(Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Banksy was going on the knock cos he hadn't done his homework and I don't like her [the teacher], so I thought if I went I'd probably just cause agro and I think Nath hadn't done his homework either. So Banksy goes "do you want to come?", so we did. But sometimes I'll say, "do you want to go on the knock?" Anybody can say it really. It depends. But then sometimes I can't be bothered. I don't always go. (Joe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The fluid composition of collective truancy, variability of behaviour and the shared agreement on appropriate courses of action, makes Furlong's (1976) notion of 'interaction sets' a more useful way in which to understand this truancy. Friends arrive at the decision to truant together but it would seem that the individuals retain a considerable amount of choice as to whether they should opt to truant or not.

However, there were some incidences where friends seemed to exert a more significant influence on decisions to truant. Only Alice suggested that this took the form of direct coercion:

The only thing is right, if you don't go on the knock, they (two friends) normally call you chicken and all that. So then I just does it then, cos then it gets me in a mood. So sometimes you just gotta take a chance. You don't want them to stop being your friend. But it's like half and half cos I hardly go with them anymore. I mostly goes with Sarah now or Sinead and Laura.

Zack suggested that he had opted to truant when large numbers of his friends were going because he didn't want to miss out. Similarly, Tom suggested that there were times when he had remained in school and felt that he was missing out as a result:

> Like if I said "aw we got homework to hand in", then people would be like "aw I haven't done it either, shall we just go on the knock?" Then we'd miss the lesson and then come back. But sometimes someone else wanted to do it and I weren't feeling it so I stayed. So it's kind of random …but if there's like a big group going then I've got to do it then, rather than sit in and be the only boy in my class. That's when I go along with it all like. (Zack, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I was like, I'm not going to, I'm gonna go to Science. Then I was in Science and they're teaching you all this chemical stuff and I was thinking you could be out there with the boys having a laugh...No one forces you but sometimes it does make you think.
> (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

An additional 'pull' with regards to friends was evident in the experiences of Zack and Hayley, who had both taken whole days off school to be with friends who went to different schools. In Zack's case this occurred on a number of occasions, although he insisted that the main reason he decided not to go in was because of the 'boring' lessons, and that he had then planned to meet up with some of his neighbourhood friends who were also truanting from school, highlighting how multiple factors can intersect. Hayley only reported staying off school for this reason once, to prolong the weekend spent with her cousin:

> Me and my cousin were over my nan's house and then we didn't want to go to school because it was Sunday and we were having a good day and wanted the day off. So we both set our alarms for twelve o'clock and then we were pretending we were being sick because we knew we would have to stay over my nan's then. So then we was both together. So we got the day off and were just messing around in the room but then if we could hear someone coming we just quickly lay on the settee and pretended we were ill.
> (Hayley, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

An important point also worth noting is that the second most predominant reason articulated by the young people for why they chose to *attend* school, was because they wanted to see their friends. Thus, friends were not only part of the problem, instead for the majority they seemed to have a positive influence on deterring truancy.

'Family' factors

Several of the young people provided examples of how they felt family factors influenced their decisions to truant. Importantly, those that did mention family factors as an influence were not restricted to young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Five of the young people reported having stayed off school to help their mother in times of sickness or when they were in need of aid. There was a clear gender divide evident when truancy occurred for such reasons, with none of the boys suggesting that they had truanted for similar reasons. Lizzie truanted to help her mother who was undergoing kidney dialysis, she often missed school to help out around the house, doing the daily chores which her mother found difficult to do:

> Lizzie: I stay off quite a lot to help my mum because she's got bad kidneys and goes to dialysis so she can't use her arm that much. She's got a tube thing in her arm.
> PJ: Is it just you that helps?
> Lizzie: Well my brother doesn't cos you know what boys are like but my sister sometimes comes round and takes my mum shopping but she's 29 and moved out when she was 20. So it's mostly just me, sometimes my dad when he's not at work.
> (Lizzie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Her pattern of absence was variable ranging from a few times a week to periods of persistent absence lasting up to two weeks at a time. She also always truanted on the final day of term:

> Last day n ppl was goin home dinner time soo I stayed home n helped my mum
> We dont do anyfing any way
> I never go in last day lol
> (Lizzie, Cooperfield High School – MSN)

Chelsey also truanted to help her mother who had a long term illness:

> Chelsey: If my brother gotta go somewhere and my dads gotta go somewhere then I'll stay off because we can't leave my mum on her own in case she has a fall and I'll help with all the chores and that.
> PJ: What kind of chores?
> Chelsey: Do the hovering, dusting, cooking, washing up, do the washing and all that. We all take it in turns.
> PJ: So your dad and brother help as well?
> Chelsey: Yeah but sometimes my brother just sits on his bum and he works over the pub that's by me.
> (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Chelsey's truancy specifically for this reason was not as common as her truancy which occurred for other reasons because her dad was the predominant carer for her mother. On

two occasions Zoe also stayed at home, in the example below she discusses her truancy that occurred for a week:

> Zoe: My mum had to stay off cos she was really ill, so I stayed off to help her.
> PJ: What kind of stuff did you do?
> Zoe: I like cleaned the house and I like basically did what my mum did I suppose. My step dad had to go to work and my brother isn't living with us at the moment. My mum was ill so I just thought, aww bless her. So I just stayed home.
> PJ: What did she think of that?
> Zoe: At first she was a bit like "oooh" but I think even though she said "you should have gone to school" it was better for her so she didn't have to actually get up. Obviously she could get up, but do the house work and things.
> (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Carla also took a week off from school whilst her mother was at work so that she could look after her little brother when he had been suspended from primary school for a week. Lizzie, Zoe and Carla all pretended they were ill in order to avoid detection by their school. Chelsey sometimes used this excuse but more often than not she failed to provide the school with any reason for her absence. This demarcation of gender with regards to young people's domestic responsibilities within the home has also been highlighted in a number of other studies (Griffin 1985, Skelton 2000). Each of the girls claimed that it was their choice to truant to help their mothers and seemed to suggest that their role as 'daughter' took preference over their role of 'pupil' when their mothers were in need of help.

> I'm just happy to help my mum. At the end of the day that's more important than school. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> If your mother's ill then you've got every right to mitch. That's what I think. Obviously the school don't think that. You've gotta go to school but sometimes it's just more important to help your mum isn't it.
> (Lizzie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Nevertheless, it may well be argued that the girls are able to assert autonomy through deciding to truant so they can help their mothers but it seems that the girls are then circumscribed by scripted gender roles.

A completely separate family factor was raised by Tom. He suggested that his truancy could at times be partly influenced by family problems at home, seeing it as a reaction to arguments following his parents' divorce:

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My dad wants my mum to sell our house because we've got quite a big house and he's not living with us anymore, so they're always arguing ... Say like when they've been to the solicitors and my mum comes home and she'll just be shouting and taking it out on us and then that can kick off my bad days. You wake up and she's shouting at you and then you know it's probably going to end in a bad day. Then like in some subjects I don't like the teachers and if I'm having a bad day I just think aw I'm gonna have a row in the next lesson. So there's no point me going because I'll end up having detention. So then I just walk out of school. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

There are number of factors at play here. Although Tom suggests that his parents' arguments are the root cause of this truancy he also suggests that the lessons he misses are the ones with the teachers which he dislikes and he anticipates in advance that his behaviour in the given lesson may lead to conflict and thus truants to avoid this. Hence there is a clear sense of overlap between the family factors at home, the points discussed in the 'teachers' section and his behaviour. But Tom also then goes on to suggest that the problems at home can lead to his attendance at school, not just his absence.

But most of the time I'd rather go to school just to get away from it all, when my mum's like screaming her head off and I don't want to make it worse. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Like friends, for many pupils the family also had a positive influence on attendance. Attendance was ordinarily encouraged by most pupils' parents and they also made them aware of the risks associated with truancy, threatened to sanction them if they found out they were truanting and actually sanctioned those that had been caught.

'Work'

Choosing to truant in order to work in paid employment was mentioned by one boy within the sample. Aaron held a Saturday job helping out on a building site, organised via a friend of his family and occasionally he would truant from school to work there.

If it's major work then I help out. I done it two weeks ago and he gave me 50 quid for it. But I've only done it twice this year and once was at the start of the year, the first day cos it doesn't really matter. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group).

As discussed, Aaron aspired to be a builder when he was older and truanting in this way allowed him to gain experience in this occupation. Although truanting to work can be

regarded as a 'pull' for Aaron, it is also strongly related to the push factors outlined earlier in the 'lessons' section. Aaron strongly believed the present curriculum had little to offer him and that there were skills which he desired yet were missing from the curriculum in its current form (specifically the key stage 3 curriculum). Yet clearly, the extent to which these skills can be acquired through helping out occasionally on the building site is certainly questionable.

Other factors

There were a number of other pull factors articulated infrequently by the young people as reasons for why they truanted. Two people mentioned that they had truanted on the odd occasion because they were hungry and so they went to Greggs bakery and the local chip shop to buy some food and three people said they had truanted because they needed a cigarette. These two activities were also undertaken by other pupils from the sample but only as a way to spend their time truanting, after they had already decided to truant for one of the other reasons outlined in this chapter.

> Carla: Sometimes it's like aw let's go have a fag before I go to lesson. But like the other day I said to you (Whitney) didn't I? Like when Chantelle and that went for a fag and I said "I don't want smoking getting in the way of my education". So I'd rather go to the lesson than go and have a fag. When I go on the mitch and I go have a fag is mostly when we've got a supply and when you do want a fag obviously.
> Whitney: It's not often though that you'll mitch just for a fag is it.
> Carla: No not for a fag.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

They were not, however, thought to be the reason why truancy was opted for in the first place. In addition Zack said that on one occasion he had truanted for a morning so that he could buy school shoes after his were damaged and Steph took the day off to prepare for a pop concert in the evening. Hannah, Delwyn and Zack also suggested that they truanted because they had woken up and felt too tired to attend school that day. Two pupils also suggested that the prospect of walking to school in torrential rain had made them decide against going to school on one occasion in the year of study, although, clearly the latter examples cannot really be described as 'pulls' per se.

Struggling for Control and Making Room for Agency

Central to the young people's accounts of why they chose to truant is the issue of power and control. For many of the young people their reasons for truancy varied over the course of the year depending on the situation at the time. In this sense their reasons for truancy tend to be multiple and overlapping:

> It's like one time I mitch cos I don't like the lesson another time it's cos I don't like the teacher, last day of term, forgot my homework or something. You don't really have just one reason, it kind of changes. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The young people's attempts at negotiating institutional control and its constraints, demands, expectations and restrictions is a recurring theme that encompasses many of their reasons. Clearly when asked to account social actors tend to direct their actions and strategic intentions to particular situations and people that they feel to be impinging on their lives at a given time. Thus, for many of the young people, the object that their explicit conflict is directed at is the teachers, the subject, the classroom management etc. rather than the institution as whole. As Giddens (1984) highlights, despite the knowledgeability of social actors their reflective capabilities tend to be grounded in everyday conduct rather than structural factors. Yet, time and time again it is the institution's control that is highlighted, whether this is the control of their time and space, the control of knowledge and what counts as worthwhile knowledge or authoritative and disciplinary control etc. The young people's decisions to truant can clearly be read as a struggle for control and agency in relation to the institution. In making the decision to truant the young people are able to assert their autonomy and freedom of action, temporally and spatially.

Making the distinction between whether a pupil was 'pushed' or 'pulled' may appear to obscure the extent of the young people's agency, implying that the decision to truant is beyond the young people's locus of control. However, on the contrary, the majority of the pupils were adamant that they ultimately made the decision to truant, and that at any one time they could have 'acted otherwise' (Giddens 1984).

> I mitch if like the lesson is rubbish or if the teacher is being a bitch to me... but it's not all the time that I'll actually mitch if you know what I mean? Sometimes I can't be

bothered mitching like...I only do it if I want to do it. You're gonna want to do it sometimes. (Carla, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

You do it cos you want to do it, you don't like the teacher or you've got too much homework or something. You just make up your mind. If you want to do it you just do it or sometimes it's like aww I can't be bothered. Then you usually just end up messing around in class or something, talking for the whole lesson.
(Adam, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

People think someone made you do it or you've got bad parents like but like me, I decide if I want to do it. It's my choice innit. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

They may have been 'pushed' but they made the decision to jump and they did so purposely. It is their intentional conduct which is central to their expression of autonomy in relation to the institution. This struggle for autonomy in relation to the institution can also be seen in a discussion between the girls at Cooperfield High School:

Sarah: Cos were like, cos were in year 9 they expect us not to be childish and that, but we like to have fun, you know what I mean?
Carla: We're still children at the end of the day.
Kerry: Yeah were not exactly adults are we. They've got to let us do what we want to do.
Carla: They don't have to let us but we're gonna do it anyway. At the end of the day it's our lives isn't it. If we want to mitch we're gonna mitch. If we want a fag we'll have a fag. The thing is cos we're in the top sets, me Whit erh me and Whit, they expect us to be perfect, like all the time and it's like ah we don't want to be perfect every lesson. I like learning and I'll be like really good and work really hard for ages but then you just think, I can't be arsed learning anymore. I wanna get out of here. I'll have a bit of a laugh but then I'm back normal again doing my work.
Kerry: And it's like we're not allowed trainers, nail varnish, you're not allowed to dye your hair, not allowed makeup. I think it's disgusting. We're not allowed to do anything we want to do and we're not allowed to look the way we want to look. It just makes you more determined.
PJ: Determined to do what?
Kerry: To do what you want.
(Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

The boys from Cooperfield High School also demonstrate this desire for autonomy and freedom of action when discussing how they felt when they made the decision to truant and left the school grounds:

Kai: It feels like you're free.
Scott: You get like a buzz off it. Cos you think, you think you're like better than the teachers like, cos you've got away with it. And it feels good like.

Kai: It's like a drug.
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

However, although this autonomy can be interpreted as a form of resistance it does not necessarily mean that the young people were completely opposed to the institution.

Truancy as a Secondary Adjustment

In order to understand the dynamic between the young people's expression of autonomy in relation to the institution, Goffman's (1961) notion of 'secondary adjustments' is considered useful[53]. It is argued that truancy can be seen to represent a way in which the young people stand apart from the 'official self', in this case the role of 'pupil', and the expectations of the institution of the school. The widespread, though generally occasional nature of truancy can be seen as part of the 'underlife' operating in schools which exists in reaction to institutional control over pupils lives. In the young people's accounts and in their actions there is an evident struggle between self and institution occurring. For many there is a strong self-preservation motive implicit within the factors that they outlined as reasons for their truancy, such that truancy is not just absence from activity but it is also 'absence from being' (Goffman 1961: 173).

To clarify in re-iteration of the discussion in chapter 3, the school is not experienced by the pupils as an all-encompassing total institution in exactly the same way as Goffman's (1961) asylum. This thesis makes no claim that the modern Welsh secondary schools in this study are total institutions. The concept of total institution is an ideal type but Goffman (1961) suggests that it is expected that many other institutions will certainly share some of the characteristics of the total institution. Throughout this chapter we have seen examples of pupils pointing to a 'staff-inmate split', when discussing their conflict with particular teachers akin to the 'binary character of total institutions' (p.18). Pupils have discussed being humiliated as a result of being shown-up and singled-out by teachers and have complained about being stripped of identity markers such as make-up, highlighting a degree of mortification of self (although less

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[53] See chapter 3 for definitions of primary and secondary adjustments.

intense and mostly temporary). The tightly scheduled, formally administered nature of total institutions imposed from above to fulfil official aims is also apparent in the school, which is tightly structured into a timetabled routine. As Delamont and Galton (1986: 138) note 'for the pupil there are fixed points of arrival, registration, assembly, lessons, break, lessons, lunch, lessons, break, lessons, home, everyday whether it is Tuesday or Wednesday'. However, unlike Goffman's mental patients, pupils are able to leave at the end of the school day and return to their home worlds. The young people's perceptions of their time being controlled by the school and the continuous focus on 'learning' have also been noted in this chapter. The school and its 'large number of like-situated individuals' (p.11) is also spatially distinct from the outside world as Goffman notes of the total institution. How the pupils experience this and attempt to 'escape' from it are discussed in the next chapter. However, it is not as 'closed' as a total institution. Indeed, it is increasingly common for modern schools to attempt to break some of the (non-physical) barriers between the school and the local community for example. The modern Welsh secondary school is clearly not as total, oppressive, or as opposed to the individual as the ideal type of the total institution implies. Nevertheless, it is the concept of 'secondary adjustment' which Goffman develops in his study of a total institution that is seen as particularly illuminating for making sense of the young people's actions and perspectives in this study. The differences between the modern welsh secondary school and Goffman's ideal type should not therefore detract from this[54].

In discussing secondary adjustments, Goffman suggests that they are characterised by a 'general theme of disaffection and involvement' (1961: 271). What distinguishes secondary adjustments from other forms of resistance is the individual's tendency to simultaneously embrace and resist the institution, to identify with it and to oppose it, an aspect which Goffman regards as a central element of the self as a 'stance-taking entity'. This would seem a particularly apt way of encompassing the young people's relationship to the institution. For the majority of the pupils, although they aired specific grievances about their schools as reasons for their truancy, they also articulated more positive accounts of their schools. In the first stage of the photo elicitation research, out of the 13 that were asked to take photographs of things, places and people that were important to their lives, eleven took photographs of the school and/or areas within it (e.g. the sports pitch, their form classroom

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[54] Just as Corsaro (2003) applies the notion of secondary adjustment to preschools without necessarily conceiving of the nursery school as sharing all the characteristics of a total institution.

etc). Zoe and Aaron, who both engaged in persistent truanting behaviours, and Justin who engaged in occasional truanting behaviours discuss why school is important to them:

> School's important to me cos like all my friends are here and I want to get a good education ...I suppose my life would be pretty boring otherwise and I love some lessons which you might think is crazy but I like learning... especially when we're learning about different views and things. It really interests me. Some teachers can be quite fun as well. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I like going to school. I like learning, chilling with my mates and all that and I likes Rugby. Some of the lessons are crap and it'd better if we did building but If I could choose I'd still come cos I like it and I've gotta show my face like. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> School does get annoying but It'd be pretty boring if we didn't have school, cos what could you do? ...there'd be nothing to do really. You couldn't get a job and you wouldn't have any friends. It's like in Africa they just walk around all day and do chores, that's their lives but at least we've got a chance. It can be rubbish but I'd rather it than nothing. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The lack of alternative education and social options outside of the institution of the school are highlighted by the young people but they also articulate a sense of belonging and attachment to their schools and seem to value education. Aaron highlights the point, shared by many, that if they could choose whether to go to school or not, then they would still choose to go despite their particular grievances. As discussed in the 'lessons' section of this chapter, pupils also shared the instrumental aims and goals of the school and school was also seen as important because it was a dominant space where their peer relations took place, Zack and Harvey point to this below:

> This is like a picture of my class, Simmo, Rhys, Beth... because school is like important to me innit cos all my friends go there like... This one here is us like at break time cos I likes break times (laughs). (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Your mates are in school so you've got to go to school. It's kind of a laugh really. Like it's pretty boring in the holidays when you're not in. (Harvey, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

As well as friends, most pupils liked at least some teachers and lessons. Many of the pupils from the sample also participated in schools sports teams and out out-of-hour clubs and three pupils were on the school council.

The inherent contradiction in the young people's accounts with regards to both liking and disliking school at the same time reflects the paradox between embracement and resistance. Pupils seemed to maintain a considerable amount of 'joint values' with the institution, where the interests of the institution and the young people coalesce (Goffman 1961). Thus, in opting to truant the young people are not signifying a complete withdrawal from the 'official self' as is commonly portrayed in the dominant and 'official' discourse. Rather their truancy allows a temporary means by which they can achieve a sense of agency and autonomy beyond the 'grips' of the institution, a degree of elbow room. Just how far individuals remain attached to the institution and coalescing with it, will be explored in chapter 7.

Because pupils are not confined to school for the 'full round of life' they are exposed to and enact other roles outside of the school. This has some implications for their truancy. Although most of the young people gave 'push' factors as reasons for their truancy, thus implicating resistance to institutional control, 'pull' factors were also given at times. Thus in some cases role conflict is apparent, as the young people's home worlds compete with the institutional world a point also highlighted in Bird et al. (1981). For example, in the case of the young people who stay at home to help their mothers, their role as 'daughter' seems to take precedence over their role as 'pupil'. Goffman points to the likelihood of this when he suggests that secondary adjustments can typically 'arise in connection with the individual's bondage to other types of social entity' (Goffman 1961: 197). This was particularly evident among those who persistently engaged in truanting behaviours, where the time spent away from school led to increasing identification with their home worlds at the expense of the institutional world because less time was spent within the school.

There is a significant wealth of classroom research to indicate that the 'underlife' of a school and pupils' use of secondary adjustments are not just expressed through truancy alone. Rather there are many ways that young people can stand apart from the institution on a day-to-day basis, such as 'humour', 'mucking about' etc. (Woods 1979, Willis 1977), many of which the young people of this study also reported utilising[55]. The decision to opt to truant

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[55] The notion of secondary adjustment also seems to share a number of similarities with the notion of 'coping strategies' (see Hargreaves 1978, Woods 1979) which is more frequently used to describe the everyday minor resistance deployed by pupils and teachers.

however is ordinarily conceived of as a riskier option influenced by the intensity or accumulation of 'push' and 'pull' factors.

Accumulation and Intensity

The categorisation of young people's reasons for truancy along the lines of 'push' and 'pull' can actually be regarded as somewhat crude considering the complexity of factors at play when decisions to truant are made. Thus it is important to stress that for many of the young people, their assessment of the situation at any one time involves a complicated interplay of strategic thought; weighing up the various likely outcomes of their actions, taking into consideration their interests, goals, the probability of risk and the possibility of punishment, amongst other things. This process is one that occurs on a day to day basis in many classroom situations, and in many instances truancy is not the action opted for, especially given the wealth of less risky forms of secondary adjustments open to them. For most, making the decision to truant was considered a risky option and often one that was not taken particularly lightly, especially as the majority only truanted occasionally. Sometimes the decision to truant was given little thought but often truancy only seemed to be opted for when a situation had intensified significantly (e.g. in the case of Adam and the dislike for his textiles teacher) or when an accumulation of the above 'push' or 'pull' factors were present. This also seemed to be a key difference between those occasionally truanting and those persistently truanting. The persistent seemed more likely to attribute a greater range of contributory factors to their decisions to truant or to articulate especially strong feelings about a particular factor (e.g. discontent with the curriculum) or situation (e.g. fear of bullying).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the young people's reasons for choosing to truant from school. Push and pull factors were cited, but the push factors significantly outweigh the pull factors, heavily implicating the institution. Close attention was paid to the young people's definition of the situation, but it was also argued that a struggle for control and a desire for autonomy seemed to be an inherent issue connecting their accounts. Goffman's notion of secondary adjustment was used to make sense of their struggle for autonomy and truancy was presented as a way in which the pupils can temporarily stand apart from the clutch of the

institution. It was also suggested that in opting to truant the pupils are not signifying a complete rejection of school, as is commonly portrayed in the dominant and 'official' discourse. Rather, many of the young people seemed like and dislike school simultaneously and displayed an attachment to the institution for most of the time. The following chapter will now explore the ways in which the pupils' sense of autonomy and control is played out when truanting.

Chapter 6:

Enacting Truancy

Introduction

In chapter 5, it was argued that institutional factors were overwhelmingly considered responsible for decisions to truant and not the 'pull' of activities and/or social interaction outside of school. Yet what these young people do when truanting is indeed central to our understanding of truancy. Truancy was depicted as a way for pupils to achieve a sense of autonomy and control as they attempt to temporarily stand apart from the institution and the expectations of the 'official self'. This chapter explores the ways in which this perceived sense of autonomy and control is executed and performed.

A central element to concerns over truancy is the fear over what young people are doing when truanting from school, with a particular emphasis on their presence in public space outside of the school (Valentine 1996, SEU 1998). The use of public space among young people has historically been a contentious issue among adults, with the very presence of 'loitering youths' regarded as symptomatic of social disorganisation and perceived as a threat to social order (Hall et al. 1999). However, in recent years, the use of public space by young people truanting from school has epitomised such concerns tied to societal and indeed 'local' moral panics about anti-social behaviour. It is also associated with wider feelings of anxiety, ambivalence and risk consciousness, encapsulating late/post modern society (Beck 1992, Bauman 1990). Valentine (1996) has shown how there seem to be contradictory concerns regarding young people's use of public space, with young people regarded as 'angels' or 'devils'. The understanding of young people as angels positions young people as innocent and in danger and has led to growing concerns about their safety. Young people as devils, sees them positioned as unruly, violent and a nuisance in public space. Both emphasise the need for increasing control over young people's use of public space but for the devils the response is a call for increased monitoring, surveillance and regulation (e.g. truancy watch, truancy patrols etc.) Historically there has been a clear gender division with regards to these distinctions, with females thought to be at greater risk of danger, particularly of a sexual kind.

This chapter will explore the use of space, place and time by the young people when truanting, drawing upon situational accounts and observation, as well as retrospective (re)constructions. Discussion is based around three overarching spatialities: Inside school;

outside space;[56] and the home. The chapter discusses the impact that increasing surveillance and disciplinary responses have had on the spatial autonomy of the young people, whilst exploring the young people's use of evasion and deceptive strategies in their attempt to avoid detection and hold on to their spatial and temporal autonomy. The home and the school are cited as the most dominant places for truancy by the young people, challenging the common assumptions about the presence of truants in outside space.

Where are the truanting young people?

Figure 2 presents the places in which the young people truanted within the year of study[57].

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[56] When referring to outside space. I refer specifically to space which is external to the school grounds, i.e. the school playing fields etc. are not included in this category.

[57] Liminal space is not charted within this diagram. Clearly, those who left the school during the course of the school day, in order to truant at home, had to get home by moving through outside space. When this was the case the young people usually went straight home, moving quickly through the outside space. If they stopped along the way, then they have been included in the 'outside space' section of the diagram. It is also worth noting that a consideration of liminal space is largely absent from the remainder of this chapter. The separate consideration of the school, outside space and the home, makes discussion of liminal space difficult. The pupils did occasionally move between the three dominant areas when truanting but the majority of their time was spent in one of these three areas. Thus, a consideration of the young people's use of liminal space adds little to the analysis.

Home

Outside School

In-School

Kai   Scott
Calum Harvey

Robert   Duncan
Harry   Helen
Zoe   Marvin
Mark   Lizzie   Tao
John   Hayley
Harriet   Shaun
Richard
Craig

Justin
Bradley
Ella   Jenny
Ruby   Anna
Emma   Sonia
Whitney Leanne
Hannah   Lucy   Joanne
Connor   Delwyn   David

Adam   Zack   Joe
Stacey   Kym   Chelsey
Aaron   Alfie   Carla
Kerry Tiffany Lauren
Steph   Alice   Naomi
Joshua Owen   Bryan
Andrew   Dylan

Tom

Sarah

Figure 2: *Locations of truancy*

In contrast to the popular assumptions regarding secondary school truancy, the young people were not predominantly found in outside spaces. Rather, more of the young people truanted within the home and the school. What is not clear from figure 2 is the frequency of truancy within these locations. Twenty-five of the young people truanted in outside space but, importantly, fourteen of these pupils spent more of their time truanting within the home and/or the school than they did in outside space. Truanting in outside space had a strong seasonal pattern to it, with more of the young people found outside when the weather was nicer. There were slightly more boys than girls who truanted outside of the school, whereas there were slightly more girls than boys who truanted on school grounds. It is also notable

that of those pupils that truanted in outside space, more were from 'routine & manual' backgrounds than were from 'intermediate' or 'professional & managerial' backgrounds. The differences are not huge but what this does suggest is that location of truancy could be a plausible contributing reason for the over-representation of working class boys in the dominant and 'official' discourse regarding truancy. Each of the three places where truancy was enacted shall now be considered separately.

In-School Truancy

Within the school grounds there was widespread truancy from lessons occurring in each of the three schools. Truancy within the school is certainly overlooked in the dominant and 'official' discourse on truancy. Although the pupils were still present on the school grounds they were breaking with the routinised 'time-space paths' (Giddens 1984) which regulate the use of space during the school day, implemented in the form of school rules and the school timetable. This section explores the ways in which the pupils were able to absent themselves from lessons yet remain officially present within school. Importantly, much of this truancy would not show up in the 'official' absence statistics. Pupils reported truanting in this manner from 10 minutes to an hour.

'Free spaces'

Within each of the schools their appeared to be a geography of 'free spaces' (Goffman 1961), spaces where levels of surveillance were perceived to be reduced or absent and it was possible to spend time there away from timetabled activity. One of the most commonly frequented was the school toilets. Here the physical space of the school toilets took on a very different meaning for those who used this space whilst truanting, regarded as a place of solitary retreat or as a social space.

> I just stayed in the toilets for geography cos I didn't want to get done, cos I was already like 10 minutes late. They really stink though and it felt like hours! Just like sitting there doing nothing. (Adam, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)
>
> I didn't want to mitch outside like a loner, so I was like ah I'll hide in the toilets and then say I've been to the Nurses and then go back in after. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Telephone Interview)

For Adam and Kym there are clearly a number of constraining elements to their autonomy and Adam highlights how time seemed to slow down because he was alone and because of the undesirable location of his truancy. When alone, time spent truanting was more often than not, about 'killing time' rather than enjoying the time that they had taken off. The toilets were often seen as one of a limited range of options when truanting alone for specific lessons, if the pupils had not been able to mobilise friends to truant with them or had not had time to do so (as in Adam's case). More girls seemed to truant in the toilets than boys, as the girls rarely truanted outside of the school grounds for specific lessons when they were alone.

> Hannah: If I don't want to go to lesson then sometimes I'll just hide in the toilets.
> Lucy: Yeah if you just don't go to lessons, cos say like if you have P.E. then say you have French and you didn't want to go to French, you like go and hide in the toilets until that lessons over.
> PJ: Is it always the toilets?
> Lucy: No but most of the time.
> Hannah: If you're by yourself then it usually is because you wouldn't go mitch outside for just one lesson. There's no point and there wouldn't be anything to do, so you'd just be by yourself walking around and that would be a bit sad to be honest.
> Lucy: And you might get attacked if you're by yourself.
> Hannah: It's just easier to stay in school really and if it's raining you don't want to get wet.
> Lucy: Hmm yeah.
> (Girls Focus Group – Pen-Y-Peel High School)

The boys, by contrast, truanted within school *and* outside the school when they were alone for specific lessons.

The toilets were also used as a place of solitary retreat by pupils who felt that they were being bullied, with some deeming them as 'safe' spaces as Alice highlights:

> I've only been bullied like three times this year. The first time Tracey Knott said she was going to break my legs in Music. So on the way there I quickly ran off and hid in the toilets so I was safe because you don't know what she's like. She has actually broken someone's arm before. She's really nasty. So I was like hiding there until the bell went, because it was last lesson. When it went quiet and everyone had gone home, I snook out and ran. (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Chelsey and Steph, however, suggested that they regarded the toilets as a possible 'encounter space' (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001):

> Some people hide in the toilets when they're on the knock like but personally I would never go in there. That's where all the bullies go and they threaten you if you go in there and stuff. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

> Bullies sometimes go in the toilets. I always go behind the stage if I need to mitch or I go to the school counsellor. (Steph, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

In this case the toilets were avoided and other options were sought. For those using the toilets as a place of refuge, their time spent truanting was not a particularly enjoyable experience but it did offer them a temporary means of controlling their situation.

The toilets were also used as a social space by girls:

> Lauren: Sometimes we go in the girls' toilets cos not really a lot of teachers go in there
> Joanne: Yeah mostly when it's raining or we just can't be bothered to mitch outside, so we chill in there. (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

> Jenny: I was in Art and Amy text me and goes like "aw come and meet me". So I asked to go to the toilet and missed half the lesson.
> PJ: What did you do?
> Jenny: Aw just like sat there and talked. You can't do it all the time but every now and again. (Girls Focus Group - Hillsden High School)

In such instances it was not the quality of the space that was important to them, they were under no illusion that the girls' toilets were in fact just that. Yet they were a place where the girls could spend the time that they had re-claimed for themselves, participating in an activity which they enjoyed doing, talking. It was also an enclosed space which was free from the elements and free from adult surveillance. The boys rarely suggested that they used the toilets as a social space, rather they seemed to prefer other places within the school:

> Tom: I mitched reg two or three time this week :D
> PJ: did u come in late?
> Tom: I was only 5 min late but there was no point in going anyway
> PJ: wher did you go?
> Tom: we hid on the very back pitch and in the corner so they couldnt see 3 of us
> PJ: Wat about ur mark?
> Tom: just got it in 1st lesson

said Id been at the dentist cuz my brace :p
(Tom, Hillsden High School – MSN)

Other 'free spaces' frequented in the schools by both boys and girls included the back of the stairs in Cooperfield High School, behind the stage in Pen-Y-Peel High School and other concealed places on the school playing fields in each of the schools.

Some of these spaces were also commonly used by smokers of the school, which included some of the young people from this study. Smoking on the grounds of the school was only considered possible in Cooperfield High School and Pen-Y-Peel High school, where the young people suggested that it was possible to do so without detection or at least without their behaviour being acknowledged:

> Carla: We just go by the back stairs to have a fag and that.
> PJ: The stairs inside the school?
> Kerry: Yeah.
> Carla: And sometimes we hide in the toilets.
> Kerry: Yeah, well sometimes we do go outside like as well. You know by the youthy, by main entrance. We sometimes go by there.
> Carla: Yeah to be honest it's not often we'll have one in the toilets like.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

> Owen: Like you can just stay in the boys' toilets. You just sit down and smoke in there.
> Bryan: And there's like a container up the yard. That's where we mostly go.
> (Boys Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

On my numerous visits to Cooperfield High School, the in-school smoking seemed particularly overt to me. It was clearly visible from the school's reception area and within the staff offices which overlooked the main entrance, one of which was the Head's. Interestingly, this lenient approach to smoking actually appeared to have a slightly positive effect on the attendance of these young people. As the common 'smoker's places' were located within the school grounds the smokers that frequented these places were often only late for lessons, rather than missing a lesson altogether in order to smoke. Although lateness, in such circumstances, can still be regarded as truancy, the time missed from lessons was relatively short, normally amounting to a maximum of ten minutes absence. In contrast, Hillsden High School took a much stricter policy towards smoking, adopting a zero-tolerance approach. Consequently, there were still smokers within the Hillsden High School sample but each of which said that they would 'never' smoke on the school grounds. They still had a place which was frequently

used by smokers but this was outside the school grounds, less conspicuously positioned down a lane away from the immediate perimeter of the school. Logically one would assume that this tough line on youth smoking would be beneficial to pupil attendance, yet the opposite was often the case, as Kym explains below:

> I've got to admit, when I mitch off it's like more easier. It's better than being caught in school, cos if you get caught in school you get an inclusion. So if I badly need one then I just go out. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Although being caught truanting outside the school in Hillsden High School would also result in punishment for the pupils, being caught smoking on the school grounds was perceived as particularly 'risky' given that it is an instantly detectable act, in a binary sense (i.e. one is either smoking or not smoking). Truancy, by comparison is not as easily detectable, allowing the scope for justification if their presence was questioned. Further measures of evasion were thus considered necessary for the Hillsden High School smokers. As a result, they more commonly missed whole lessons when experiencing the 'pull' to truant due to their smoking habit, or missed longer periods of time from a lesson if returning to the lesson late.

'Surveillance spaces'

Truancy also took place in what Goffman has called 'surveillances spaces' (Goffman 1961), essentially areas where the pupils could be openly visible to teachers. For the majority of the pupils truanting in this manner, a wide range of deceptive strategies were employed in order to essentially 'authorise' their movement within the school. A common strategy used by the young people is discussed by Lauren in the following quote:

> I went on the knock earlier. We were in Maths, me and Alisha, and he asked us to go and send a message and we took the really long way. Then we were like just sitting on the wall and then we saw these two girls, so we stayed with them for like 15 minutes. Then we saw this teacher but we had a note cos we were on a message so we got away with it and when we finally got back I think he'd just forgotten about us anyway. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

In this case the girls have been authorised to take a message for the teacher but take time out for themselves along the way. Incidents like this may seem very minor and insignificant from an outsider's perspective but for the pupils they were defined as great successes. They encapsulate the perceived sense of personal autonomy beyond the grasp of the institution. Punch (2001) describes similar strategies in her study of rural children in Bolivia. While,

Goffman (1961) also describes similar examples of 'working an assignment' in reference to prisons and concentrations camps and regards this action as an attempt at profiting from the heightened expectations and responsibilities that had been attributed to inmates.

While Lauren's account can be seen as somewhat opportunistic, other strategies were more premeditated. Strategies included pretending to be ill so they would be sent to the school nurse, yet making out to the nurse that they weren't ill enough to be sent home, but ill enough to warrant temporarily staying in the sick bay. Many also forged notes from their parents asking for them to be excused from P.E. and Games lessons, due to a falsified injury or simply informed their teacher of their fabricated ailment. With the teacher's attention focused on managing the class, wandering away from the place where they were told to stay and away from the activity they were supposed to be doing was common.

> You can just be like "<u>aw</u> miss I've got my period, I can't do P.E, the <u>pain</u>!" Then you just sit and mess about or go for a wander. (Whitney, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Joanne: Like I really hate P.E so I've pretty much stopped going to be honest. I just go to Art instead.
> PJ: How can you do that?
> Joanne: Well we just like go to Art and do extra work. We just sit in the corridor cos there's a table out in the corridor. She knows what we're doing as well [the Art teacher].
> PJ: What, she knows you're supposed to be in P.E?
> Joanne: Yeah she's like "as long as you've got permission". So we're like "yeah we've got permission".
> PJ: What does your P.E. teacher say?
> Joanne: Oh she doesn't care, ages ago I made up a note saying "Joanne has to be excused from P.E because she has problems with her back" but they never ask to see it now. They just knows.
> (Joanne, Pen-Y-Peel High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Anna: I always forge notes for Games and P.E. I am a pro at doing my mum's signature. Seriously you should see it.
> PJ: What do you do instead?
> Anna: I just sit at the side and mess about, sometimes go for a little walk, spy on the boys (laughs).
> (Anna, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Pupils in separate lessons would also text each other on their mobile phones to arrange to meet outside their classrooms and then would each ask their teacher if they could go to the toilet. And some would even go to their friend's lessons to facilitate this inter-class truancy.

> She (her friend) comes and gets me out of lessons every now and again, even when we have Maths she's like "aww blah and blah needs to see Alice". I'm like "oh my god what have I done?" and she's like "coming for a walk?"
> (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Much of this in-school truancy can be seen as minor attempts by the young people to assert their agency on their use of time and space in the school. Their efforts at concealing their behaviour, by the adoption of different deceptive strategies, indicate that their intention was not to overtly challenge the authority of the school by making their transgressions overtly visible.

However, a small minority did make their in-school truancy overt and this seemed to be with the specific intention of making their disaffection known. Stacey and Owen for instance often made their presence known when truanting:

> Mr Dobbs proper pissed me off right, so I just went outside and stood there pulling faces at him like and everyone was laughing and he was getting <u>so</u> mad like and then he comes storming out. So I just runs. Then he goes in, 5 minutes later I was back again. It was so funny he couldn't do anything like. He was just getting madder and madder and his face was going all red like he was going to explode.
> (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

> I don't care if they sees me having a fag. I likes a smoke and what can they do? d'ya know what I mean? I do it right in front of them, when they're staring straight at me. I just walk straight by them like. I don't care at all, d'ya know what I mean? If I don't like what we're doing I walks out. If they disrespect me I walks out. If they proper disrespect me I just tell them to fuck off or I just waits till later and goes back and disrupts their class, banging on the window and that, so they can't teach and then it all kicks off.
> (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

Further examples of Owen and Stacey's disruptive behaviour are discussed in chapter 7. Sometimes Owen and Stacey concealed their truancy in the same way as the others did:

> If I can't be arsed with the agro I'll hide on the field and that like but I don't actually care d'ya know what I mean? (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

However their attempts at concealment seemed to be quite rare in comparison to their overt and disruptive truancy. On a few occasions a minority of the other pupils also made their truancy particularly visible[58]:

> Dylan: Well I'm on report now
> PJ: What's that for?
> Dylan: Hobbes were being a dick so I just walked off the pitch, got changed and then I was chatting to some people from another class and the teacher told me to "get back to class" but I stayed. They weren't doing anything anyway and I wanted to quickly finish what I was saying. Then next lesson I got called out and put on report cos Hobbes told them I called him a wanker and walked out of his lesson. But he was being a wanker so it wasn't really my fault.
> (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)
>
> I always seem to end up in other people's classes messing around and that. Sometimes I just like their class better, but it can be quite funny, winding people up and that and you gotta run if a teacher's coming up to you. (Sarah, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

In chapter 5 on p. 119, Carla also discusses how she is more likely to truant visibly and disruptively if being taught by a supply teacher. However, for the vast majority of the time the truancy of these young people was enacted in a covert manner.

Truancy in Outside Space

Truancy in outside space, particularly public space, resonates closely with popular images of what 'truancy' is. As discussed, the young people of this study did truant in outside spaces but it seemed to be less common than the truancy which occurred within the school and the home. The pupils' truancy also seemed to be enacted in a much more covert manner than is commonly assumed, standing in contrast to the popular characterisation of anti-social truants engaged in criminal and delinquent activity. The behaviour of the young people in this study seemed to be fairly mundane in comparison and not particularly extraordinary. This section will explore the young people's use of space, place and time when truanting in outside space and will also highlight the evasive strategies they used to avoid detection and the deceptive strategies used in an attempt to gain authorisation for their absence by the school. Part-day truancy was the most common form of truancy occurring in outside space, with pupils generally truanting for specific lessons.

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[58] Namely, Carla, Whitney, Kerry, Sarah, Chelsey, Sonia, Alfie, Aaron, Zack and Dylan.

A 'risky' option

In comparison to the home and the school, outside space was thought to be a particularly risky option when truanting. Outside space is essentially free from institutional constraints. There are clearly a greater number of ways in which to spend time outside school and available space is much more expansive. However, for young people truanting from school there is the threat of surveillance and its potential to curtail their autonomy. Despite the increasing use of surveillance technology in recent years, it was the threat of detection by police, teachers or EWOs that the young people were most concerned about.

> Hayley: There's this local police man who cycles round on his bike and he'll ask you why you're not in school.
> Lauren: Yeah police on bikes.
> Joanne: It's really bad because they can go loads faster on bikes.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

> The teachers sometimes check the parks though, because we were down this quiet alley-way and we saw loads of teachers going over and the boardie[59] lady as well and you got the policemen on the bikes and all that and they say "why haven't you been in school?" and then they'll take you back to school. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

> Naomi: But sometimes if you go out of the school grounds you get caught easier because sometimes when the teachers go...
> Harriet: They go over the field don't they.
> Alice: Yeah they go all over.
> Harriet: They drive round don't they?
> Steph: Yeah.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

The actual extent of this surveillance was unclear. During my fieldwork I noted a significant police presence in the Cooperfield area and I was present when a group of young people had to run from an approaching policeman. A similar incident occurred on one occasion during my observation in Pen-Y-Peel. However, staff that I spoke to in each of the schools said that they very rarely had the time or the resources to search the surrounding locality checking for truants:

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[59] "Boardie" is a term that many of the young people used when referring to Education Welfare Officers.

The thing is registers will indicate whether a pupil is in school or not. We don't need to check the area because the registers will pick them up. I simply don't have the time. I'm on the phone all morning. (Attendance Officer, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Now and again we do what they call section 16 truancy orders. You just concentrate on one area and you go out with the local police, stop the kids bring them back to school or take them home but unfortunately it's just here and there. I mean in the past year we've only done three days and I mean there's none planned at the moment. When you've been in this job as long as I have you know where they are. They get their mark and go over the bridge, down the river, in the woods but we don't have the resources.
(EWO, Cooperfield High School)

Nevertheless, the surveillance that did occur had been enough to make it seem like a realistic and constant threat for the young people. The pupils also regarded their parents, associates of their parents and, to a lesser extent, members of the general 'adult' public as possible sources of surveillance. This threat did not completely deter the young people from truanting in outside spaces but it was done less frequently and it did seem to affect how the young people used outside space.

Rather than avoid all outside space the young people seemed to associate different spaces with a probability of risk and tailored their use of space accordingly. Areas that were deemed to be under high levels of surveillance were regarded as especially risky and were to be avoided, ventured into very occasionally or moved through quickly. Built up areas, especially the centre of Cardiff and many local shopping areas seemed to be attributed a high probability of risk:

It's stupid going into town where police can see you when you're on the knock, you're gonna get caught. That's why I go to the places where I can't get caught. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

When you go shopping in town you've really got to try and avoid the police. I've only ever done it once. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

You used to able to go down the shops, loads of people used to go but Mr Jenkins always walks down there now. It's really hard to get away with it. I wouldn't go there now. But I knows the places to go. (Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

You should never go shopping in town, that's where you get caught. (Harriet, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

Shopping areas by their very nature are localities of concentrated adult presence hence although the young people perceived there to be a greater level of 'official' surveillance in such areas, the chance of being spotted by an adult who knew them was often enough of a deterrent in itself. However, not all shops were off limits, as many of the young people from Cooperfield High School frequently visited the local Greggs bakery, and some of the young people in Hillsden High School often ventured to a nearby 'chip shop'. It seemed that these shops had been established as safe places, with reduced risk, as reportedly the shop staff never queried their presence. If the young people did venture into areas with a perceived high probability of risk, extra precaution was often felt necessary as Chesley's account demonstrates:

> I've been to town once when I was on the knock, to buy Christmas presents cos my mum wouldn't let me have a day off to go shopping. She told me to go on the weekend but it's packed on the weekend. We stuck clothes on under our school stuff and when we were out [of school] we chucked 'em off and put them under a bush and then shoved 'em back on when we got back. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Places with a low probability of risk tended to be secluded areas, preferably those which were concealed from public view:

> You've got to go somewhere out the way, like the river or behind somewhere. (Tiffany, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)
>
> Joe: You've got to be an idiot to go into town. I go where you don't get caught
> PJ: Like where?
> Joe: Like the brook, basically where no one goes, so they can't see you.
> (Boys Focus Group – Hillsden High School)
>
> We just go in the woods so no one can see us and it's not so risky. (Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

Knowledge of the risks associated with different areas tended to be experientially developed through the young people's navigation of their locality, as well as learning from the mistakes of those that had been caught. This knowledge often needed updating, as people grew aware of popular truancy spots:

> Carla: The woods were basically the place to mitch like.
> Kerry: Yeah but not now like. The teachers know.

Carla: That used to be like "aw the teachers will catch us if we go in school, so we best go in the woods" kind of thing. But now it's like we stay in school, in the toilets.
(Girls Focus Group - Cooperfield High School)

Some also suggested that this knowledge could be acquired by accompanying more experienced peers:

Alice: When you go with Hannah, she knows like every single hiding place, doesn't she?
Steph: Nodds.
Alice: Now I knows them too. So I never get caught.
(Girls Focus Group – Pen-Y-Peel High School)

Over the course of my fieldwork, only a couple of the young people truanting within outside space were actually caught. Although the young people's autonomy in outside space is curtailed by the imposition of surveillance practices, it seems that their choices to avoid high-risk spaces in preference for low-risk spaces allows them to command a degree of control over their use of time and space. The young people's use of time and space is now explored further in relation to an evident gender distinction.

Gendered nature of truancy

There was a notable gendered element to the spatial patterning of truancy in outside space and the activities that the young people were involved in. The pupils' enactment of truancy seemed scripted and thus structured and defined by dominant and regulative gender expectations. Although the pupils perceive their behaviour to be autonomous, the gendered nature of their truancy seems to indicate that there is a clear stock of circumscribed roles which they draw upon in their interactions. The young people suggested that the majority of their time truanting was spent with those who were of the same gender as themselves. This was also clearly evident during the time I spent observing the truancy occurring in outside spaces. When asked why this was the case the boys were keen to demonstrate themselves as the greater risk takers, celebrating their masculinity.

Tom: I've mitched a couple of times with girls, but not normally. Normally it's like just us lads. I dunno, they just wouldn't take the risk of getting caught and getting done.
PJ: But boys would?
Tom: Yeah, we're a bit more nuts... It's good to just be out there with the boys having a laugh.
(Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Girls don't do stuff like that. There's a couple of girls in our year but mostly girls are good. Boys are more daring. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Truancy was an activity for 'the boys' and relationships boys held with the girls during school time and outside of school time were often compartmentalised when it came to truancy. The boys' time spent truanting was usually quite active, they liked to be 'doing things' which they perceived as the opposite of what the girls did whilst truanting.

Aaron: You can have more of a laugh with boys. You can't have a laugh with the girls the same as you can with the boys.
Alfie: Girls, they just sit down and moan.
Aaron: Yeah.
Alfie: "It's too cold, let's go back to class" and the boys they just goes, "let's go somewhere else".
Aaron: Let's jump in the river!
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Boys are like, they go far and do all different things, like football and that, and girls are like....they just sit around and talk. (Scott, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

There is a strong sense in which this distinction may be partly because of the age of these young people, being 13 to 14 years of age. Yet, this division between boys and girls was not as apparent in their everyday lives. On days when I met the boys outside school time, they would regularly bring their girlfriends and the boys were usually with girls at the end of the school day. Yet truancy in outside space was perceived by the boys to involve elements of 'risk' that they did not equate with the behaviour of their female friends. Re-claiming time through truancy was to be used to 'have a laugh' and this they felt was to be concentrated among the 'sensation gathering' attitudes of the boys (Bauman 1997).

Indeed, the data gathered suggest that the boys *were* more likely to cover a larger spatial area than the girls when collectively truanting in outside space. This was predominantly a result of the activities which the boys were involved in. The boys took part in a wide range of activities whilst truanting, such as playing football on the street or in local parks, sledging, biking in skate parks and less structured activities such as rolling down hills, wrestling etc.

We've been all over really, but mostly we just go to the park over the road, just take a football with us and have a kick about. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Aaron: In the summer I prefers big hill, we just rolls down it and things like that.
Alfie: And there's a swing on a tree.
Aaron: Like, me, Mike, Jay and Danny just roll over each other and down it, elbowing each other, messing about and that.
Alfie: Yeah did you know they're planning on building on it?
Aaron: It's joke innit. That's our mitching grounds!
(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

The data gathered about their lives outside of school time showed little variation in terms of how they spent their time, suggesting that the boys were relatively autonomous when truanting in outside space. The boys tended to avoid high-risk areas but many of the activities they participated in made the presence of the boys potentially visible, yet importantly they were mobile and ready to run if teachers, police or 'boardies' approached.

We nearly got caught over the park in 1st lesson we were playin football in there and I spotted them walk in [police] so we ran hopped the fence and ran on the field and started playin there with some of the other boys.
(Tom, Hillsden High School – MSN)

We go everywhere like... erh but I'd say our main mitching places are like the river, big hill, the woods, big field and all those. But you've got to keep an eye out, be ready to peg it if someone comes. Then we go to one of the other places, and it keeps going like that so we don't get caught. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

This spatial mobility and flexibility was a principal evasion strategy adopted by the young people of the study who truanted in outside spaces. The fluidity of meaning which they were able attach to different spaces in making them 'places to go' (Hall et al. 1999) seemed to allow them to command a degree of control over their use of time and space.

Part-day truancy was the most common form of truancy undertaken in outside space. Often the young people had made the decision to truant in order to avoid a specific lesson and usually intended to return to school. However, when collectively truanting, occasionally the young people suggested that they were enjoying themselves so much that they ended up taking the next lesson off as well, sometimes not returning for the rest of the day[60].

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[60] The same issue was also raised by a few of the girls who had collectively truanted.

If there's loads of you it's exciting, you're having fun, playing footie sneaking around and all that. Then it's time to go back and you think do I really wanna go back to class and it's like you do and you don't. Then you're like aw I'll just do one more [lesson]... But if there's hardly any of you and you're just walking around doing nothing then you'd rather class like. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Tom: ended up going up the wenallt today :D
PJ: how did u end up over there?!
Tom: I dunno really it just sort of happened
I wuz only going to mitch music! ended up missing half a day
Couldnt be bothered going back :P
PJ: What did u do?
Tom: Just walking around really but it wus funny :D
(Tom, Hillsden High School – MSN)

Clearly in such cases the distinction between push and pull becomes somewhat blurred.

For the boys, collective truancy was not the only form of truancy undertaken in outside space, solo truancy also occurred. When truanting alone, the young people's spatial and temporal autonomy seemed a lot more restricted and the same sense of fun and excitement was not articulated:

If I go by myself I hate it. There's nothing to do. You're desperate for the bell to go so you can go back in. (Calum, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Scott: Say I mitch like half day, I see if anyone's about and then the rest of the day if no one's about I go in my house. Sometimes I just wait outside if it's like one lesson and I want to go back after.
PJ: What like outside school or like in school?
Scott: Just outside like, near the woods. But not so much cos it's a bit dull and you looks a bit stupid on your own like. Sometimes I go back early but that's how you get caught.
(Scott, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

These sentiments are notably different to the accounts the young people gave when collectively truanting, which centred on 'having a laugh'. Instead, solo truanting was regarded as 'boring' and they tended to stay in closer proximity to the school waiting to re-enter at the first opportunity. As a result, solo truancy in outside space seemed to be undertaken infrequently in comparison to collective truancy.

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Studies of young people's use of outside space have commonly depicted the outdoors and particularly the 'street' as a male only domain, with females largely ignored (Corrigan 1979, McRobbie 1991, Matthews et al. 2000). Although the boys did seem to display a greater spatial autonomy than the girls, the girls were by no means absent from outside space. The main activity participated in by groups of truanting girls was talking or chatting amongst themselves. Other activities observed and discussed included 'sorting out arguments', picnics, playing in parks etc. All of which were often summarised by the girls as 'chillin', commonly referred to as 'hanging out' within the youth literature (Larson and Verma 1999, Valentine 2004, Katz 1998), although this was not a word used by the young people in this study.

> Alice: Mostly we just like talk, like find a place in the field or park innit, wherever we can find to go.
> Steph: If we've got any drinks we'll share them.
> Alice: Yeah sometimes we have a little feast thing.
> (Girls Focus Group – Pen-Y-Peel High School)
>
> We go there to chill. Not many people go there. We're just like chillin' back really.
> (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Larson and Verma (1999) have suggested that a large proportion of western youths' time is spent 'hanging out'. Yet it is the sight of young people grouped together, and seemingly unproductive that registers high amongst public concern due to underlying concerns over young people's intentions. However, although appearing unproductive to a passing observer, informal interaction such as this is a central way in which young people develop, explore and negotiate their personal and social identities in relation to others (Hall et al. 1999, James 1986) and in this case free from the clutch of the school and the expectations of the 'official self'.

In contrast to the majority of the boys, the girls were more likely to remain in closer proximity to the school, or within the school grounds when truanting. Some researchers, such as Hart (1979) have suggested that parental restriction of children's geographies may account for the greater spatial privileges that tend to be accorded to boys rather than girls, mainly because of greater concerns over female safety. As a result, young people's personal engagement with space is thought to differ between the two genders (Hart 1979). Many of the girls did seem to make greater use of outside space, outside of school hours but as their 'chillin' when

truanting required little space, and time was often restricted to less than an hour[61], spatial distance from school was not necessary. What was necessary was to locate places to congregate away from the adult gaze. Hence, for the girls, mobility was a relatively less important evasion strategy than it was for the boys. Mastering their knowledge of spaces in close proximity to the school with minimal adult surveillance, which they could make their 'places to go', was a fundamental skill underlying their evasion strategies. Thus, although many girls did collectively truant in outside spaces, their presence was often a lot less conspicuous than the boys. When the weather was less favourable or when they simply 'couldn't be bothered' the girls' toilets or similar places within the school grounds were sufficient.

The separate discussion of boys' and girls' use of space, place and time, is not to suggest that the boys and girls never mixed when truanting. Indeed, they did mix but this occurred a lot less frequently. In smoking places outside of the school there seemed to be a greater mix of genders, this also often seemed to be the case when the young people went to the local Greggs bakery in Cooperfield:

> Scott: Sometimes the girls come with us but mostly they don't.
> Calum: Says you sees some girls and they're bored and then you go over, and then you goes on the munch. Or they say "aw I wanna go to the shop" and we're playing football and they say "come to the shop" and then we go to Greggs or something and then come back. (Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

The woods also occasionally seemed to be a place where girls and boys truanted together, particularly in Cooperfield High School:

> Kerry: We used to go in the woods with the boys and they would light a fire and we'd just like chill by the fire and then come back stinking of smoke but we don't go there now.
> PJ: Why's that?
> Kerry: Cos that's when I went out with Sean but he's got a pig nose[62]. And the teachers started to know and people were getting caught so we couldn't be bothered.

The boys did collectively truant in the woods without the girls but, in contrast, the girls rarely seemed to truant in the woods without being with boys.

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[61] Because it was specific lessons that were predominantly truanted from, when using outside space.
[62] 'Pig nose' is a term of youthful dialect used to suggest that has a person has a nose that looks like that of a pig, pointing upwards.

Aaron: Sometimes we go in the woods and we always got to have a little fire but then the girls sometimes come over and want to chill by <u>our</u> fire, just so they can get warm.
PJ: So sometimes you do mitch with girls then, do you?
Aaron: Sometimes but rarely cos girls are sluts. It's just like if we're in the woods cos they want to steal our fire and they're too scared to go in there if it's just girls. They just like run through screaming "<u>ah</u> someone's going to attack us with a knife" <u>ah</u>.
(Aaron, Cooperfield High School - Boys Focus Group)

Steph: I never go in the woods it's too creepy, paedos sometimes go in there.
Naomi: I went once with Jay, Minto and all them lot but I wouldn't go in there without the boys or like loads of us.
Steph: There's a swing at the bottom of the woods that we sometimes go on but I would <u>never</u> go like properly inside like.
(Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

As discussed, discourse on the surveillance and regulation of young people has historically positioned girls as in sexual danger when truanting or using outside space. Steph's concern over 'paedos' in the woods seems to imply that she, alongside many of the other girls in the study, are accepting of this discourse. When collectively truanting, the girls suggested they felt less at risk. Nevertheless, certain areas, like the woods, were regarded as unsafe regardless of whether they were with others or not. The locality of these woods as well as local history may be a contributing factor here. Roughly 20 years ago a female persistent truant was murdered in woodlands within Cardiff. The murder took place outside of school time but was considered one of the 'worst' school girl murders in recent years and it was a high profile case at the time. No member of staff or pupil mentioned this murder. Indeed, no member of staff ever discussed being concerned for the safety of females when truanting. However, it may well be that local history has filtered down into the pupils conceptions of the woods as 'unsafe' even if they did not explicitly connect this to the local schoolgirl murder.

Occasionally I also observed boys and girls essentially truanting together but sticking to their separate predominantly gendered activities. So, for example, the boys would play football whilst the girls sat at the side and chatted[63]. There are also seemed to be some gender distinction in the deceptive strategies deployed by the young people when escaping the school in order to truant outside and on their return to school.

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[63] Clearly individuals would occasionally break away from these predominantly hegemonic gender roles but this did seem to be rare.

Escaping and re-entering the school

The evasion strategies employed by the young people when truanting in outside space were vital in allowing the young people to assert their spatial and temporal autonomy despite the existing surveillance practices. However, it was often their escape from school and their return to school which presented the greatest chance of detection and hence which they feared the most. Each of the schools had different methods of monitoring their attendance and absence and a range of punishments for those suspected of truanting. The young people of this study seemed to have developed a range of deceptive strategies, designed to manipulate these systems and hence avoid internal punishments or the identity implications associated with being known as a truant or "mitcher". The young people would either attempt to gain authorisation for their absence before they left the school grounds, or they would to attempt to cover their tracks on their return.

The girls appeared to have a far broader repertoire of deceptive strategies than the boys within the study and regarded themselves as much more skilled in their absence.

> Steph: We're more sneaky than the boys. They're just a bit dumb.
> Alice: Yeah, we like know all the good tricks and all that, how to get away with it.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)
>
> The boys aren't really so bothered about who knows but I'd say girls lie more. We don't want people knowing our business. We're a bit more sly.
> (Tiffany, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

The young people were often very proud of their deception attempts, as Steph makes clear when discussing a strategy that she commonly employs:

> I knew Miss Barnes would probably check up on me, cos my attendance isn't that good. So what I did was, I went to her before she got to me! I goes "Miss, I missed R.E yesterday cos I went to Bev's (school councilor). I just thought I better come tell you, so you know I weren't mitching like". They never checks, I always use that one. (Steph, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

On this particular occasion Steph had not been with the school councillor, she was in a nearby field with her friends. Steph did indeed, legitimately, make use of the school councillor fairly regularly and this was known by a number of staff members, so she was able to utilise this

knowledge to enhance the credibility of her excuse. The deception required here was clearly thought out. Other more common excuses used by the young people in each of the schools were, that they had been to the dentist, orthodontists, the doctors or the opticians.

> Hayley: You just go to the main office and say "can I sign out?" and they don't ask you why. They just say "yes". So they just open the door and you go and just pretend you're going to the dentist or something.
> Lauren: Yeah, like last Wednesday. I just said to them "can I sign out please?" and she went "what for?" and I said "orthodontist" and she just give me the book and give me the pen. Aww yeah and before I said I had the orthodontist and Alisha said she was ill, but then later on I was like aww what would happen if they check up on me and check the sign out book and see we've gone out the same time. But we just done it.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

The pupils then either signed out before they went, as the girls of Pen-Y-Peel High School discuss, or used the excuse on their return. Some of the girls also forged notes from parents:

> Naomi: I just take a little note saying I've been to the doctors if I've been on the knock.
> PJ: Where's the note come from?
> Naomi: From me, I forge it, pretending to be my mum. I go to the doctors a lot...or the dentist (laughs).
> Alice: And me, I'm really good at it.
> PJ: Do they ask you for a note do they?
> Naomi: Aw no, they never do but they can check your records. If you've got a note they won't know.
> (Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

> Kerry: If I take half a day off, like if I leave at lunch I always gotta take a note the next day because now they always check up on me.
> Carla: They never ask me.
> Kerry: It stops them screaming at you. If it's just like one lesson I don't usually bother. They wouldn't really care and sometimes it's a bit more obvious.
> Carla: Yeah cos half the time they don't even know you've been off anyway. They just mark you in.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

Another strategy used by Kym was to intercept any messages from the school inquiring about her absence, which were meant for her parents:

> Kym: Ah I hardly ever get done now cos I've got my mum's phone haven't I. Sneaky sneaky.
> PJ: How do you mean?
> Kym: Ah my mum got a new phone for Christmas, so I asked if I could have hers. One day I got this voice message from the school saying about my absence, then I realised

they haven't got her new number have they. I'm not saying anything. I just makes sure I don't answer it and then I know they're on to me and I gotta take a note in.
(Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

A similar strategy was also reportedly used by Alice in the year before the study, but in her case it was text messages and phone calls she was intercepting.

The boys were generally less concerned with employing elaborate deceptive strategies. Rather, they seemed to rely on the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the school's monitoring practices, simply hoping that their absence would not be detected. For instance, Hillsden High School had the most sophisticated attendance monitoring system out of the three schools and devoted the most resources to tracing absentees. However, Tom noted the inconsistencies that were evident in practice:

> It'll come up on the register that you're absent but they don't really do anything. They say they'll phone your parents but like I've been a couple of times and that and they haven't done anything. But then this one time, I was actually in lesson but the teacher marked me absent for some reason and they phoned my parents and my mum said I was definitely in. So I got called to the year tutor and they had to call my friends in as evidence and everything. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

In Cooperfield High School and Pen-Y-Peel High School, specific lesson absences were rarely followed up because of a lack of resources (as discussed in chapter 4). The pupils seemed to be aware of this and it was relied on when truanting in outside space for specific lessons:

> You've got afternoon register and morning register. I'm usually in for them but say like Welsh it's easy to go on the mitch cos he don't take the register and they never check lesson registers anyway. (Scott, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

If the pupils' absences were questioned on their return to school, then it was often suggested that they would attempt to fabricate excuses on the spot:

> I don't bother with a note or anything. They never really bother like. If they say anything I just say I've been to the dentist or something and they're like "oh right, O.K". (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

However, some boys, particularly the more persistent truants whose attendance was monitored more closely, did feel the need to employ deceptive strategies before their absence was questioned, as with Zack:

Well I normally just go and then come back and say I had the doctors or something but that time I asked one of my mates to call and say "Zack's got the doctors. He won't be in for the rest of the day". (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Aaron also discussed a strategy which he used in order to truant from morning registration and his first lesson of the day:

Aaron: I just sign in late at reception. Say like if I comes in and I forgot my kit, I just mitch Games and go in next lesson and say I was late.
PJ: So you mitch before you've got your mark?
Aaron: Yeah, you can sign in late any time as long as it's in the morning. Same for like assembly or anything, first lesson you can't be bothered going to like.
PJ: But surely they'd know you've been mitching if you sign in late?
Aaron: Nah they think you're late and late's not mitching. They don't care if you're late as long as you get your mark. But if you just walk in and say you've been mitching like, you'd be in the unit. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

This strategy allowed Aaron to receive a late mark, deflecting attention away from his truancy which he was more likely to be punished for if it was detected. This was a strategy mentioned by a lot of the pupils in Cooperfield High School. As the EWO corroborates, it was not official practice for pupils to be able to sign in so late in the morning, but informally it was allowed:

They've got half hour to register. Technically after the register shuts, after the half hour, they should be marked as being absent but they tend to keep it open so the late ones can get their marks. Its only truancy if they don't turn up at all.
(EWO, Cooperfield High School) [64]

The majority of the deceptive strategies deployed by the young people were used to excuse part-day truancy, as this was the most common form of truancy undertaken in outside space. In contrast, whole day truancy was more commonly undertaken within the home, where different strategies were necessary.

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[64] The manipulation of the official guidelines for how absences are recorded in this case may partly account for why Cooperfield High School had such a low unauthorised absent rate compared to its above average authorised absence rate. Some of the pupils in the sample had a large amount of late sessions recorded. Alfie, for instance, was late for 22% of possible attendances. Pupils tended to suggest that this was a good way for them to avoid getting into trouble for truancy but for the school it clearly has implications with regards to their absence rates. After 30 minutes pupils should be marked absent, by keeping the register open pupils could be marked as present but late.

Truancy in the Home

Numerous authors have begun to talk about a retreat from the 'street', or more generally outdoor public space, in recent times (e.g. Valentine 1996, Matthews et al. 2000, Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001, Cahill 2000). For the young people of this study outside space was still an important place for truanting, particularly when collectively truanting, but the home seemed to be the most common location for truancy among the majority of the sample. This was largely because it was deemed to be a less risky place to truant. This section outlines why the home was considered to be a safe option for truancy, presents the most frequent deceptive strategy deployed to facilitate this truancy and explores the most common activities participated in when truanting in the home. The majority of this truancy is hidden from the institutional and public gaze because of its location and the strategies used by the young people to authorise their absence, standing in contrast to the common assumptions regarding the visible presence of truants in public space.

A 'safer' option

The main reason the home was so commonly opted for as a place for truancy was because it was generally regarded as a safer option than truanting outside school or on school grounds. This is primarily because the home is a private and enclosed place which is generally free from public and institutional surveillance[65].

> Anna: If you're in your house it's safer isn't it. Not many people would think you're a mitcher if you're just at home.
> Zoe: Yeah you can't tell. You don't really know who's a mitcher and whose not. Anyone could do it and no one would ever know.
> Kym: If you do it all the time they would.
> Anna: I think it's the best way really because you can't be seen. Like, I would never just go running round town or something. It's so obvious. At least if you're at home no one thinks you're a mitcher and you can't get done.
> (Girls Focus Group – Hillsden High School)
>
> It's getting harder now ...because they knows. Like Mr Davis goes down the shops and Mr Jones goes up in the woods. But like they can't really check your house can they.
> (Lucy, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

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[65] Except for the very persistent truants who received visits from EWOs, which is discussed in chapter 7.

When you're at home, you wouldn't get done so much cos like people don't think you're like mitching. Like, my mum would actually kill me if I got caught mitching by like the police or something. (Hannah, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

The majority of the young people also deployed what seemed to be a particularly effective deceptive strategy in order to ensure that their truancy in the home was authorised by the school. This strategy was to pretend that they were ill and it added to the sense of security that they felt from opting to truant at home.

Bradley: The best way is faking you're ill. It's not so obvious. You're at home so people wouldn't exactly think you're mitching and you've got an excuse so no one cares.
PJ: What about your parents?
Bradley: Well obviously they think you're ill as well. You've got to fake it to them too.
(Bradley, Hillsden High School - Boys Focus Group)

Mostly I just stay at home when I'm on the knock and if the teachers phone if I answer I just say I'm ill and they put my marks in. (Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

For the majority of the young people opting for this form of truancy meant deceiving both parents and teachers and the young people were often very proud of their creative and skillful manipulation:

Aaron: We've all pretended to be ill haven't we?
Marvin: Yeah
Alfie: Who hasn't?
Aaron: And then about 5 past 10 you're jumping around! (laughs). One time I was faking it, proper like "<u>aww</u> I'm gonna be sick in a minute" and my mam felt my temperature and she goes "<u>aww</u> you do feel ill". I was freezing! (laughs).
All: (laugh)
PJ: Does she believe you?
Aaron: Yeah most of the time. I don't do it all the time, so when I do she believes me.
PJ: How often do you reckon you do it?
Aaron: Aww I dunno... about three times a month.
Alfie: I'd say like a week in a month.
(Cooperfield High School - Boys Focus Group)

Joanne: When I was lying to my mum I got the hairdryer, cos it's quite quiet and blowed my head for a bit to make sure it went real hot.
Hayley: That's a good one that.
Joanne: Isn't it.
(Girls Focus Group - Pen-Y-Peel High School)

PJ: Does your mum believe you?

Delwyn: Yeah I just say I feel really ill. Then I walk outside with my head down looking like I'm going to throw up and she calls me back and I'm like <u>yes</u>.
(Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

However, eight of these pupils suggested that their parents allowed them to take days off and collaborated with them in fabricating an excuse to the school.

Emma: My mum makes excuses for me. She rings the school and just says I'm ill and all that.
Sarah: And then she comes in blaggin all of us.
(Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

My mum doesn't mind if I mitch sometimes. Like, if I can't be bothered, she'll write me a note. (John, Cooperfield High School – Boy Focus Group)

Yeah my mum knows, she rings the school for me and says I'm sick. (Andrew, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

Of these eight young people, four also included the young people discussed in chapter 5, who helped their mums at home. One of these was Chelsey, who also suggested that her parents would collaborate with her on other occasions in addition to when she helped out her mum:

When it was just me and my dad[66], he just let me stay off on the Wednesday and Thursdays cos he knows I just hate Games and P.E. but she [her mum] wants me to go to school. But If I go up to my dad and say, "dad can I stay off today because I've got P.E and I don't want to do it" he's like, "Erh you best ask your mother" and then she goes, "Ask your father, he's the one that drives you to school" and so my dad just says, "Ah go on then, go back into your pyjamas". So I just go back in my pyjamas and then go back to bed and if the school rings they just say I'm ill or I've got a doctor's appointment. But sometimes she says "no" and I have to keep nagging and nagging her and then she just says, "Just have the day off like, go back the following day". She knows I don't like P.E. or Games. ... When she's ill she doesn't mind me staying off cos she needs someone around in case she has a fall. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Whereas the others suggested that their parents did not know about all of the times that they were pretending to be ill, as on some occasions they deceived them as well as their teachers.

Solo truancy was particularly common within the home because of this deceptive strategy that the young people frequently deployed. By truanting within the home and pretending to

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[66] When her mum was in hospital for 3 months.

be ill the majority of the young people's truancy seemed to go completely undetected, it was a much less visible form of truancy. For this reason pretending to be ill was considered to be one of the only effective options available to those that had been caught truanting when inside the school or outside the school. As Kym highlights, this is because of the increased monitoring and surveillance which they felt that they were under as a result of being identified as a truant.

> If you've had a detention or an inclusion or something you've got to pretend you're ill if you want to mitch. That's the only way you can do it, because they watch you. Say like if you missed Geography and then came back, they'd know because they're watching your attendance, making sure you're in and they'd probably ask you when you got back... If they catch you outside having a fag or in town or something then you're in serious serious trouble. (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The safety of the home in comparison to other options was also raised by Joshua after he had come off school report for being caught visibly truanting:

> Joshua: Im at home
> PJ: what u doing there?
> Joshua: havin da *[sic]*[67] day off :)
> cudnt be botherd wiv da lessons
> and bin on report hant *[sic]*[68] i
> PJ: You're off it now tho aren't u?
> Joshua: ye
> But I dont wanna go bak on it like so im faking it init :)
> PJ: aw I see
> Joshua: so no one knws
> (Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School – MSN)

By pretending to be ill they could attempt to obtain authorisation for their absence, reducing the likelihood of their absence being attributed to truancy.

This form of truancy clearly had implications for the amount of time that the young people spent truanting, as pretending to be ill usually meant having to take whole days off. Sometimes this was the intention but often it was specific lessons that they were trying to avoid by making the decision to truant:

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[67] ' Da' is used here to mean 'the'.
[68] 'hant' in this case is used to mean 'haven't'.

Helen: I was off Wed cos I hadn't done my homework for history and I didn't want to get in trouble
PJ: So you took the whole day off?
Helen: [Nodding graphic]
PJ: Why didnt you just miss History?
Helen: Cos then pple [sic] [69]would know I was mitchin
I pretended I was sick
(Helen, Hillsden High School – MSN)

Ella: Mostly when I mitch, it's when I don't like a lesson but I don't like doing it too much because I end up missing the rest of my lessons.
PJ: How do you mean?
Ella: Say if I want to mitch Geography, I'll take the day off but then I end up missing History and P.E. or something as well, which I actually like.
(Ella, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

Because the pupils saw whole-day truancy at home as the safe option, they then had to miss their other lessons on the given day as well as the specific lesson which they were trying to avoid, as Ella highlights. Interestingly this suggests that the monitoring and surveillance practices and negative discourse surrounding truancy may actually result in pupils taking more time off than they wanted to. One to three days off from school were usually facilitated by this form of truancy, yet there were cases where the young people claimed to have successfully absented themselves in this way for weeks at a time.

Part-day truancy also took place within the home, when the young people had been to school but then left at some point during the school day. A few of the pupils attempted to have this absence authorised by pretending to be ill during school time so that they would be sent home:

I couldn't be bothered with the lessons so I just went to the nurse and just said I've got a bad stomach and I was really holding it. Then she just rang my mum and I got to go home. (Richard, Pen-Y-Peel High School - Boys Focus Group)

In this way their parents were also informed that they would need to go home. However, it was more common for those part-day truanting not to inform their parents of their absence but to return home if they knew that their family members were out during the day and were unlikely to return. This form of truancy was not as widespread as whole day truancy within the home because of the added risks associated with it, as Joanne highlights:

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[69] 'Pple' is used here to mean 'people'.

Sometimes I'll just go home at lunch and stay off. But it's better if you just don't go in like cos somebody could catch you on the way home but if you just say you're ill then you're already at home. Do you get me? (Joanne, Pen-Y-Peel High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

The home was also occasionally opted for by collective truants attempting to escape the public gaze. Although this seemed to be less effective, as all the pupils that claimed to have tried it also reported they had been caught when doing so:

We went to Simmo's house because there was a load of us, so we thought we'd be safer there (laughs) ...We were all on the X-box upstairs and we had the volume quite loud, didn't hear his mum come through the door, straight up the stairs and she opened the door and was just standing there behind us and she sort of just went nuts. Chucked us all in the car and drove us back to the school.
(Tom, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

Joe: Tell her about when you went with Ashley...a couple of weeks ago.
Adam: Oh yeah, there was about 10 of us and we saw the police so we all ran and then we went to my friend's house and his neighbour rang our school and said "all the people in your school are here". Then they rang Houzer's mum and Houzer's mum rang Houzer and said "arh come back to class now or I'm gonna ground you for like a month and tell all your friend's parents to ground you".
(Boys Focus Group – Hillsden High School)

There was clearly little scope for making up an excuse for their absence when caught truanting in the home with friends.

For Mark, David, Chelsey and Steph the home was not just considered to be a 'safe' space because it was easier to avoid detection, rather it also provided them with a safe haven away from threatening situations with other pupils. Each of these young people had experienced periods of physical and verbal bullying. They had all returned home during the school day following specific incidents which they wanted to distance themselves from.

When they [bullies] start, I just walk out and go home, 'cos I can't do anything else really. I can't really go anywhere in school, so I just sneak in and sneak upstairs. (Mark, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

David: When it all kicks off I'd rather not be there to be honest I'd prefer to be in my house where you don't fear for your safety.
PJ: You go home do you?
David: Yeah when it's really bad I do. I go straight home because I've got my own key.

(David, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

They also truanted within the home for whole days during periods of acute bullying:

> Mark: Wen ur at home no1 can get at u
> Sumtimes you wna get away from it.
> PJ: How do u mean?
> Mark: Sutimes its jus beta stayin at home
> Lik If I walk past 10R i get pounded
> or the cafteria
> or the shops lik
> Thy start shoutin an swearin an chasin u an all that.
> Sumtims thy go real pyscho thn its best not to go in
> Sumone else gets it lik
> (Mark, Cooperfield High School – MSN)

As Mark suggests, truanting within the home acts as a form of respite whilst also being a safe place away from possible 'encounter spaces' (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001) within the school and the surrounding areas.

Cyberspace

As discussed in chapter 3 technological advancement has led to significant changes in interaction and transformations of time and space in contemporary life (see Lash and Urry 2004). This has some interesting implications with regards to the interaction, communication and use of time among the informants within this study. Indeed, new forms of sociability when truanting would seem to be apparent that differ from that which would have been possible among young people from earlier studies (e.g. Willis 1977) when the pervasiveness of technological communication was not apparent.

When truanting at home the majority of the young people in the study used a range of information and communicative technologies to maintain social relationships with their peers. The qualities and relationships between space and time can be significantly altered by the use of such technologies, such that time can become 'compressed' (Harvey 1990) or 'distanticated' (Giddens 1981), essentially reducing the temporal and spatial gap. When using such technologies aspects of activities like truancy can be essentially despatialized (physically) yet allow for a sense of simulated physical 'co-presence' potentially transforming what we think of as 'near and far, present and absent' (Urry 2007, 2002). Dystopic accounts (e.g. Harvey 1989) of time-compression have pointed to an emptying out of social relationships as

a result of such time-spaces changes. Early academic commentaries (e.g. McLaughlin et al. 1995) on internet usage also suggested that face-to-face interaction might be eroded in place of on-line communication. However, Valentine and Holloway (2002) suggest, based on their research with young people, that online activities are more commonly incorporated into young people's 'real' social worlds and as such virtual activities and 'real' lives are mutually constituted. This seemed to be the case for the young people of this study. For the young people the possibility of despatialized (physically) and instantaneous communication in cyberspace when truanting had some distinct benefits for their autonomy and sociability. When truanting within the home, the majority of the young people were often alone. However, through the use of various forms of technology, the young people were able to uphold interaction with their peers and sustain their social relationships, blurring the boundaries between solo truancy and collective truancy. These interactions often took place in cyberspace. At the time of the study, MSN was the most common medium by which this communication took place, although the social networking site BEBO and Xbox live[70] were also used.

> I'm mostly at home on the PC when I'm mitching... chatting on MSN, sometimes Bebo
> (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

> Bryan: Im at home havin day off
> PJ: what are you up to?
> Bryan: Chatin wi my mates on ere
> (Bryan, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

> Half the time I'm at home because it's easier isn't it... you can fake to be ill and just lie in bed on your laptop. You're in your nice warm bed and you can you still chat to your friends on MSN if they're mitching or they're ill or if they're in IT or something, ... or you can just stalk people on BEBO... Oh yeah and some people, if they've got a decent phone like mine, then they get free internet on their phone so you can just chat anywhere really, like in the middle of Science or something.
> (Whitney, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Calum: I couldn't be bothered with the lessons they had planned so I just went home and played on the computer with my friends.
> PJ: You went home with your friends?
> Calum: No I was at my house and they was at theirs. You know on the X-box.
> (Calum, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

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[70] Xbox live is a games console which allows people of separate locations to play against each other and communicate with each other.

As Whitney highlights, interaction was not just restricted to those who were off school at the same time, they were also able to communicate with their friends whilst they were at school. Text messaging via mobile phones also made this possible. Thus, as Valentine et al. (2000) have highlighted, the use of the internet and other communicative technologies has meant that the 'home' is no longer simply a private space but is increasingly linked to public space.

Furthermore by collectively truanting in cyberspace the young people were able to actively resist some of the impositions that constrained their freedom of autonomy with regards to collective truancy in outside space. By truanting in the home and interacting with peers in cyber space the young people could avoid the level of monitoring and surveillance which they thought they were subjected to when truanting in the public domain. Zack hints at this below:

> When you're outside anyone can catch you, police, boardies, teachers but if you're faking it no one knows. You can do what you want, sleep, eat, watch TV, play people online on the x-box like. It's quite good really because you can keep up with your mates but you don't have the risk of getting caught like... But in the summer I'd rather be playing footie like because I prefers outside like. It's just like in winter, if it's raining or something or when you can't be bothered risking it and all that.
> (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Entering the virtual world when truanting also seemed to offer a sense of collective co-presence for pupils who had little option but to engage in truanting behaviours alone, such as pupils who were bullied or those who seemed to have few 'friends' to associate with when in school or outside school.

> Chelsey: Erh yeah I took a picture of my laptop 'cause I'm on it every day so it is really important to me.
> PJ: What do you use it for?
> Chelsey: Mostly I just goes on my laptop or computer and talk to people, 'cause sometimes it can be a bit boring at home.
> PJ: Who do you talk to?
> Chesley: Erm depends whose on like. Loads of people really, people who my brother knows, sometimes Mandy Ward and like people who live far away you know.
> PJ: How do you mean far away?
> Chesley: Erh like sometimes my cousins and all that cos they don't really live so close. We don't really get to see them so much.
> PJ: Where do they live?
> Chelsey: Erm I think it's Doncaster, erh somewhere far away. And it's good 'cause I can just talk to whoever I want, like my friend Claire, 'cause I met her on holiday and we just like talking and like I talk to all her friends and stuff. But I can just chat to anyone like.
> PJ: on MSN?

Chesley: Mmm and Bebo. I've got loads of friends who I knows.
PJ: Loads of friends from around here?
Chelsey: Just people everywhere, I don't really like so much people that live round here, they're all horrible but I knows loads of people on the computer. I just talk to anyone I want, nice people.
(Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Indeed, Scott (2004) has highlighted how the physically impersonal nature of communication in cyberspace can be particularly welcoming for certain people, giving them a greater sense of control over self-presentation. Indeed, a number of studies have suggested that the cyber-self offers individuals a greater sense of autonomy in creating online selves, a presentation of our choosing where we can work through troubled offline selves (Adler and Adler 2008, Springer 1991, Plant 1997, Valentine and Holloway 2002). However, drawing upon a Goffmanian analysis, Robinson (2007: 94) suggests that the 'cyberself is formed and negotiated in the same manner as the offline self' with expressions similarly 'given' and 'given off' just as Goffman (1959) noted of 'face-to-face' interaction. As the internet evolves and greater use of visual communication via cyberspace (e.g. Skype, facetime etc.) becomes apparent further limits might be placed on options for alternative self-presentation in cyberspace, though this could also allow further complexity to the notion of replicated co-presence. In the discussion with Chelsey she also highlights how the internet offers the potential for her to communicate with people beyond her home and locality. This was also made possible through the boys' usage of x-box live where they would commonly play against locally based friends as well others beyond their immediate locality.

In addition, as Chloe highlighted earlier on, it was even possible for truanting young people to interact with pupils who were in lessons or on the schools grounds through mobile technologies. It is seemingly possible for young people to be in class, and hence structured by the time-space structuring of their teachers, yet at the same time enter a time-space path that is desynchronised from institutional control by instantaneously absenting themselves from the class (without doing so physically) and entering into the realm of collective interaction with truanting peers in cyberspace. Indeed, instant messaging allows multiple 'backstages' (Goffman 1959) to be entered in this way, all of which are essentially 'invisible' to authoritative others in the school. Holloway and Valentine (2000) have also noted similar

possibilities for agency and resistance within school via young people's creative use of ICT in relation to the spatial disciplining of school.

Cyberspace, like public space is far from neutral. Indeed, young people's increasing usage of information and communicative technology has led to growing anxieties among adults and the call for greater control and surveillance (Valentine and Holloway 2001). However, the young people of this study reported little constraint on their internet usage.

> PJ: Does your mum know you're talking on MSN when you're pretending to be ill?
> Sonia: I'm in my bedroom aren't I so she doesn't exactly come in. I don't think she even knows how to use a computer anyway. She doesn't care.
> Carla: My mum doesn't even know how to switch one on!
> Kerry: We could be doing anything on the internet they haven't got a clue.
> Whitney: Innit. You can do what you want. I'm always on it and my mum hasn't checked once. Sometimes I think what would happen if she actually did sneak on my laptop or something. But she never has, I'd know if she did.
> (Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Cyberspace may, therefore, offer the young people a further way in which they can exercise a degree of agency in relation to the institution of the school, standing apart from their role of pupil as they interact with friends outside of school and resist the spatial and temporal discipline of the school. Interaction in cyberspace also seems to allow the young people a degree of agency in relation to the surveillance practices used to curtail their autonomy in outside space, a place where they can interact with friends somewhat freely whilst resisting adult imposition. Indeed Madell and Muncer (2007) have suggested that the level of control that young people perceive they have over their interactions is a primary reason for young people's usage of the internet and mobile phones.

Cyberspace may, therefore, represent a new avenue for the spatial consideration of truancy, one which currently seems to have been overlooked, a space where interaction among fellow truants is essentially despatialised and where surveillance is less restricted. It is though important not to overplay the extent to which interaction and communication among the young people of this study is 'vastly' different to the truancy depicted in studies from earlier years. As Zack mentioned, although collective interaction in cyberspace was often opted for when truanting, activities like 'football' etc. were still participated in and were regarded as preferential even if 'risky'. Despite the 'newer' possibilities made available through

cyberspace many of the spaces, places and activities that the young people of this study occupied or were engaged in when truanting were similar to those documented within the earlier literature (e.g. Willis 1977, Blackman 1988 etc.). Indeed, Boden and Molotch (1994) and Urry (2002) have noted that although virtual co-presence offers new possibilities it has not, and is unlikely to eliminate the importance of physical space and place or of physical co-presence. Physical co-presence offers a level of richness and depth which cannot be replicated totally by virtual co-presence and the maintenance of virtual co-presence would seem to rely to some extent on at least intermittent physical co-presence limiting the degree of re-shaping that such new technologies and forms of communication can have (Urry 2002, Boden and Molotch 1994).

Time abundance

When truanting in the home, the young people were clearly a lot less mobile (physically) than in the other spaces of truancy. This was especially the case if family members were at home whilst they were pretending to be ill. Aside from the time spent on their computers, the young people suggested that they mainly watched TV, DVDs, slept and ate.

> The gud thing about being at hme is food... Sleep.. food :) and computer and *one tree hill* (Tiffany, Cooperfield High School – MSN)

> I just chill in my bed. When my mum goes to work I come out and go on a munch (Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Ive stayed in bed like for the past 2 days :D on ere an watchin TV and sum films likee (Carla, Cooperfield High School – MSN)

> I just ask if I can have a day off, go back and sleep for a bit, watches TV and goes on my laptop half the time, to see whose on like and then just talk to my mates.
> (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Some also did school work, which is discussed in chapter 7 and a few of the girls helped their mothers with housework as discussed in chapter 5. Adam (1990), in her work on 'time', provides a detailed account of the strict temporal order of schools as a bureaucratically organised institution (see pp. 104-107). Adam notes:

> Even the most the cursory look at contemporary school life reveals that everything is timed. It demonstrates that the activities and interactions of all its participants are

choreographed to a symphony of buzzers and bells, timetables, schedules, and deadlines. Layer upon layer of such schedules form the structure of our education system (Adam 1990: 104-105).

Adam (1990: 114) makes a useful distinction between 'time scarcity' and 'time abundance'. The later is accorded a higher value when time is restricted but its value decreases when people have time. According to Adam (1990) time is also related to status and authority. Teachers have the authority to structure and control the time of pupils and this is supported by attendance laws. By truanting the young people of this study were able to gain a *degree* of temporal autonomy from the time-structure that controls their lives in school but this was not always as valuable as they had initially thought it to be. When their time was controlled and structured by the routines and timetables of the school, time-off seemed to be valued highly and activities like sleeping and watching TV were regarded as quite desirable. However, as the majority of the young people truanting within the home were doing so for whole days, the time abundance which this afforded them soon depreciated the value of time spent in this manner. As a result it was commonly suggested that they ended up being quite bored and wishing they had attended school after all.

> At first it's fun. You can like play on your x-box all day, get munch whenever you want, watch TV but then it does get kind of boring and you can't go outside or do anything because you're supposed to be ill. (Scott, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Delwyn: I was like a week just nothing playing on the x-box and that.
> PJ: Did you enjoy it?
> Delwyn: Yeah it was fun but then you couldn't see any of your mates from school or nothing so I came back in.
> (Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I just lied on the sofa all day and watched TV, it was quite boring though so I wish I went to school. (Hayley, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

> It's like you don't want to go to school so you mitch. But then when you mitch, it makes you wanna go to school because it's actually quite boring and you can't really do anything. Do you know what I mean? It's stupid really. (Kerry, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Alfie: Some days you could have like two days off at home and then you want to go back to school cos it's boring at home.
> Harvey: Yeah, you think it'll be fun but it's actually more fun at school.
> Aaron: It's the same in the school holidays you end up proper bored.

(Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Like the first five minutes you're like "yay, no school!" but then I hate it to be honest. I actually start to miss school because it gets so boring. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Not all pupils experienced time abundance when truanting though. For instance, Lizzie's time when truanting was considerably more structured by the temporal routines associated with her mother's illness and it's daily treatment, as well as the daily domestic duties which Lizzie would undertake. Indeed, Adam (1990) suggests that 'whether we are affected in a primary or secondary way, we cannot escape the clock time that structures and times our daily lives' (p.107). Although there would seem to be more discretion over the use and organisation of their time at home, when compared to the institutional timetable of the school, it is clear that temporal constraints, such as the timings associated with the people the young people interact with can still have a significant influence. This did seem to have more of a pervasive hold on the use of time when truanting for some (like Lizzie) more than others. Furthermore, there was not always a clear division between school time and time spent at home (when truanting or outside of school time) as some of the young people did school work whilst at home which is discussed further in the next chapter. Nevertheless, for the majority of the young people, their experiences of time abundance in contrast to time scarcity seemed to facilitate their return to school. This also seemingly highlights how the young people are not completely detached from school rather they recognised that being at school had its benefits and they articulated a sense of belonging to it, even if this was because of the lack of stimulating alternative ways to spend their time.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the use of space, place and time by truanting young people. It is argued that much of this truancy is 'hidden' from the public and institutional gaze, as the young people actively negotiate ways to maintain their sense of autonomy and control despite being constrained by adults who enforce boundaries of time and space. By utilising strategies of evasion and deception it is argued that truancy is overwhelmingly performed in a covert, non-conflictual manner, which stands in contrast to their largely conflict based narratives regarding their reasons for truancy. The 'school' and the 'home' are presented as

important sites in which truancy frequently takes place, yet which are often overlooked in popular discourses regarding truancy. Only a minority of this truancy can thus be considered as 'visible', thus questioning current truancy surveillance practices, such as truancy sweeps and the recent emphasis on criminalising the parents of truants. This chapter has pointed to some of the practices of control used for the surveillance of truants in outside space. The next chapter explicitly examines the issue of institutional power and control and the relational control between pupil and institution.

Chapter 7:

Contained & Disrupted Truancy

Introduction

Chapter 5 presented the act of truancy as the young people's attempt to gain a sense of control and autonomy in relation to the clutch of the institution and highlighted a general theme of disaffection *and* involvement which was seen to be characteristic of secondary adjustments. Chapter 6 looked at the ways in which this sense of agency was played out and explored the range of strategies deployed by the young people in order to maintain their sense of autonomy and to keep much of their truancy hidden from the public and institutional gaze. This chapter will show some of the ways in which the majority of the young people in this study manage their truanting behaviours and educational careers, as well as maintain a positive identity in the eyes of others, thus minimizing the risks associated with their truanting behaviours. The chapter will also highlight some of the difficulties that a particular minority of students experience in managing their education and a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils, resulting in a more negative impact on their school careers. It will then explore their reactions to these difficulties and their treatment as 'truants'. A distinction is made between 'contained' truanting behaviours and 'disrupted' 'truants' based on Goffman's model of secondary adjustments (1961)[71]. The chapter is presented in two halves respectively.

Distinguishing Between Secondary Adjustments

In chapter 5, it was suggested that truancy can be seen as a secondary adjustment, representing a way in which the young people stand apart from the role of 'pupil' (the 'official self') and the expectations of the institution of the school. However, Goffman makes a further distinction between 'contained' and 'disruptive' secondary adjustments which may be a useful way in which to think about the risks and consequences of truancy for the young people themselves, especially given the more diverse forms of truancy which have been demonstrated. According to Goffman, 'contained' secondary adjustments fit into the existing institutional structure without exerting any significant pressure on the stability of the institution and can deflect efforts that might otherwise have been disruptive. Disruptive

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[71] The distinction between 'contained' and 'disruptive' is not the same as the distinction between 'occasional' and 'persistent' truancy. This is discussed later in the chapter.

secondary adjustments are aimed at rupturing the smooth running of the organisation through the intention of abandoning the institution or altering its structure (Goffman 1961: 180). When applying this distinction to the issue of truancy and the context of the school, some modification is required. Principally, rather than being disruptive to the smooth operation of the organisation as in the context of the total institution, the young people's rejection takes the form of absence and hence the disruption mostly affects the young people's own careers. That is, their school careers. There are some secondary consequences for the school in terms of absenteeism levels and related scrutiny but the consequences seem to be far greater for the young people themselves. It would, therefore, be more appropriate in this case to use the term 'disrupted' secondary adjustments, rather than disruptive. The categories of 'contained' truanting behaviours and 'disrupted' 'truants' have been developed based on this distinction. However, although this creates a binary divide between the categories, it is important to recognise that they are not in fact two homogonous groups. For instance, within the 'contained' category there are pupils who are more 'contained' than others, and conversely pupils who are more at risk of becoming 'disrupted' than others. Similarly, there are some pupils within the 'disrupted' category whose school careers seem to be more 'disrupted'. In the sections that follow these categories are explored in more detail.

Contained Truanting Behaviours and Self-Management

The vast majority of the young people within this study might be seen as 'contained' pupils. Throughout the thesis we have already seen some of the ways in which truancy is essentially 'contained'. In chapter 5 it was suggested that the majority of the young people articulate some disaffection with the institution but at the same time appear to embrace or at least tolerate it. In chapter 6 the covert manner in which truancy is commonly enacted was highlighted. This section now focuses specifically on how truancy is 'contained', by exploring the young people's efforts to self-manage the risks associated with their truanting behaviours. Self-management here is taken to mean the act of pupils individually controlling their truanting behaviours and the associated risks by monitoring and regulating their actions and deploying strategies to reduce the possibility of negative consequences. Those categorised as 'contained' consist of pupils from across the range of social class backgrounds, from all set positions and are mixed in terms of gender. However, as discussed, some pupils seem to be more 'contained' than others, whereas some pupils seem to be at greater risk of

becoming 'disrupted' 'truants'. As we shall see, it would seem that there is a class dimension evident amongst those at the extremes of the 'contained' category, with pupils from 'professional and managerial' backgrounds better placed to 'contain' their truancy. Most of the 'contained' pupils only engaged in occasional truanting behaviours, but, importantly, eleven engaged in persistent truanting behaviours. The main risks that the young people associated with truancy are, the possibility of damaging their educational trajectories and subsequent employment prospects and the effect that truancy might have on their image and identity. This chapter will explore the pupils' perceptions on each of these areas and will end by considering how schools might contribute to the 'containment' of particular groups of young people through the differential interpretation of pupil's behaviour.

Self-Management of Education

The majority of the pupils articulated a strong awareness of the negative consequences that truancy may have on their education. The main risks that they identified were the possibility that their academic progress in school might deteriorate and that they may jeopardise their chances of obtaining qualifications and eventual employment.

> The problem with mitching is you might like miss a lesson where you're doing something really important and like you really need to know it for a test or something and then you could get a really bad grade. So you have to know what to mitch. (Emma, Cooperfield High School - Girls Focus Group)

> You've got to be careful mitching. We need to go to school to get a good job. These are probably like the most important years of our lives and if we didn't go to school it would probably muck up the whole of our lives. (Lucy, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> If you mitch too much you can end up falling really behind in your work and all that, start getting bad grades, probably end up in McDonalds you know. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The pupils also suggested that they were often reminded of these risks by teachers and parents.

> Mr Milner is always going on about attendance and that, and like you can fall behind in your work and like miss important work that you might need for a test and all that. (Justin, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Lauren: That's what my mum says, "I got a rubbish job. I had you when I was 18 and I mitched". All I hear is that she used to hang around with loads of boys.

Hannah: It's like just seeing how your parents have grown up and that.
Katie: Yeah I want to get like a good job, like a police women.
Hannah: I want to be like a childminder. I want to like work with little kids, so like in a nursery or a crèche and you need a good education for that.
Lauren: Yeah, so you have to be careful like.
(Girls Focus Group, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

My mum says I don't want you to mitch cos I don't want you to be on your own in life, without a job and like you'd end up living on the street. And she's like "don't think I'll be standing by you if you're like kicked out" and everything. (Alice, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Indeed, many studies (e.g. Reid 1999, Attwood and Croll 2006, Office for Standards in Education 2001, National Audit Office 2005, Morris and Rutt 2005) have reported a link between absenteeism and poor education outcomes and, as discussed in chapter one, this link is commonly highlighted by policy-makers in Wales (e.g. WG 2011b) and England (e.g. SEU 1998, Miliband and Lewis 2004, DfE 2010a). It is perhaps not surprising therefore that pupils, parents and teachers are conscious of the educational risks associated with truancy, but the importance of absenteeism in relation to education outcomes is also clearly interlinked with the value of education in contemporary UK society and the importance placed on academic credentials internationally, nationally, and locally (at the school and individual level). Chapter one outlined the increasing emphasis placed on standards and performance, and the pressure which schools are under, particularly as a result of the mechanisms used to monitor and publicise performance. At the pupil level, Jackson (2006) has pointed to the widespread fear of failure experienced by young people as a consequence of contemporary educational discourses:

Fears of academic failure are relatively common in contemporary secondary schooling, and are fuelled by dominant and powerful standards and credentials discourses. These discourses, which operate in conjunction with broader neoliberal discourses, emphasize the value and importance of academic 'success' and attaining academic credentials. Academic credentials are positioned as 'key' to building a successful life (Jackson 2006: 140).

Many studies have highlighted the increasing recognition by pupils of the importance of academic success for future life chances (e.g. Ringrose 2007, Jackson 2007, Reay and Wiliam 1999). However, the increased awareness of the importance of academic credentials should also be considered alongside the backdrop of changes in education and work. Traditionally, studies have suggested that working class pupils may see school based qualifications as

irrelevant to their future career plans. For instance, in Willis' (1977) study, the 'lads' were able to leave school at 15 with few or no formal education qualifications and enter a buoyant industrial labour market. While, historically, access to education and educational outcomes for girls (especially working class girls) were often limited. Since then the de-industralization of the UK and the dependence on service sector activities has resulted in a loss of traditionally 'male' working-class jobs, whilst significantly improving the labour market opportunities of young women (See Francis 2000, Egerton and Savage 2000, Delamont 1999, Crompton 1999, McDowell 2000). As Istance and Rees (1994) highlight the collapse of the male dominated employment structure is especially pronounced in South Wales. This considered alongside the successive raising of the school leaving age and the changing nature of the youth labour market has had a profound impact on the opportunities available to pupils. Although these factors are often seen to contribute to an alleged 'failure' of boys, in absolute terms, both girls *and* boys have seen significant improvements in the achievement of credentials and attainment levels than their predecessors (e.g. Gorard et al. 1999, Delamont 1999). Pupils of all backgrounds are increasingly encouraged to invest in education and are drawn into the search for credentials (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004). However, at the same time there has been more competition affecting all classes as not even the more privileged middle class can rely on a smooth transition into work in the global competition for jobs (Brown et al. 2010).

In recent years, high rates of unemployment, the expanding 'flexible' labour market, and economic recession has meant that young people are facing greater uncertainty than ever before. This had certainly not passed the pupils of this study by. Indeed, they often made reference to the 'recession' or the 'credit-crunch'[72]. In the face of such uncertainty the majority of the pupils did not seem to regard investment in education as a futile endeavour. Rather, it seemed that they considered investment in education to be even more crucial in order to compete in the labour market and/or to secure their places on Further, and in some cases, Higher Education courses. Virtually all of the pupils, regardless of background or ability, suggested that they wanted to get a 'good education' to increase their chances of future employment.

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[72] A term denoting an economic condition where it is difficult to obtain credit and money from banks or other lenders. The term was in particularly popular usage during the global economic recession of 2009.

If you wanna be in the Army you've gotta go to school..you don't got to have the bestest grades or anything, not like top of the record but you need to show you've been to school for your record like. (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

You need to go to school or else you can't do your GCSEs and you won't get into a University or like a College and then you'll be like working in McDonalds.
(Duncan, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

If I could choose I'd still go to school cos it's education, and well it's important to get good grades so you can get a good job because now you've got to mostly go to Uni to get a good job. You've got more chance if you get a degree.
(Joe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Of course there is a strong sense in which many of these young people have not quite realised the parameters of constraint which might affect their subsequent learning opportunities and their imagined transitions into the work place. Despite education discourses that explicitly link education with employment outcomes the processes by which young people move from one status to another are not as straightforward or as linear as they are purported or assumed to be. Indeed as Rees et al. (1997) highlight, individuals are autonomous and can exercise personal choices but these are defined within 'socially constituted rationalities' (p. 493) and subjected to a range of constraints such as those related to intergenerational family employment experience, history and place, particularly relevant for working class boys in South Wales (see also Rees 1997). The age of these young people might have influenced the widespread optimism and positive embracement of dominant education and credential discourses, in that the reality of the labour market situation and barriers to entry might be expected to become more pronounced as they reach the final years of their compulsory school careers.

The realities of the current recession meant that some of the informants did articulate views that were critical of the human capital and credential discourses, as Tom touches on:

Tom: Like my dad's business is really struggling at the moment 'cause of the erh credit crunch. So it kind of shows that you can do well but then still end up losing it all anyway, doesn't it? So like, I don't actually think you need education like to do well. Some people make it without education and erh I dunno, some people get the best grades, go to Uni and all that, make it and erh they just lose it 'cause of the recession and all that.
PJ: So what do you think you'll do after school then?

Tom: I'll go to sixth form and then go to Uni but...erh I dunno, 'cause like, well, if I could get a job anyway when I was 16 and a decent one, and like if I had like a future then I wouldn't bother. But there's no point just dropping out when you're going to be working in McDonalds for the rest of your life.
(Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

However, although Tom begins by questioning the value of education in an unstable economic climate, he then goes on to suggest that there are few alternative options available. So even though some were able to question the likely opportunities provided by investing in education, the majority were reluctant to depart from that pathway. On the whole, the pupils in this study said they wanted 'good'[73] jobs and recognised the strategic importance of school and school based qualifications in attaining these jobs and in mapping out their life trajectories.

Although the young people seemed to be very conscious of the risks associated with truancy, there were widespread suggestions that engaging in truanting behaviours did not *necessarily* have to equate with educational failure or deteriorating progress, as long as they were careful to deploy appropriate strategies to reduce the risks associated with the activity, as Zoe highlights:

Zoe: Mr Milner come into our classroom at the beginning of the year and was like "if you're off a lot you'll get bad grades and you won't get a job" and I was like thinking "huh loads of people mitch and get accepted to like every Uni... shut up!" but everyone was like "awww pressure" and I was just like "god!".
PJ: You don't agree with him?
Zoe: Yeah well some people will fail cos of their mitching so he is kind of right and there is a risk that you <u>could</u> fail but it's just the way he said, "you <u>will</u> get bad grades". That's a load of rubbish. The thing is, if you mitch you've just got to be a bit clever about it. You've got to make sure you catch up with your work and all that. I catch up all the time and it's not like I miss anything important or like exams or anything and I'm in the top sets. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

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[73] What was meant by a 'good' job varied widely. It did not necessarily just point to managerial or professional jobs. Rather, some pupils were interested in skilled trade jobs etc. Unskilled jobs by comparison were looked upon less favourably. It was not just 'academic' pupils who recognised the importance of school and school based qualifications. Pupils wishing to pursue vocational routes post 16 recognised the need to obtain qualifications and a 'good record' to secure their places on post-16 vocational training courses. Even pupils who thought that they were likely to be entering unskilled employment post-16 felt that acquiring a 'good record' in school would be important in order to compete for jobs.

Clearly Zoe has little understanding about the process of acquisition of cultural capital, over and above attainment, but she does raise the important point that it might be possible to engage in truanting behaviours whilst minimising the negative consequences associated with the behaviour. There were four main ways in which pupils attempted to self-manage the risks associated with their truanting behaviours, these were: to reduce the amount of time lost from education; to truant from the 'right' lessons and not the 'important' lessons; to catch up on work missed and not to miss exams or the run up to exams.

The amount of time lost from education was a key consideration in the young people's self-management of their truanting behaviours and education. The surest way to reduce or prevent the negative consequences associated with truancy was to limit the amount of truanting behaviours undertaken. The majority of the truanting behaviours discussed throughout this thesis have taken an occasional but widespread form. Among the young people there was a strong sense that missing an occasional lesson or a few days here and there would have little effect on their educational progress.

> I only mitch for like a day or a lesson or like a couple of days. I've never mitched for more than two days in a row. When I get back I'm still the same, it's like... it didn't affect my education or nothing. It's like two days out of three other days, so it wouldn't really affect you. (Adam, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I'm only on the knock for some lessons like, not that many really, so it doesn't do too much harm to be honest. I'm not like one of those whose never in...like never. They're the one's that aren't gonna get an education and are probably gonna end up on the dole or working for Tesco or something. (Joanne, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

In contrast, the more time that was missed from education the greater the sense of disjuncture experienced:

> When it's just a few lessons it isn't so bad, but if I'm off for like a week at a time it's harder innit. I gotta like put more effort in like to keep up like and it's like <u>hmm</u> I better stop now innit. (Dylan, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I don't let it ruin my education. If I start mitching too much then I'm kind of thinking this aint good what am I doing? I'm going to like screw everything up like. Then I'll go back and there's more to catch up on which is a bit like depressing really but you just gotta do it. It's like better if you just do it a bit. It's not so boring and you don't get behind. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Managing the effects of prolonged absence was especially difficult for the young people that engaged in persistent truanting behaviours. Nevertheless, eleven of the young people that engaged in persistent truanting behaviours were categorised as 'contained' because of the efforts they went to in order to maintain their school careers, by deploying the strategies used below and/or managing a positive identity. These eleven young people were, however, clearly at greater risk of tipping over into the 'disrupted' category.

Although, in general, limiting the amount of time lost from education was important, there were some lessons where it was considered less important. As discussed in chapter 5, the young people appeared to make judgements about the instrumental value of particular lessons, leading to an evident hierarchy, whereby attendance was considered of particular importance in some lessons but not in others, specifically those deemed to be of low value. As these lessons were considered to be of little use to them, they were less concerned about their progress within them and they were considered to be the 'right' lessons to truant from:

> Carla: I just mitch the right lessons.
> PJ: What do you mean the right lessons?
> Kerry: Like stuff you don't really need to learn like R.E, Art.
> Carla: Music.
> Sarah: Stuff you don't need to learn and won't get you nowhere.
> (Girls Focus Group, Cooperfield High School)

In contrast, the subjects that were frequently mentioned as the most important were English, Maths and Science, as well as personal preferences for individuals that had a strong sense of their own future aspirations and a clear understanding about what they needed academically for their desired careers. There were widespread suggestions that pupils would make a conscious effort not to truant from these lessons (no matter how 'boring' they were at times) or to do so rarely. Many studies have highlighted the ways in which boys and girls experience these subjects differently (e.g. Paechter 2000, Boaler 1997). Nevertheless, within this study, there seemed to be an almost uniform acceptance of the value of these subjects. There was a strong sense, articulated by the young people, that their success in the labour market after schooling would require good grades or at least competency in English, Maths and Science, even if they could not see how the content of the subjects directly related to the specific career that they had in mind. This can be seen in the following example where Adam

discusses the value of subjects in relation to his desired future occupation (A diver for the police or open water life guard).

> You don't have to go to school to be able to do what I want to do. I mean, I need P.E. and a little bit of Science. I don't even need English 'cause I can speak it and that, it's just like a bit of writing but I don't need that when I'm in the water. But like, I wouldn't mitch it too much because it doesn't look good on your record, you need English, Maths and Science for your record. You gotta get at least a level 5 in biology and I got a level 5 plus so I'm good at that, and I'm alright at Maths like, and I'm alright in English. I don't try as hard in other subjects as I do in those. I don't like doing Art, it's pointless, textiles, DT, I don't need them and they're kind of pointless subjects anyway, I don't see the point. (Adam, Hillsden High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

Measor (1984), in a study which took place before the introduction of the National Curriculum, noted that English and Maths were subjects that both boys and girls (regardless of their orientation to school) perceived to have a high 'marketability' factor (corresponding with similar findings from Ball 1981 and Burgess 1983). Over 25 years later, this still appears to be the case. These subjects, with the addition of Science, were considered to be a prerequisite for entry to post-16 education and the pupils also thought that employers would be looking for these subjects as basic grounds for employment.

> Lauren: I don't do important ones though.
> PJ: What do you mean by important?
> Lauren: Like the main ones ...like English, Science...Maths you know the ones you're actually going to need for a job like. Basically if you mitch them ones then you're screwed 'cause no one will take you.
> (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I would never miss English, Maths or anything like that...Science, History. I want to do Law at Uni and you need good grades to go get in. And basically if you don't have the core subjects you won't get into any Uni. They won't take you. (Anna, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Kym: Maths, English or Science I have to be in, but if it's like boring lessons like... I dunno.
> Helen: Geography
> PJ: Why do you have to be in for those subjects?
> Kym: You just do. No one hardly misses them, just the rubbish ones.... you can't get a good job if you don't have 'em. Like you won't get into college...

Helen: You need them.
(Girls Focus Group, Hillsden High School)

It seems highly unlikely that the pupils arrived at these status hierarchies alone. Subject status can ordinarily be regarded as an outcome of macro and meso political and social movements, thus given the current 'official' discourse on the core subjects mentioned above, and additional resource allocation they receive, it is perhaps not surprising that the young people ordered their subjects in this way and self-managed their truancy accordingly[74]. Indeed, Paechter (2000) has argued that the basic hierarchy of subjects has remained unaltered despite the introduction of the National Curriculum for England and Wales. She notes that the status of Maths and Science for instance derives from them being 'masculine' subjects, the dominance of which has gone relatively unchanged since the elite male curriculum of the 19th century which she suggests the current curriculum is firmly rooted in.

When lessons were truanted from, the majority of pupils suggested that it was possible to make up for the time that they had lost from education by attempting to catch-up with the work that they had missed. Pupils frequently suggested that on their return from school they ordinarily tried to copy-up work from fellow classmates.

> I do like copy out of someone's book and ask people that were in the lesson if I missed anything important, so it's not that bad. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I always try and copy what I missed from my mates... if they'll help me out. Especially if it's like an important subject like Maths or something or if we're going to need it for an exam. (Shaun, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

If the pupils had been successful in receiving authorisation for their truancy (e.g. by pretending to be ill etc.) then it was possible for them to ask their teachers for help in catching up on the work that they had missed. However, their peers were usually a more reliable source of help.

Some particularly conscientious students (e.g. Anna, Ruby, Jenny, Ella, Emma, Hayley and Harriet), all of whom were girls and from higher socio-economic backgrounds, attempted to

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[74] Although as discussed Welsh, which is also a core National Curriculum subject in Wales, did not seem to be valued in the same way.

regain the time lost from education by trying to catch up with the work that had been missed from all of the lessons that they had truanted from, even in subjects which they judged to be of particularly low value. However, most suggested that they were less inclined to do so, sticking to their judgments regarding the quality and worth of these lessons.

> I always copy what I've missed, apart from in the like pointless lessons, like Art, R.E erh... and like in Tech you can't really copy-up like you just gotta catch up like. It doesn't really affect your work so much if it's something like Tech or you know if it's like Cooking or something or Music. (Scott, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Unsurprisingly it was perceived to be easier to catch up on work if lessons were occasionally missed rather than if whole days or block periods were missed. Again, this often meant prioritising the work of those subjects deemed to be of high value as the girls from Pen-Y-Peel High School discuss:

> Alice: If I mitch French like once in a month then it's really easy to catch up or French, Geography and Maths like only one time then it's alright but if I weren't in for a whole day then it's harder to catch up... If it's like a week then it's like loads. So then you've just got to try your hardest to catch up on the important things.
> Steph: Yeah like you're not exactly gonna bother with R.E. but you've got to try and catch up in like Maths and English and all those.
> Lucy: Yeah and if it's just like once and it wasn't really anything important then it doesn't actually really matter. It's not going to really affect you or anything...unless it's like work you need for an exam or something.
> Alice: Yeah.
> Lucy: But if it's like more than once you've really gotta try and copy-up.
> (Girls Focus Group – Pen-Y-Peel High School)

In chapter 6 it was noted that the young people suggested that they were finding it increasingly necessary to take whole days off school rather than specific lessons because they found it easier to avoid detection. Clearly, this is worrying with regards the amount of work pupils are then having to catch-up on when returning to school. However, some of those frequently absent for more than one day seemed to have developed strategies to help with this.

For those pupils pretending to be ill, it was possible to ask for work to be sent home so that work could be caught-up on before returning to school. Zoe, who engaged in persistent truanting behaviours, frequently used this technique in order to prevent herself from falling

behind in her work. Occasionally her absence was parentally-condoned and her mother would also cooperate with and encourage this strategy.

> It does kind of make it harder for me because I'm not in so I don't understand but I'm like oh well I can do it. I do know it. I catch up all the time, I get the work from school then just sit there and do it and my mum and step dad will help me if it's like "argh" I don't understand...I can get good grades and when I'm in I do work really hard, like I'm like a teacher's pet. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

In this way, although Zoe did encounter some difficulties due to time lost from education, the strategies she employed allowed her to successfully remain in the top sets for most of her subjects and to achieve well academically. Yet her level of academic ability no doubt contributed to this factor. Zoe also suggests that she is a 'teacher's pet'. Clearly, being a 'teacher's pet' would also make it easier to obtain support from teachers. Marvin, who also engaged in persistent truanting behaviours, adopted a similar strategy to Zoe. His parents had previously attempted to teach him at home when he was absent from school for several months at a time during primary school as a result of bullying and they continued to do so when he truanted, although he suggested that they were unaware that he was pretending to be ill.

> I think I've probably learnt more from my mum and dad than I ever have at school because when I was getting bullied they were kind of teaching me for months at a time. They taught me how to read and write and stuff like that. Now, like, my mum still teaches me if I'm like pretending to be sick, so I can catch up. She'll like ring the school up and ask for the work I've missed and ask what we're supposed to be doing and everything and like teach me it. (Marvin, Cooperfield High School – Boys Focus Group)

Notably, both Marvin and Zoe had parents from the highest socio-economic classification and there was a sense in which those from similar backgrounds appeared to be better placed to take advantage of maximising such strategies, particularly those who had family members with high levels of educational experience. The manner in which such pupils could benefit from extra help with their work was often reflected upon by these individuals.

> It's quite good actually because I do get a lot of help with my work and stuff, like my homework and when I need to catch up and that. Basically when I'm at home my mum and nan and anyone else whose there when I'm at home just helps me... cos like my mum's been to Uni and that, so she erm...well she's been there before and she knows

what we're doing...well not everything but she knows quite a lot. (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

However Carla, a pupil with parents in the 'professional & managerial' classification, highlights the significant point that parents do not always have time to help, despite their level of knowledgeability or interest in their child's education.

Like every day my mum works like all the time. She leaves at 9, then come comes back for a bit then works at night and then comes back and goes to bed and that happens every day... and my dad works away a lot. So basically, I never get to see any of them.... They want me to do good and there's pressure 'cause I'm in the top sets and that and like my sister went off the rails but they can't help me with work and that 'cause they're just too busy ...they're never in! (Carla, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

But Carla was in the top sets and consistently performed well in class tests and exams, suggesting that her parents 'pressure' as well as her access to resources might have had a positive influence on Carla's maintenance of a positive school career regardless. Ball (2003) has highlighted a number of ways in which middle class parents seek to 'stretch' their children educationally as part of the 'reproduction strategies' that are used by middle class parents to 'make-up' (Vincent and Ball 2007) a middle class child. However, Lucey and Reay (2002) also highlight the emotional costs of the pressure to succeed for middle class children. In contrast Walkerdine et al. (2001) note that working class parents often prioritise their child's happiness at school and therefore avoid pushing their children. Indeed, for the majority of the pupils from the higher socio-economic backgrounds, having access to the parental support and recourses to enable them to catch-up with work did place them at considerably less risk than the pupils from lower-socio economic backgrounds who did not always have access to the same level of support and resources. Reay (2006) has previously highlighted how working class mothers provide considerable practical maintenance work in support of schooling, but less emphasis is placed on academic support when compared to middle class parents, with economic and cultural resources contributing to the reproduction of educational inequalities.

The final way which the pupils attempted to stay on track with the academic path was, very simply, to ensure that they attended school on the day of exams. Although the pressure of exams or assignments was cited as a cause of truancy by two pupils, ordinarily the majority of pupils claimed that they would never miss an exam to truant.

bin in evry dai this wk cos weve got exams (Joshua, Pen-Y-Peel High School - MSN)

I'd never miss an exam though, no way. I just knows the right time to mitch. I aint gonna screw up my education. (Whitney, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I've not mitched for ages actually 'cause we've got our exams at the moment. I've done loads of revision. I've even cut back on my football. (Adam, Hillsden High School – Telephone Interview)

Attendance seemed to notably improve on the run up to the pupils' year 9 exams. This was even the case for some who engaged in more persistent truanting behaviours. Jackson (1996) has noted that fears about academic failure can become particularly pronounced during the run up to exams (see also Reay and Wiliam 1999). Growing up in an educational era dominated by exams and assessment, it is not surprising that the young people considered exams to be important in regards to the self-management of their truancy and their education in general. There were also suggestions that exams and class tests could be used as a marker by which pupils could judge the impact that their truancy was having. If they continued to perform well in their exams, then their truancy was thought to have been worthwhile, but if their performance declined then they began to question their behaviour. Two of the young people suggested that particularly bad performances had led to improved attendance as a result.

I was starting to do bad, like in this test right, I couldn't understand any of it and I just thought you can't do this anymore. So then I started going in more.
(Kym, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I missed too much from German and I thought it'd be fine if I just did the test but you need the work to do the test don't you. At first I was copying up the work but then I couldn't be bothered. I got like 5 out of 40 or something. So now it's like I gotta do more like... I aint mitched it since. (Delwyn, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview).

In many ways, the four main strategies deployed by these young people are in fact rather basic but seemingly allowed the majority of pupils to truant with few overt consequences for their educational progress. The most successful young people (in terms of risk reduction) were those who deployed each of these strategies. The ways in which these pupils truanted from school, took time-out for themselves, yet worked the system to ensure overall academic

progress is extremely resonant of Becker et al.'s (1961) medical students. Although there are dangers in promoting the instrumental value of education at the expense of intrinsic satisfaction, it does appear to serve as a powerful lever to ensure truancy is essentially self-managed.

Identity management

The young people were not only concerned about their educational progress or the degree to which they would jeopardise their life trajectories by engaging in truanting behaviours, they were also concerned about the consequences of their truancy for their image and identity. It seemed that although virtually all of the young people engaged in truanting behaviours, the 'contained' young people made efforts to maintain a public and personal identity as an 'ordinary' pupil, rather than a 'truant'.

There was an awareness by the 'contained' young people that truancy and 'truants' were often portrayed in a negative light. This was an issue raised in each of the initial focus groups. The following data highlights the typical views articulated within these groups:

> Hayley: People kind of think, like straight away mitching and naughty people...
> Hannah: Yeah like they kind of go together.
> Hayley: And like mitchers are people that steal and do bad stuff...smash things up and that.
> Joanne: Yeah, yeah and like you'd probably have bad parents that don't care and are scratters[75] like.
> Hannah: Yeah wasters, don't care about their education or anything.
> PJ: Is that what you think?
> Hayley: No not like us, cos we know it's not like that but like that's what people do think.
> Joanne: Some people are scratters...some people in this school, but not us.
> (Girls Focus Group – Pen-Y-Peel High School)

It seemed that those with a public identity as a 'truant' were linked to a number of other traits which the 'contained' young people did not want to be associated with. Drawing on the work of Hughes (1945), Becker describes these as 'auxiliary traits' and notes:

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[75] The use of the terms scratter and scrat are youthful dialect, derogatory terms generally denoting the 'unrespectable' in contrast to the 'respectable' and relatively akin to the more popular term 'chav' (Jones 2011) but might also have a gender connation emphasising sexually 'immoral' behaviour among some girls.

> Possession of one deviant trait may have a generalized symbolic value, so that people automatically assume that its bearer possesses other undesirable traits allegedly associated with it (1963: 94).

The deviant and criminal association that the young people point to seems to resonate with the popular and dominant 'official' image of truancy outlined in chapter 1. The majority of pupils were clear that they saw this as an undesirable image and one which they did not want to be associated with. This did not however prevent them from truanting altogether. Instead, it seemed to affect the way they truanted as they actively attempted to avoid being labelled as a 'truant'. Again this can be seen as a form of risk management with the pupils attempting to distance themselves from this identity and in doing so to maintain or project a generally positive identity in the eyes of others. Truanting in a predominantly covert manner and again truanting only occasionally were the two main ways that this was executed.

The young people made comparisons between themselves and pupils who were publically identified as 'truants', some of whom were also involved in the research. For instance, Zoe discusses Chelsey's (a disrupted 'truant') reputation:

> It's like Chelsey she's kind of tarred as one of the naughty kids because she's always off and she doesn't exactly hide it. People kind of think she's nothing, which is a bit bad but that's what it's like if you take it too far. But the naughty ones like just say what they want to teachers, personally I'd never do that. (Zoe, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Both Zoe and Chelsey persistently truanted from school but Zoe distanced herself from Chelsey by reference to Chelsey's more overt truancy, her behaviour and her reputation. As discussed, some of the 'contained' pupils who engaged in persistent truanting behaviours, like Zoe, were able to avoid the institutional gaze through the successful deployment of a range of evasive, deceptive and self-management strategies but it was easier to avoid negative labelling if one was only engaged in truanting behaviours occasionally. If occasionally truanting the chances of being identified as a 'truant' were reduced. By appeal to their level of truancy, young people who only engaged in occasional truanting behaviours could also distinguish their identity from that of the persistent 'truants'.

> Yeah I do mitch but I'm not like a <u>mitcher</u>, like Amy. I don't do it all the time. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

As Lauren Indicates "mitchers" were more likely to be associated with those who frequently truanted. Thus the triviality of occasional truancy is contrasted with the more prolonged norm transgression undertaken by the more persistent truants, helping to 'neutralize' (Matza 1957) their actions.

How they would be perceived by their teachers if they were identified as a 'truant' seemed to be a common concern articulated by the young people:

> I don't exactly want to be known as a mitcher. If you're like known as someone that's always on the mitch then the teachers don't respect you or anything. If there's like trouble they probably think "yeah it's gonna be her she's a mitcher and she doesn't care about her education or anything. She's just a bad kid". But like me I do care about my education and all that. I'm not like that and they knows it. (Lauren, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> If I get caught then it's like I'm definitely on the knock, and then they'll think I'm a mitcher and like they can't trust me and I'm a scratt ...and like I'm thick and don't care. (Joanne, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

> Like teachers don't ever forget, they don't ever drop things like that. They'll always think you're like a kind of naughty person that always does naughty stuff and that your parents don't care or anything. And if you've got bad behaviour they don't let you go in the top sets or anything because they think you're going to be a bad influence or something. (Craig, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

> They think you're like really naughty if you mitch even if you're not really. (Justin, Hillsden High School – Boys Focus Group)

Instead it seemed that the pupils would rather project a generally positive identity in the eyes of their teachers, seemingly one that would *not* jeopardise their 'official self'. Being labelled as a 'truant' by their peers was also regarded as undesirable. Specifically, pupils did not want their peers to associate them with the delinquent, anti-social behaviour that is often linked to those with public identities as 'truants'.

> Mark: If you're never in it's like you get known as some kind of gangster wannabe and people don't want to know you ...like someone that's really naughty and...
> Aaron: Probably hits their mum.
> Mark: Yeah smokes weed and's got no respect. It doesn't matter if you're not like that, people just think you probably are like that.
> Aaron: They just reckons that's what you're like.
> PJ: If you mitch?

> Mark: If you're known as someone that mitch's all the time...someone that doesn't care. If you just mitch a bit then it's alright like no one thinks that.
> (Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

As Mark highlights, being labelled in this way was considered more likely for persistent 'truants'. Several pupils tried to keep their truancy completely hidden from friends, particularly if they perceived their friends to be generally non-deviant (with regard to other behaviour also).

> Amy knows I do it, but no one else does. It's embarrassing if people think you mitch.
> (Anna, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

However, this was alleviated for those who engaged in truanting behaviours with friends, because of the peer support and mutual understanding which collective truancy can offer.

A distinct issue raised by some of the boys from Hillsden High School was the concern that their truancy might result in them being associated with backgrounds which they perceived as inferior to their own.

> Tom: Well you know, rough people do it more and I don't want people thinking I'm like a chav and like from a rough background and that.
> PJ: People like who?
> Tom: You know like mates and people in our class and year.
> (Tom, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)
>
> Joe: You don't exactly want to be seen running around on the knock all the time. You have to be careful.
> Tom: Rough people from Leckton do it more. They do it all the time.
> Robert: They don't care if they get caught either.
> Joe: Hmmm some of them hardly go in. We do go on the knock but not as much and we wouldn't exactly make it so obvious. You just look rough.
> (Boys Focus Group – Hillsden High School)

Notably the boys that discussed these concerns were all from 'intermediate' and 'professional and managerial' backgrounds. It is clear that they tended to associate the negative popular and dominant image of truancy as one which resembled the truancy of those from 'deprived' areas. Despite truanting themselves, they attempt to assert their moral worth by reference to their decisions to engage in truanting behaviours in an occasional and often covert manner. Adam also raised concerns about the way in which his parents might be perceived as a result of his truancy.

> I dont like doing it so much aswell because people think that my parents have brought me up wrong but they havent it's me. They think you got a ruff backround. (Adam, Hillsden High - MSN)

Pupils from other class backgrounds also articulated similar concerns regarding the possibility of their parents' parenting skills being questioned as result of their truancy. Government discourse has increasingly emphasised parental 'responsibility' in recent years. However, perceptions of working class behaviour have long been divided into the 'rough' and the 'respectable' (Vincent et al. 2008). The importance for working class women of being judged as 'respectable' has been noted in a number of studies (Skeggs 1997) and this extends to the importance of 'good mothering' (Vincent et al. 2010). Working class women are especially likely to be judged as failures in this regard but middle class woman are not exempt from this (Gillies 2006, Vincent et al. 2010). Turning out 'good' children is clearly associated with 'good mothering' and it would seem that parental anxieties on this matter might well have been passed on to some of the young people in this study. A few concerns were also raised about what the young people's parents might think of them if they found out about their truancy:

> If my mum ever found out she'd disown me, now my brother's up I've got to be even more sneaky because he's a snitch. (Naomi, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Girls Focus Group)

> My mum wud be sooooooo upset if she eva found out I mitch she'd probably cry (Ella, Hillsden High School – MSN)

The young people's consideration of how they would be viewed by others implies a level of reflection that is often overlooked. As Becker (1963) has highlighted, the degree to which an act is constructed as deviant, depends upon societal reaction over time. Truancy in recent years has been unequivocally labelled as an act of 'deviance' reinforced by the 'official' punitive approach taken towards it and sensationalized by the media (as discussed in Chapter 1). The young people's attempts at self-managing the risks associated with how their identity is portrayed in front of others, demonstrates the prevalence of this discourse. Their regulation and control of information, with regards to who knew they truanted, can be seen as an expressive form of self-presentation, performed in order to curtail the consequences of this truancy whilst also projecting a consistent image in line with their 'official' self. By truanting in this way, and by drawing upon various techniques of neutralization (Matza 1957), the

majority of the 'contained' young people also seemed to be able to successfully craft a positive, non-deviant, sense of self for themselves. However, the young people's own efforts at the self-management of their identity was not the only factor responsible for whether they were publically identified as 'truants' or not. The schools response must also be considered.

Turning a blind eye

As discussed, some young people seemed to be at far less risk of becoming 'disrupted' 'truants' than others. Although the young people's own self-managing efforts appeared to play a fundamental part in this, the response of the school staff might also be seen as contributory. For instance, it seemed that school staff were more likely to turn a blind eye to certain levels of truanting behaviour and to the truancy of particular groups. Some of the staff members interviewed suggested that turning a blind eye to occasional truanting behaviour was often common in practice and also often necessary due to time and resource constraints, as long as pupils weren't caught visibly truanting. Even those engaged in persistent truanting behaviours could avoid significant reprisal as long as they had 'authorised' their absences and did not fall below a specified level of attendance.

> Officially I don't deal with them unless they're under 85% but that's quite high, really it's about 60% when I start really chasing them unless they've got valid excuses. (EWO, Cooperfield High School)

> You see, staff are under a lot of pressure, class teachers haven't got the time. They'll know so and so isn't in their lesson but quite often they think aw god I haven't got time to do that now I've got to get on with the lesson. I mean there are a lot of lessons missed but generally kids do turn up and we rely on that but it's the same ones that don't, some as low as 20 or 30 and it's those we have to focus on. We make an allowance we don't intervene on attendance until it gets down below 85%. (Attendance Officer, Pen-Y-Peel High)

In the previous chapter, it was also highlighted how staff members in Pen-Y-Peel High School and Cooperfield High school were often aware of where those participating in less visible truanting behaviours go, yet they did not have the time, resources or the inclination to expose this truancy as long as it caused no significant trouble. In order to function effectively the school needs to turn a blind eye to this truancy. In doing so, it might be that schools are able to deflect efforts that could otherwise be more disruptive if this truancy was to be exposed and the pupils were not allowed to exercise their autonomy. In this sense it is similar

to the 'truce' which Reynolds (1976) depicts as an in an important negotiated function in schools.

However, importantly, the level of absence considered acceptable and what counts as a 'valid excuse' did seem to vary. Power (1996) has previously shown that discrepancies in how absences are interpreted are often class based. In this study, the Learning Leader at Hillsden High School did imply that absences were treated with different degrees of trustworthiness depending upon a pupil's home background:

> We accept phone calls to a stage but when it gets too much questions are asked basically. If the attendance is so poor and we're getting medicals, medicals, medicals we obviously have to think about sending the Education Welfare Officer. You have to play it case by case. Some families don't support education so we send the Education Welfare Officer there and she makes the decision, and sometimes she'll come up to us and say the absences are not to be authorised until we get some kind of confirmation from a medical expert so that helps her for prosecution then at the later stage. If the child has a supportive learning environment at home we generally accept that it is a genuine illness and an Education Welfare Officer isn't needed. We have the support of their parents. We've got to look at every case on their own merit sort of thing. I think everybody goes ill now and again. (Learning Leader – Hillsden High School)

What we see here is the ways in which the Learning Leader selectively constructs absences as 'genuine' or not with an assumption that pupils who are perceived to have supportive parents will not engage in truanting behaviours. However, in this study many such young people claimed to engage in truanting behaviours and sometimes these seemingly 'supportive' parents would actively collude with the young people to facilitate their non-attendance (e.g. Zoe's mother). This differential interpretation of absence was also evident in a conversation with the Head of the school, when arranging subsequent school based interviews with some of the young people of Hillsden High School. I listed a number of pupils I wanted to interview and when I mentioned Zoe's name, the Head responded with the following:

> You know Zoe Thompson doesn't have an attendance problem don't you? She has been ill, but she's not a truant. (Head, Hillsden High School)

Zoe was recorded as having a low attendance rate in the 'official' school statistics and frequently claimed that that she pretended to be ill so that she could receive 'authorisation' for her persistent absence. However, despite her persistent levels of absence her excuses

seemed to be accepted as genuine and what is notable here is that Zoe was a pupil from a 'professional and managerial background'. As we shall see in the 'disrupted' 'truants' section of this chapter, other pupils that engaged in persistent truancy were not afforded the same level of trust. For pupils like Zoe, much higher levels of absence seemed to be tolerated, placing them at considerably less risk of acquiring a public identity as a 'truant' than their working class peers. What constitutes acceptable levels of truancy, or a 'genuine' excuse for one group of pupils is clearly not the same as for another.

There were clearly degrees of 'containment' evident among the young people in this study, with some pupils at more risk of becoming 'disrupted' than others. However, the self-managing efforts of the vast majority ensured that there truanting behaviours remained 'contained'. For the majority it appears that their sense of autonomy is underscored by the need to judge and take responsibility for their own actions. As Rose (2000: 334) highlights, capacity for autonomy appears to be increasingly linked to one's 'capacity to accept responsibility'. Thus, the young people may choose to engage in truanting behaviours as a means of gaining a sense of autonomy in relation to the institution, but they also accept the need to self-manage and self-monitor this truancy. They stand apart from the institution through their truancy but remain attached and coalescing with it through the self-management of their education and identities. Their truanting behaviours, as a result, are contained.

Disrupted Truants

The majority of the young people in this study seemed to have 'contained' truanting behaviours partly because of their self-managing efforts. Even persistent truanting behaviours were possible to 'contain' by self-managing school work and a positive identity. However, for some vulnerable persistent 'truants', self-management was not possible and as a result they seemed to have school careers which can be described as 'disrupted'. The consequences of this 'disrupted' truancy seemed to be far greater than the consequences experienced by the 'contained' pupils. The young people that can be described as having 'disrupted' school careers are Chelsey, Owen, Stacey, Sonia, Zack, Alfie and Aaron. All of these young people engaged in persistent truancy. As discussed, there were also 'contained' pupils that engaged

in persistent truanting behaviours. It is therefore important to stress that 'contained' and 'disrupted' truancy do not relate straight forwardly to 'occasional' and 'persistent' truancy. However, whereas the *majority* of the 'contained' pupils engaged in truanting behaviour occasionally as a strategy of self-management, all of the 'disrupted' engaged in persistent truancy and there was a notable lack of self-management. Slightly more boys (4 out of 7) than girls have been categorised as 'disrupted' 'truants' and it is also notable that all of the 'disrupted' 'truants' are from the lower socio-economic backgrounds[76]. Therefore, it might be that the strategies and resources available for people to actively 'contain' their truancy are not as readily available to particular groups or particular students. This section will explore the lack of educational self-management evident among the 'disrupted' 'truants', it will then look at the difficulties they experience in managing a positive identity as an 'ordinary' pupil and will end by considering some of the consequences of being defined as a 'truant'. Although these factors are taken in turn, it is the combination of these factors that seems to lead to a 'disrupted' career.

Lack of educational self-management

In common with the 'contained' young people, the 'disrupted' young people did not seem to reject *all* the educational aims, values and goals of school. It was schooling in its current form, rather than education per se that they seemed to be particularly critical of. They held strongly instrumental views about the value of education, believing that education should provide the skills necessary for future employment. But, just like some of the 'contained' pupils, they were discontent with what the current Key Stage 3 curriculum and pedagogic process had to offer (as discussed in chapter 5)[77]. They did like some things about school. Sonia, for instance, really enjoyed netball and would always be in school on the day of netball practice and matches and despite suggesting they disliked their teachers, there were some that each of them liked. They liked some lessons and there were some friends that they enjoyed seeing at school. However, at a general level the 'disrupted' young people were far more negatively orientated towards school when compared to the 'contained' pupils. In contrast to the 'contained' pupils, the 'disrupted' young people tended to articulate a much stronger dislike and disenchantment with school:

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[76] Six were from 'routine and manual' backgrounds and one was from an 'intermediate' background.
[77] Stacey, Owen and Aaron were particularly keen to see a purely vocational curriculum.

Owen: I just don't like school. I can't be bothered..the lessons are crap. I don't need it d'ya know what I mean?

PJ: What don't you need?

Owen: School, it's shit. It's not my sort of thing d'ya know what I mean?... I knows how to write and I knows how to speak. I don't see what's so important about school like. If I aint [sic][78] on the mitch they're chucking me out of school anyway, d'ya know what I mean?

(Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

Schools rubbish I hates it. I just wanna be out of there... I don't wanna go. Some lessons are alright but I hates working and I hates homework like 10 pages and that and most of the teachers are pure bitches like. (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Telephone Interview)

I just don't like it. I don't like some of the teachers and all that... I just hate them. I don't like coming to school. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

I just hate school. I refuse to go to school and sometimes my mum has to ring the school up with an excuse. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

The fear of deteriorating academic progress, or the prospect of poor education outcomes threatening future employment prospects, was not enough to encourage these young people into the self-management of their truancy, nor was the opportunity to participate in a greater variety of vocational and applied subjects in years 10 and 11[79]. However, it does seem that these young people experienced a number of difficulties which might have contributed to making the self-management of their educational school careers especially hard, such as difficulties in fulfilling academic expectations and difficulties associated with their 'public' identities. As a result, in contrast to the 'contained' pupils, the 'disrupted' young people did not seem to self-manage by deploying the strategies that the 'contained' young people did in order to self-manage their educational careers.

Whereas the majority of the 'contained' young people attempted to minimise time lost from education by only participating in occasional truancy, *all* of the 'disrupted' young people engaged in persistent truancy. Their persistent levels of truancy meant whole-days were commonly missed, often for weeks at a time. As a result, they were more likely to miss a

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[78] 'Aint' is used here in place of 'I am not'.

[79] Although there were suggestions by Zack, Chelsey and Stacey that the changes in the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and the opportunity for them to take applied and vocational subjects might encourage their re-engagement with school.

wider variety of lessons. However, Aaron and Zack did claim that when part-day truanting they would consciously avoid truanting from the high status subjects, for similar reasons as the 'contained' pupils (as discussed in chapter 5). The other five 'disrupted' 'truants' were less concerned about what lessons were missed. For the 'contained' young people who engaged in persistent truanting behaviours, additional self-management strategies were deployed in an attempt to reduce the risk associated with the amount of time lost from education. For the 'disrupted' truants this was not the case.

Whereas the young people that engaged in 'contained' truanting behaviours made attempts to catch-up on the work that they had missed when truanting, the 'disrupted' young people did not. The amount of time that was lost from education made catching-up on the work that was missed when truanting seem like a particularly arduous task, as Sonia and Aaron highlight.

> Sonia: I used to copy what I missed but I can't be bothered now. I'd be sat here for the rest of my life if I tried to catch up on all what I've missed.
> Kerry: An old lady sat here still doing your Maths from 30 years ago!
> Sonia: (laughs) I know innit.
> (Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

> Say I'll miss lessons like and then I'll have to copy it up like, but you've missed so much. You're just like screw it innit, I can't be arsed with this like. Then I'm off again.
> (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Boys focus group)

As Aaron indicates, the amount of work missed was often enough to deter the young people from even trying to catch-up, a factor which could result in further truancy as a way of coping. It was not only the young people's reluctance to catch-up with the work that they had missed that led to their lack of educational self-management in this regards. The young people suggested that it was also difficult for them to do so because they felt that their teachers were particularly reluctant to help them.

> Miss Riley never helps me. She's just like "ooh it's nice to see you back" proper snidely. Then she like purposely ignores me for the whole lesson. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview).

As the 'disrupted' 'truants' absence was persistent, often unauthorised and sometimes very overt, it is unsurprising that teachers might be more reluctant to help them, if they believed that they had been truanting. Malcolm et al. (1996) have reported teachers' views on this issue, and it was suggested that for them it often meant 'extra work, disrupted planning and frustration' (p. 30). Moreover, the 'disrupted' 'truants' did not seem to be able to draw on support from their peers in catching up with work, in the same way that the 'contained' pupils were able to.

> This one time I went to Hannah like, "aw can I borrow your book like", see what I've missed and that innit but she was like "<u>no</u>, ask Miss Baker". So I was like "fuck you then" and right, I sees her showing Claire and all but she was just like acting all stuck up round me like 'cause she didn't want to help me or something. (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Alfie and Owen also indicated that they were reluctant to seek help from their peers seemingly out of a concern for how it would make them look.

> Mark: I just ask someone what I've missed and all that, then I quickly copy it up...sometimes I'll ask to borrow a mate's book if it's like really important.
> Alfie: (laughs) "oooh excuse me, can I borrow your book please" (laughs). You'd look a right dick!
> PJ: so you wouldn't do that?
> Alfie: huh, no!
> (Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)
>
> Owen: Half the time I haven't got a clue what's going on like 'cause I weren't in d'ya know what I mean?
> PJ: do you ever ask for help from mates or something?
> Owen: no, I'm not a geek am I. I just fuck about like innit.
> (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Telephone Interview)

Indeed, many studies (e.g. Wolpe 1988, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Epstein 1998, Paechter 1998, Renold 2001, Jackson 2003) have highlighted how boys often interpret academic study as 'feminine'. As Frosh et al. (2003) argue 'hegemonic masculinity is pervasively constructed as antithetical to being seen to work hard academically' (pp. 197-198). Owen and Alfie's concerns about engaging in behaviour which might make them look too 'studious' (Reynold 2001) or hard-working might then be read as a fear of challenging their subscription to hegemonic forms of masculinity and their 'lad' image. Whilst the 'contained' boys seemed able to negotiate this conflict, these boys refrained from it altogether. What is also notable is

that these boys were not successful academically. Therefore, their decision not to seek help from their peers to catch up with the work that they had missed might also be interpreted as a strategy utilised to curtail their exposure as academic 'failures' and thus to protect their self and/or social worth (Jackson 2003, Covington 2000). Not only were the 'disrupted' 'truants' unable (or reluctant) to seek help from teachers or peers, help in catching-up with work was also absent at home. When discussing the young people who engaged in persistent 'contained' truanting behaviours it was highlighted that some were able to draw upon parental help and resources at home to keep up with the work whilst away from school, reducing the amount they needed to catch-up on when returning to school and reducing the burden for their teachers. The 'contained' young people that seemed most able to take advantage of this support were those from the higher socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast, the 'disrupted' young people did not seem to have access to the same level of support or resources at home.

> My mum like will have a go at me if I get a detention, and she'll ask me if I've got homework but mostly I say no ...but they're [his parents] not really like the kind of people that knows about school and stuff, if you get what I mean? (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Erh my mum weren't really good at school. She's cares and all that but she doesn't understand or anything like, she doesn't get it. But it's like, well it's the teachers that should help isn't it 'cause they're the ones that actually know what's going on like. My dad knows all about the war and stuff but that's it really. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School - Girls Focus Group)

> Now and again my mum asks about school but when she's in hospital she can't really ask. My mum doesn't really mind if I don't do my work, as long as I've done my jobs like. Erm 'cause she can't really do them in case she has a fall so it's not fair on her. If I don't then it gets into an argument and it's always like fighting then and I can't watch TV 'cause my dad says "you're too busy sitting on your arse watching TV". But they're nice 'cause they don't makes me do homework or anything like that. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Here Donna also highlights a specific gender constraint in terms of her mother's primary focus being on Donna's domestic responsibilities rather than her school work. There were 'contained' pupils with similar domestic responsibilities (as discussed in chapter 5). However, this was balanced with the need to stay on track educationally, whereas Donna highlights how her domestic responsibilities were seen as the priority. The lack of educational self-management in this regards was not therefore purely down to individual decision-making, or

reluctance on the part of the young people themselves. Rather, it would seem that structurally embedded inequalities certainly compound their fate. Without support from teachers, peers or family members in order to catch up with the work that had been missed, it was easy for these persistent 'truants' to slip further and further behind with their work and enter into a destructive cycle of repeated truancy as a result.

The amount of time lost from education because of the 'disrupted' young people's persistent truancy and the difficulties they had in catching-up with work meant that the academic side of school life was often perceived to be particularly challenging. Chelsey illustrates the difficulties experienced:

> I don't get on sometimes with the work. I get stuck on the work like. Sometimes I just don't get it because I weren't in when they did the work. So I just sits there for a bit, but then I still don't get it, so I just writes anything down... I just have to guess. Sometimes I gets it right and sometimes I gets it wrong. I might as well just try and guess cos I don't have a clue. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The effects of Chelsey's truancy were also highlighted in an interview with a Learning Support Leader at Hillsden High School:

> Chelseys a prime example, I don't think she's made any major improvement in the three years she's been here. I don't think her curriculum levels have gone up since primary school because her attendance has been so poor. (Learning Support Leader, Hillsden High School)

Chelsey, Owen, Alfie and Stacey were in low set positions, whereas Sonia, Zack and Aaron were in middling set positions. Data gathered on class test results and end-of-year exam results (when the pupils were present) also indicated that Owen, Stacey, Alfie and Chelsey tended to have very low performance levels, whereas for Sonia, Zack and Aaron their performance varied. As each of the pupil's truancy dated back to primary school, it was hard to tell whether the difficulties they experienced were as a result of their truancy[80] or whether their academic difficulties were a contributing reason for their truancy and dislike of school. It seems that it is likely to be a combination of both. Furthermore, it seemed that there were difficulties associated with these young people's identities that may have made the self-

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[80] Indeed, many studies have presented a link between high absence levels and poor attainment e.g. Morris and Rutt (2005), Attwood and Croll (2006) etc.

management of their educational school careers especially hard, significantly contributing to the tipping point which resulted in their 'disrupted' school careers.

Difficulties in self-managing identity

In the 'contained' truanting behaviours section it was highlighted how the majority of the young people in this study seemed to be able to maintain the identity of an 'ordinary' pupil, rather than a 'truant'. In contrast, the 'disrupted' young people seemed to have both a public and personal identity as 'truants'. Virtually all of the 60 young people involved in this study engaged in truanting behaviours, it was not, therefore, the act of truancy itself that marked these young people out as 'different'. All of the 'disrupted' pupils truanted persistently, which can clearly increase the risk of acquiring an identity as a 'truant', yet there were 'contained' pupils who persistently truanted but seemed to be able to avoid this label. This section highlights a combination of factors, in addition to the pupils persistent levels of truancy, that seemed to make it difficult for the 'disrupted' young people to manage a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others and thus might be seen as contributing to the interpretation of their absence as truancy and them as 'truants'. These factors include their class background, their academic identities, their behaviour identities, their gender identities and specific personal attributes. These are each discussed in turn.

As discussed earlier, in the 'contained' truanting behaviours section, there are a number of ways in which pupils and school staff differently interpret behaviour as truancy or not. The 'disrupted' young people all seemed to have acquired an identity as 'truants'. Their names were often raised when pupils or staff distinguished between 'truants' (or 'mitchers') and non-truants e.g.

> I wouldn't mind guessing that you're working with Owen? His attendance is very bad, oh yes a real truant there. (Attendance Officer, Pen-Y-Peel High School)

It would seem that staff have classes of truanting behaviours and it is clear that not everyone is considered a 'real' 'truant' (or 'mitcher). Although there is likely to be many elements to the ways in which school staff and young people differentially interpret given pupils as 'real' 'truants', reference to class background seemed to feature especially strongly. For instance, as discussed earlier, despite participating in truanting behaviour themselves, the boys in

Hillsden High School singled-out pupils from 'rough' backgrounds and neighbourhoods as more consistent with the identity of 'truants'.

> Joe: I reckon the areas important though innit? like the kids that go to this school but are from rough areas, like it makes you wanna do it, do you know what I mean like?
> Tom: If you're a Leckton boy (looks at Zack)
> Joe: Ummm (nodding – also looks at Zack)
> PJ: Are you a Leckton boy? (to Zack?)
> Zack: Yeah
> Tom: It's like certain areas, certain people isn't it? (addressed to Zack).
> Zack: Well yeah, I'd say I've got a rough background.
> PJ: Would you say you have? (addressed to Tom)
> Tom: No!
> All: (laugh)
> Tom: It's like people like Zack erh like, they're different, like erh I dunno.
> Joe: We go on the knock, like if we hate the teacher or like if we haven't done the homework and stuff like that but Zack does it all the time. He doesn't care.
> (Boys Focus Group – Hillsden High School)

The three 'disrupted' 'truants' from Hillsden High School (Zack, Chelsey, Stacey) were all from the 'deprived' neighbourhood that was frequently condemned by their fellow peers. A factor that Zack himself acknowledges in the above focus group and which was also raised in one of the girls' focus groups at Hillsden High School:

> Ella: Erh if you're from a poor background you mitch more because their parents don't care, which is bad because you want parents that care.
> Jenny: Poor background, bad families.
> Sasha: They tend to be the same thing.
> Stacey: Erh I don' think so. People always reckons we're bad and all that just cos were from Leckton, but how would you even know (directed at Sasha)?
> Chelsey: Yeah we always gets it like.
> Sasha: You can be more affected.
> (Girls Focus Group – Hillsden High School)

However, it was not just the pupils that differently interpreted truanting behaviours according to the background of the pupils involved, the staff seemed to do so also. This is highlighted in an interview with two members of staff at Hillsden High School.

> LSL: We have a handful of pupils who have got attendance problems. Background makes a difference. A lot of it is down to social class and all that kind of thing. Some families can't see the point in education and there's not much support for their children's education at home.
>
> LL: A: how much support they get at home I think makes a big difference. Background shouldn't make a difference, but it does, whether it should or not.

(Learning Leader and Learning Support Leader - Hillsden High School)

Here the differential interpretation of 'truants' according to class is quite blatant. Hillsden High School is located in a relatively prosperous area when compared to Pen-Y-Peel High School and Cooperfield High School, which draw the majority of their students from substantially 'deprived' areas. In the latter two schools it seemed that particular types of families or vulnerable pupils were the focus rather than social class per se.

> In an area like this it is a struggle, but usually it's the same ones, the serious truants. They've got no ambitions, no motivation, they end up on the extended opportunities when they reach year 10. I mean some of the children I'm dealing with now I dealt with their parents when they were here because they didn't come to school either. They're so laid back. They don't care, they likes having the children home or they just give in and they're left to their own devices. Often they're unemployed, I go round and mum's in her dressing gown, "I couldn't get him up", but they don't try. Even if the parent says the child's ill or whatever, it's down to the school to authorise it or not. You know the parents that are making excuses. It's generational. So I check, I ask for a medical note and little Johnny hasn't been to the doctors. You get to know the kids, you get to know the parents, you know which ones are genuine. You think they'd be panicking but its bury-your-head-in-the-sand syndrome, thinking I'll go away but I don't. It's the same kids nearly all the time here. Deprivation has a lot to do with it, the more deprived they are, you know. They haven't got the same interests. (EWO – Cooperfield High School)

Here the EWO selectively reads different families as more 'deficient' by reference to parental unemployment and a lack of structure and support and indicates that pupils from these families are more likely to be 'truants'. Again, this discussion is heavily underlain by class assumptions. However, instead of the more general linking of 'truants' to pupils of lower social class backgrounds made by the Learning Leaders at Hillsden High School[81], the EWO distinguishes 'truants' from the more 'normal'/'respectable' majority by reference to a greater degree of 'deficiency'. Indeed, Power (1996) previously highlighted how school staff carry hidden dossiers around on their pupils built up from talking to pupils, parents and other support agencies and differentially interpret the behaviour of pupils based on these dossiers which are underpinned by stereotypical assumptions of class. Similarly Chessum (1980) has highlighted how in particular instances of disruption, teachers might resort to a 'personal and family pathology of disaffection'. Whilst not intending to discredit the professional experience

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[81] The EWOs reading of these young people's families also seems to be underlain by gender assumptions as she makes references to "mum's" part in contributing to non-attendance.

and knowledge that the EWO and other staff have regarding truancy and likely 'truants', it is important to note that the *diverse* backgrounds of those engaging in truanting behaviours within this study are not reflected in any of the staff discussions. Indeed, when discussing social reaction, Becker (1963:79) has argued that the degree to which behaviour is labelled as deviant varies, and that 'rules tend to be applied more to some persons than to others' and cites class as an example of this. It is certainly notable that all of the young people that seemed to be labelled as 'truants' within this study were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The source of labelling may not, however, lie with the teachers alone. As discussed in chapter 1, the 'official' state defined image of truancy and the media portrayal of 'truants' is heavily class based and it is certainly plausible to speculate that the institutional categorization of 'truants' may be significantly strengthened by wider discourses on truancy.

Although class background seemed to be a particularly strong factor used to distinguish between 'real' 'truants' and the supposedly 'normal' majority, behavioural identities also seemed to affect the degree to which pupils were able to manage a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others. The 'contained' pupils and school staff frequently pointed to the behavioural reputations of those identified as 'truants'. For instance, Carla, a 'contained' pupil, pointed to Aaron's previous position in the behavioural set when discussing pupils in the school who had a reputation for truancy.

> Carla: were quite bad for mitching likee but we aint the worst tbh, were alrightt likeee
> If youu wanna talk to the realy bad micthers talk to the behavour ones likee
> PJ: the behaviour ones??
> Carla: yerr the naughty ones mitch loads, there a bit dumbb likee
> You need the likes of danny coffield aaron leaning,jay Bennett sean ryan if there ever in like
> PJ: I've been talkin to aaron
> Carla: Aww he doesnt shut uip
> hes lush aaron :)
> he is well cutee but hes always on the mitch cos hes been in 9D they dont care
> PJ: people in 9D?
> Carla: yerr all the naughtly ones like, there never in lessons too busy bin bad boys puffin on fags, getting high foolss :D
> (Carla, Cooperfield High School –MSN)

Aaron himself also reflected on the negative implications that he thought to be connected to his negative behavioural reputation:

Aaron: Even when I'm trying to be a good boy, keep my head down, I gets it. Like Tweedy every time I see him he brings up my attendance. Say if I'm with Ginge right he won't say nothing to him and he's been off for days but with me he's like "what you doing, where've you been?" and I'm like "I'm just going to my lesson" and he's like "well get there now or you're off in the unit" and I'm like I was doing anyway. I don't need him telling me like. And it's like Tech right, I'm sitting there and she tells me to "get out", and I'm like "what've I done?" and she's like "aw you're just disrupting the lesson".

PJ: Why do you think that is then?

Aaron: It's like people kind of reckons I'm like a gangster wannabe or something and I don't have no respect because I've been in 9D and they've seen me mitching and causing agro and all that. Not as bad as some of the others like but people are surprised when they see my work and that cos they reckons I'm like a bad boy and I've got learning difficulties or something. Like when I was in 9D, Greg Hartley came in and he seen my work and he asked me "how did I do it?" and I just showed him.

(Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Here Aaron suggests that his perceived negative behavioural identity (compounded by his time in 9D) seems to make him more identifiable as a 'truant', but also as less academically able, making it difficult for him to manage a positive identity in the eyes of others. School staff also frequently linked the behavioural identities of pupils with the identity of 'real' 'truants'.

LSL: So you saw Stacey? How did she behave?

PJ: She was good.

LSL: I was worried about you talking to her because she has a lot of behaviour problems but we are aware that she does truant. Her attendance is not very good. She is one of the real minorities in this school though. (Learning Support Leader, Hillsden High School)

The serious ones tend to be the naughty ones and we've got some really naughty ones. I mean they just tell you to F-off, you know, what can you do? They do it so blatantly [truant], they smoke, cause trouble you name it. (EWO, Cooperfield High School)

Here it seems that the focus for interpreting 'truants' seems to be related to what young people with negative behavioural identities are thought to be doing when truanting from school. 'Serious' truancy in this sense is connected to disruptive behaviour rather than the level of persistent absence alone. Many studies link disruptive behaviour and poor attendance (Reid 1999, Willis 1977, Cullingford and Morrison 1997, McAra 2004, DCELLS 2008a etc) and truancy is strongly associated with anti-school and delinquent behaviour in 'official' and popular discourse. It is not, therefore, surprising that school staff and pupils may be more likely to interpret non-attendance among pupils with negative behavioural identities

as truancy and thus more readily label such pupils as 'truants'. Visibility of pupils in the eyes of others as a result of overtly negative behaviour is clearly an important part of this association and it does seem that this may be mediated by gender.

Numerous studies (e.g. Younger et al. 1999, Rudduck et al. 1996, Pickering 1997) have highlighted how boys are often perceived to display more visibly 'disruptive' behaviour than girls and this in turn can result in differential treatment (e.g. extent of reprimand, surveillance etc.) of boys and girls by school staff. The boys categorised as 'disrupted' 'truants' in this study suggested that they felt that they were placed under greater scrutiny and received greater sanction for non-attendance when compared to girls.

> The boys get the blame but girls never get the blame. The other week me, Shauney and Wilson went on the mitch with Sarah, Kerry and all them lot right. We comes back and Tweedy goes we've been spotted but only me and Shauney got done for it. He weren't bothered about the girls. I got on report for that one and all. (Alfie, Boys Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

Many studies have highlighted how boys often feel that girls escape the scrutiny of their teachers (Younger and Warrington 2008, Pickering 1997, McCluskey 2008). Younger et al. (1999) have highlighted how this might in part be due to variations in rationalisations of situations by boys and girls, with boys 'offering more 'defensive' rationales for their own behaviour and displaying more critical perceptions of teachers' attitudes to them as boys' (p. 327) . Clearly, there were a lot of boys in the 'contained' category who were seemingly able to escape an identity as a 'truant'. Nevertheless, some of these boys, particularly those who seemed to be on the edge of the 'contained' category and closer to the tipping point, also shared the same views as the 'disrupted' boys with regards to their perception that they were more likely to have their non-attendance scrutinised and receive harsher discipline than the girls. One aspect that seemed to be common among such boys, and which might play a part in making them more susceptible to staff surveillance and scrutiny, was the 'laddish' masculine identities of these particular boys. All 4 of the 'disrupted' boys commonly displayed characteristics and behaviour which have become associated with the identity of a 'lad', such as 'having a laugh', 'disruptive' behaviour, heterosexual activity, acting 'hard' etc. Although this particular form of heterosexual masculinity has become more widely appropriated by

males of different social class groups[82], it remains an identity associated with the working class, in particular the 'unrespectable' elements of working class lifestyle (Griffin 2000, Skelton 2001). Francis (2006) highlights how 'lad' behaviour is being cast as increasingly problematic under a neo-liberal agenda that emphasises individual responsibility and is dependent on 'good' hardworking pupils which the laddish identities contradicts. It was predominately the working class boys in this study displaying 'laddish' masculinities that seemed to complain more frequently about unfair surveillance, scrutiny and reprimand with regards to non-attendance. However, as we shall see later, the 'disrupted' girls also held the perception that they were under far greater levels of scrutiny and surveillance than their 'contained' peers. With regards to gender, it is perhaps interesting to note that the 3 'disrupted' girls all displayed behaviour that could be seen to transgress normative femininity[83] and could, in some cases, be seen as similar to the 'laddish' masculinities displayed by the boys[84]. Such 'troublesome' femininities have been portrayed as increasingly problematic in recent policy and media discourse, considered a danger to the girls themselves as well as to others (Griffin 2000, Jackson 2006, Jackson and Tinkler 2007). Greater regulation and surveillance of girls who fit this profile seems to be evident, as with the boys displaying 'laddish' behaviours (Harris 2004, Jackson 2006). Chapter 6 highlighted how in general girls seemed to be better at covering up their truancy when compared to boys. However, the visibility of the 'disrupted' female 'truants' might be seen as contributory to their apparent identity as 'truants'.

Finally, the 'non-academic' identities of some of the 'disrupted' 'truants' might also be seen as a contributory factor in how they are perceived by others. As discussed, Chelsey, Owen, Alfie and Stacey were in low set positions. When discussing 'truants' staff members would often make an association with low ability pupils as the Learning Leader highlights below:

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[82] 'Tried on and used as a resource' by middle class males for example (See Skeggs 2004).

[83] Stacey for instance was very boisterous, assertive, would frequently swear and was sometimes aggressive. She was portrayed by her peers as 'bad', disruptive, rude/cheeky to teachers and as someone that wanted to 'look hard'. Sonia also shared some of these characteristics but was generally not aggressive. Chelsey's behaviour displayed more of a contradiction. In the domain of the home Chelsey engaged in practices that support the dominant 'women as carer' feminine discourse (e.g. when caring for her mother and helping with domestic chores when truanting etc) but when at school, and among friends outside of school, she shared some of the more 'problematic' 'ladette' behaviours that Stacey and Sonia displayed.

[84] Femininities that could be likened to the traits depicted by the increasingly popular term 'ladette', a conception which Is the creation of the UK media in the 1990s, initially applied to post-school age girls but has more recently been extended to include school girls (see Jackson 2006, Meikle 2004).

> What you often find is that pupils who truant are in low ability groups, they don't see the point in school and so forth. Disaffection really. They don't care. I'm just trying to think of all our truants, and I mean we don't have many but I would say that most of them are in the low ability groups. (Learning Leader - Hillsden High School)

In this sense, there is the possibility that absence might be interpreted differently for pupils in such groups, as the learning leader indicates that it is within the low ability groups that 'truants' are located. There is no mention of the possibility that 'truants' might be located among high achievers. Indeed a number of studies have highlighted (e.g. Keddie 1971, Ball 1984) that teachers often have pre-set expectations of pupils in bottom 'ability' groups, conflating academic and behavioural stereotypes. For instance, Ball (1984) in a study before the 1988 ERA, found that teachers tended to typify those in 'band III' as 'anti-school' and 'maladjusted' and that based on this conception pupils were limited in terms of the identity that they could negotiate as teachers based their evaluation of pupils on this stereotype. Similar, stereotypical expectations were noted in Keddie's (1971) study in a London comprehensive (before the 1988 ERA), where 'C' stream students were considered to be potentially more disruptive than 'A' stream students were and the same behaviour was differentially interpreted as such.

In this section a range of factors have been discussed that might affect the degree to which particular students are able to manage a positive identity as 'good' or 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others, making them more susceptible to being picked out for special treatment as 'real' 'truants'. These factors include 'undesirable' social class backgrounds, negative behavioural identities, low academic positioning, and particular 'troublesome' gender identities[85]. Any one of these factors could potentially increase the risk for pupils but for the 'disrupted' pupils it would seem that it is the combination of these factors that is particularly pertinent. Some of these factors may be seen as somewhat 'fixed' and thus, in this regards, the particular way staff and pupils interpret them is essentially beyond the control of these particular pupils. Although these factors have been discussed in turn, there is certainly a clear sense in which they are interconnected and reinforced by each other (such as low academic

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[85] A range of seemingly more trivial individual factors were also raised by some of the 'disrupted' 'truants' as additional factors which they thought made them more visible in the eyes of others and thus more open to increased surveillance and scrutiny. For instance, Aaron suggested that the fact that he looked a lot older than his classmates did made him stand out more and his presence and lack of presence harder to ignore, and Zack pointed to the uniqueness of his name within the school.

ability, negative behaviour and truancy for example) which becomes clearer in the next section. The effects of being identified or labelled as a 'truant' are now explored.

Being a 'truant'

In this final section, the 'disrupted' pupils perceptions of the treatment they receive as a result of seemingly having acquired a public identity as 'truants' are presented, followed by an exploration of their reactions to this treatment. The consequences of being known as a 'truant' that are discussed in this section are consequences that the 'contained' pupils seemed to avoid, despite also engaging in truanting behaviours.

High levels of scrutiny and distrust with regards to attendance were frequently mentioned by the 'disrupted' 'truants':

> They're like "note?" so I gives 'em it and now they're like saying I've got to get one from the doctors 'cause they don't believe me or something but it's like Sarah and all those, they don't even need a note. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> If I'm late for school, he'll [Learning Leader] ring the boardie and tell 'em that I'm late, stuff like that, so he tries to get me in even more trouble. (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> If you're ill, they still accuse you of going on the knock yeah 'cause the boardie came to my house I was ill and she thought I was on the knock and 'cause I was ill she was just having a go at me and I was ill and I didn't really need her there at the time, 'cause I had mumps and it was contagious and she could have got it as well.
> (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

As Sonia points to, the level of distrust experienced by the 'disrupted' pupils was perceived to be markedly different to how other 'contained' pupils were treated. Hargreaves (1976: 204) discusses this heightened suspicion as a 'process of stigmatization', highlighting the differential treatment which those defined as 'deviants' are subjected to. Under heightened suspicion any absence by the 'disrupted' pupils seemed be scrutinised to a greater level, with the potential for interpretation of it being truancy. Furthermore, strategies used by other pupils in an attempt to avoid reprimand and essentially 'contain' their truanting behaviours did not seem to be effective when used by the 'disrupted' 'truants'. Self-management becomes increasingly difficult even if it is desired. The autonomy granted to the 'contained'

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pupils is denied to the disrupted 'truant'. Pupils with a public identity as a 'truant' must essentially demonstrate full compliance with the role of 'pupil'. They must be primary adjusted rather than secondary adjusted (Goffman 1961) if they are to avoid reprimand.

Not only did their absence seem to be questioned more, the 'disrupted' 'truants' also claimed that they were repeatedly singled-out[86] for their absence by staff, often in front of their peers, e.g.

> Every time he brings my attendance up, in front of everyone else and all. Not just when I've been off, like he'll just start having a go about it for no reason. Just to make me look bad and everything. My attendance is like one of the worst so he always has a go at me for it...He's always like "you're mum will be in court before long". I hate it. They never let it drop. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

It seemed that the 'disrupted' pupils were under no illusion about how others saw them. It is certainly not hard to see how the public nature of such degradation and labelling can make it increasingly difficult for these young people to manage a positive identity as an 'ordinary' pupil rather than a 'truant' in the eyes of others. Repeatedly bringing up a pupil's poor attendance record in this way can quite obviously have an impact on whether someone is regarded as a 'truant' or not, but also whether individuals see *themselves* as 'truants'. Indeed, Hargreaves (1986) has previously noted that the frequency and public nature of labelling can be important factors in the internalisation of a label by the pupils themselves. It is notable that in contrast to the 'contained' pupils who did not seem to self-identify as 'truants' the 'disrupted' young people were more likely to claim the label. This was not necessarily a label which they saw as fairly attributed, as they commonly complained of fellow peers who they knew truanted but who did not receive the same scrutiny or sanction as they did. Nevertheless, fairly or not it, it was a label that they seemed to have at least begun to accept, seemingly as a result of being repeatedly defined in this way by school staff and their peers.

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[86] In chapter 5 a series of accounts were presented from both 'contained' and 'disrupted' pupils which saw pupils complain about their dislike of being singled-out by teachers and how this could lead to truancy. The perception among pupils of being shown-up and singled out is not therefore restricted to the 'disrupted' 'truants', all pupils are clearly sensitive to this. However, whereas the 'contained' pupils could truant in order to avoid the escalation of conflict with such teachers, the 'disrupted' 'truants' autonomy in this sense was restricted as they felt that there absence was also being highlighted and scrutinised in this way. Being singled-out and identified as a 'truant' clearly might also lead to more negative implications when compared to being singled-out for some of the issues raised in chapter 5 which often tended to relate to particular teachers humour gone awry.

It was not just the scrutiny, distrust and verbal reprimand that seemed to contribute to defining these pupils as 'truants'. The formal disciplinary sanctions used by the schools to tackle truancy seemed to be crucial to this process. Indeed, in contrast to the 'contained' pupils who, more often than not, were able to avoid being sanctioned for their truanting behaviours, the 'disrupted' 'truants' were frequently subjected to disciplinary measures.

> I'm always on this thing (pulls out his report card). I get back off it, mitch, and I'm back on it again or I'm in the unit. I swear I spend half my life in that place innit (laughs). (Alfie, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I keep getting inclusions and stuff for it [truanting] and after schools [detentions] and my mum's been really crying cos the boardies keep coming to my house, having a go at me. She's scared she's going to have to go to court for me. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

> Sonia: I've been in the unit four days this week. They never believe my excuses.
> Sarah: They believe mine
> Sonia: and I've got two after schools [detentions] next week, one with Bentley and erhh miss Robinson I think. (Girls Focus Group – Cooperfield High School)

> I've got to take this to every lesson (shows me her time card). So the teachers see I'm in and all that like but I keep ending up with inclusions 'cause say like you weren't in for one lesson you automatically get an inclusion for it. (Stacey – Hillsden High School, Photo Elicitation Interview)

> I get a lot of detentions for walking out like and erh we got the fine from when my dad went to court. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

> I don't give a fuck but my step-dad's getting proper wound up like, with 'em ringing my house all the time. He's told 'em they can fucking stop ringing innit.(Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

As the young people highlight, whilst at school they were regularly placed on time sheets, or reports, were given detentions and were placed in units or support centres as a sanction for their truancy. Whilst at home, they regularly received visits from EWOs and text messages, phone calls and letters were sent to their parents and Chelsey's parents were fined as a result of prosecution. Although designed to tackle truancy, these measures, when used in an overzealous fashion, seemed to have a somewhat contradictory effect. Taking the frequently used practice of placing these pupils in units or learning support centres as an example, it is clear to see how this sanction for their truancy can reinforce and exacerbate a sense of 'difference' between those identified as 'truants' and the 'normal' majority. The 'disrupted'

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'truants' did suggest that from their perspective there were benefits to be had from this disciplinary practice, as Stacey and Sonia highlight:

> Inclusions better cos you just sit there all day and they don't ask how much work you do and you can eat in there and open the windows and that and you miss lessons anyway, so it's o.k. (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Girls Focus Group)

> I just sleep and they wake me up at the end, sometimes read magazines and in the unit like you can have a lay in. You don't have to be in school 'till like break time. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

Similar accounts of leniency, limited expectations and limited learning have been noted in numerous studies of units and special classes (e.g. Delamont and Atkinson 1995, Burgess 1984, Phtiaka 1997). Delamont and Atkinson (1995) suggest that the tone of informality in such settings can make integration difficult on return to mainstream classes. As a sanction for truancy, internally excluding pupils is clearly nonsensical as it adds to the time that pupils spend away from the classroom and it also segregates the pupils, 'othering' them as 'truants' in front of their peers and school staff[87], as they are placed with fellow 'truants' and other 'problem' pupils, as Alfie points to.

> But everyone thinks you're naughty and that 'cause I'm not being funny but it's the same faces in the unit like. People kind of get to know who goes in like 'cause they sees you going in there like or like they'll send for you in the middle of class like and everyone's like "<u>ah</u> you're off in the unit" sort of thing and there all staring at you and that. (Alfie, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

This can also have significant social implications, to be discussed later on. Similarly, the use of time cards or reports can have the effect of disseminating knowledge of a pupil's attendance transgressions, as Aaron points to:

> It's like I love sport right, especially my rugby so I'm always going to show my face for that right, unless I don't have my kit with me. I'd do it in my uniform, but Tweedy goes mental. Personally I don't see the fuss like. It's my uniform if I want to mess it up, it should be alright like. But erh, yeah, right so like I'm usually in for that right and they all knows it. But it's like I've got to get my report signed for it, so they knows I were in but they knows I would have been in anyway so I don't see the point. Then Tweedy's

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[87] As discussed, the units and support centres in these schools were used for both sanction and support but when used as a sanction for truancy none of the pupils in this study reported any support, rather the emphasis seemed to be on the removal of their rights to interact with their peers for routine school activities. The exception was Pen-Y-Peel High School where this practice seemed to be rarely used as a sanction for truancy.

like sticking his nose in reading all my comments from my other lessons and all that, having a go, "where were you in Tech?" like. But it's like, I was good in your lesson wasn't I so what's it got to do with you like. Do you know what I mean? Or like say in Science right, Miss Cole was like "<u>ooh</u> you gonna stick around for my lesson are you or do I need to keep my eye on you" and it's like erh yeah, just 'cause I walked out of Welsh like, but I was feeling proper sick like but they don't write that. They just puts "Aaron walked out of class" like, so the rest of 'em just think you were on the mitch like. They proper do your head in with it all. (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

As Aaron suggests, having to present a report at each lesson increases the scrutiny and distrust from all teachers, regardless of whether it was their lesson that was truanted from or not. This includes lessons/teachers that they especially liked and were unlikely to have truanted from anyway. Knowledge that the pupil has truanted is passed on to a variety of different teachers and might therefore increase the chance that pupils are seen as 'consensual' rather than 'individualistic' deviants (Hargreaves 1986:202). They are not 'ordinary' pupils that might have engaged in truanting behaviours as a one off from a lesson they particularly disliked. Instead, they are 'truants' with the potential to abscond again at any time, from any lesson. Pen-Y-Peel High School also displayed the weekly attendance records of every pupil in the school entrance hall. The aim of this was clearly to improve attendance but there is an obvious element of public shaming and identification of poor attenders.

The differential treatment that these young people received seemingly as a result of being identified as 'truants', alongside the difficulties they experienced in managing their education, seemed to contribute to a series of negative reactions from the disrupted 'truants' [88]. The majority of the 'contained' pupils generally managed to avoid reprisal for their truanting behaviours and they tolerated school most of the time. If they were caught and sanctioned for their truancy, either their truancy ceased (at least temporarily) or they made an extra effort to conceal their actions. In contrast, the 'disrupted' 'truants' responded to their notably harsher treatment with more acute reactions. Their reactions seemed to take the form of 'attack' or 'defense', responses Lemert (1951) cites as typical of those dealing with the problems of negative societal reaction towards them and hence typical of those on the road

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[88] Although, as discussed, there were 'contained' pupils that were more 'at risk', experiencing some of the difficulties experienced by the 'disrupted' young people and at times these 'at risk' young people did demonstrate similar reactions to the 'disrupted' 'truants'.

to becoming 'secondary deviants'. As a form of 'attack' further truancy was often opted for in retaliation for being negatively sanctioned by teachers for previous acts of truancy:

> They punish you but it doesn't stop you, it just make you hate them even more, you're like mitching 'cause you want to get back at them sort of thing. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School – Girls Focus Group)

For some of the 'disrupted' pupils (namely Owen, Stacey, Aaron and occasionally Zack), this reactive truancy was engaged in overtly in front of their teachers and peers, directly following negative sanction:

> Stacey: Sometimes I just walk straight out like.
> PJ: During the lesson?
> Jenny: Yeah she just gets up and storms off like. It can be quite funny.
> Stacey: It's not my fault it's theirs!
> (Girls Focus Group – Hillsden High School)
>
> I had a lot of agro from the teacher and I was pissed off, running round getting chased by them. It was pretty funny. [89] (Aaron, Cooperfield High School - Photo Elicitation Interview)

In addition to further reactive truancy, the notably 'disruptive' in-school behaviour engaged in by some of the 'disrupted' pupils might also be read as a form of 'attack'.

> If I'm in I just sit there, fucking don't pay attention to what's going on like d'ya know what I mean? Just looking around and throwing things like, d'ya know what I mean? Fucking around. Terrorising innit, 'cause they take the piss like, proper starting all the time so it's like fuck you innit, may as well wind them up. (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Telephone Interview)

Indeed, it is not possible to determine whether these young people would have displayed disruptive behaviour anyway or whether their disruptive behaviour in class might in part arise from being identified as 'truants' (and their ensuing treatment), as they live up to the behaviour expected of them as 'deviants'. It would seem more than likely that it is an iterative process.

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[89] More examples of overt and confrontational behaviour are provided in chapter 6, where the enactment of truancy is discussed.

As a form of 'defence', the young people's response was to withdraw from school through very persistent, whole-day truancy often within their homes. In this way confrontation or an anticipated sense of rejection could be avoided.

> I don't really give a fuck d'ya know I mean? But they piss you off like innit, going on about the same thing all time d'ya know what I mean? It's like fuck you. I ain't staying for this shit. Just stay at home innit. (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Boys Focus Group)

> You wake up though and it's like can I really be bothered going in because I knows as soon as I'm in I'll get it like, they'll be screaming at you and it's like oh well that's not really very nice is it. I should have stayed in bed, then I end up in the unit. So there's not really much point like 'cause it's like I'll go back but I don't get to see any one any way, don't get no actual lessons. I'm just sat by myself doing nothing so I may as well stay at home. And it's like they wonder why I'm never in, perhaps if they were actually nice I might be in more. (Sonia, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

As Sonia indicates, rather than be excluded, self-exclusion is opted for[90]. Although each of the 'disrupted' pupils went through periods of this type of withdrawal, Sonia and Chelsey were particularly prone to this form of reaction. This could be partly mediated by gender as many studies (e.g. Plummer 2000, Lloyd 2000, Osler and Vincent 2003) have highlighted how quiet withdrawal such as this is more common among girls than boys. Sonia and Chelsey were by no means invisible in the classroom, they too could be confrontational and disruptive, but truancy in the form of withdrawal and self-exclusion seemed to be their typical response. The 'disrupted' young people's behaviour, whether 'attack' or 'defense', may be seen as a way for the pupils to cope with the implications of being defined as a 'truant' and to react against the institutional punitive measures used in an effort to deter their truancy. Behaviour such as this can be seen to depict what Goffman has referred to as a 'rejection of one's rejecters' a secondary adjustment functioning to express 'unauthorized distance' from the institution (Goffman 1961: 277). By engaging in more truancy, acting-out through visible reactive truancy and disruptive behaviours or withdrawing from the school for prolonged periods of time, the young people have an option to partly appease the sense of injustice they

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[90] There was a time when this voluntary withdrawal of pupils from school could have been overlooked, perhaps even welcomed. However, because of the accountability measures which schools are now subjected to and the unrelenting focus on the reduction of absenteeism rates, this is no longer feasible. Long periods of absence by pupils now have considerable impact on schools and schools are under considerable pressure to demonstrate what is being done to address the problem. As a result, the 'disrupted' 'truants' would frequently receive visits in their homes from EWO's. A return to school often did follow but this was always temporary and persistent truancy was always returned to.

feel, partly solving the problem of being stigmatized. However, in doing so, they gradually seem to be taking on the image of a 'truant' and are essentially confirming their 'labellers' typification.

Becker (1963) notes that 'a final step in the career of a deviant is movement into an organized deviant group' (p.37). This did not seem to be evident among any of the 'contained' pupils. Indeed, for most of the 'contained' pupils there seemed to be few negative social implications arising as a result of their truancy. However, for the 'disrupted' 'truants' there did seem to be some social implications that seemed to partly arise as a result of their treatment as 'truants' and which would seem to hold the potential for exacerbating their truancy and disruptive behaviour. For instance, Owen highlights how interacting with classmates on return to school could be difficult especially when 'othered' as a 'truant':

> If I haven't been in for ages like I'll be talking to people like and they're like "yeah erh erh" then walk off like, d'ya know what I mean? People in my class and that. It's like fuck it I should have stayed off like, d'ya know what I mean? (Owen, Pen-Y-Peel High School – Telephone Interview)

More often than not the people that Owen did associate with tended to be those with a 'common fate' (Becker 1963), young people who were similarly frequently subjected to institutional disciplinary and exclusion processes. Stacey and Aaron also tended to associate with similar peers. When drawn together in this way Aaron indicates that participating in other deviant behaviours was almost inevitable:

> But when you're in the unit, you end up with the boys like. Like say I'll be in there and says like half an hour later Shauney's in, then Phill. All the boys together like, pissed off like. Shauney kicks off, then we're all doing it like.
> PJ: why all of you?
> Aaron: you're not exactly just gonna sit there like are you. Aw yeah and last week yeah, Tweedy was properly on my back and he goes "right you can get out", so I did, goes down by the youthy and I sees Phill with some of the others. He's proper pissed off like puffing on a spliff cos he's just had a bollocking. Then we see Banks (the Head) right, looks right at us like, then he just walks off. He doesn't give a fuck like. Doesn't care if we're in or not. Next thing someone's lobbing a stone at the window, proper wound up and all that. Then everyone starts like.
> (Aaron, Cooperfield High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

For these young people it did not seem that they had quite reached the stage of a consistent, 'organised' deviant or subcultural group, like Becker (1963) and others (Cullingford and

Morrison 1997, Willis 1977, Hargeaves 1967) have found, rather their associations seemed to be more of a loose grouping that find each other when similarly disaffected or marginalised. However, there were certainly common aspects between these groupings and those described in the subcultural literature, including a definite sense of peer acceptance, and subsequent status enhancing deviant behaviour when they were together. It is perhaps the case that such associations represent a way of coping with the 'injuries' of schooling that these young people seem to face (Furlong 1991). For Zack, when truanting for whole days, he would sometimes spend time with a group of boys from his neighbourhood who were also truanting and who he described as experiencing similar frustrations to himself (as discussed in chapter 5). In contrast, when Zack was in school he seemed to have a more mixed group of friends (academically and behaviourally), although as he comments there was often the expectation that he would be a source of amusement for them:

> Everyone sees it as a funny thing being naughty. It's only 'cause the teachers are always having a go at me. Then when I have a go at them back everyone laughs which makes it worse, gets me in more trouble. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

For Zack, his behaviour also seemed to be status enhancing:

> Everyone's like "aw go on, you went on the knock!" and makes a big thing out of it. Say if it looked like I was going to the shops or something, I see them running out to see if I was going on the knock then run back in. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

Having a strong social stake in the informal peer world at school did seem to have some benefits for Zack's attendance, when compared to the other 'disrupted' young people. Conversely for Sonia and particularly Chelsey a sense of social isolation was more apparent:

> Mandy Ward is the only person I hang round with in school. She's a good friend. She lives not far from me like but she's not in my form. Now and again Kylie and Dan. They're in my form but not really that much because they goes round with different people like...Hmm I don't really know people that much cos I'm not in so much like. (Chelsey, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

With little stake in the academic or social world a sense of not belonging can occur, further exacerbating truancy (Stevenson and Ellsworth 1991, Cullingford and Morrison 1997).

Although the young people often described choosing to truant as an act of liberation or revenge, there were also moments of helplessness and resignation in their accounts as their school careers seemed to be spiralling out of control as Zack and Stacey typify:

> I've promised my form tutor loads of times that I'm going to change. I've promised him loads... I want to prove that I can change and I want to change for my mum because she hates them ringing up and the letters. I can be good sometimes, like for a couple of weeks but it's like I always end up stuffing up... some teacher always ends up pissing me off like and I start all over again. I want to change so I can move up but it always seems to happen. (Stacey, Hillsden High School – Photo elicitation Interview)

> It's my fault like, no one else can make you change. But it's like I wake up right and I'll be like right I'm going to be proper good today, no agro, keep my head down and all that, see if I can stay out of trouble. But it never works, I don't know why. It's like I walk in and Pickersley's having a go at me for my stud as soon as I get in, so that puts you in a bad mood. Then Bowden's on at me to get him a note for when I was off like 2 weeks ago or something stupid like that. Stuff like that. Someone goes "coming on the knock?" and you think yeah I've had enough of this place. I need to get out. Then you get back and they're like "Ah where've you been? you need permission" and I end up with an inclusion! And then it starts all over again. So you think fuck it, I'll stay off. Then you get back you've missed all the work, don't know what's going on, so I end up on the knock again, messing everything up like. (Zack, Hillsden High School – Photo Elicitation Interview)

The expectations of them and their behaviour had become fixed to the extent that change was now difficult even if it was desired. This is not to imply that these pupils are passive victims with no consciousness or choice. They have both, but it is clearly a more complex situation than that which is popularly portrayed. They give similar primary reasons for their truancy as the 'contained' pupils but then react to the processes which the schools put in place to manage truancy with further truancy and other deviant behaviours again designed to gain autonomy and control in the face of rejection but ultimately their actions are self-defeating. Their rejection turns out to be more damaging for themselves.

As discussed in chapter 5, there are many reasons for truancy and motives are often multifaceted, this is no less true for the 'disrupted' 'truants'. All of the 'disrupted' 'truants' seemed to be facing an acute intensity or a significant accumulation of primary motives. However, it seems that there is a threshold beyond which the labelling of young people as 'truants' can intensify the practice and the punitive institutional processes used in order to manage 'truants' might significantly contribute to a 'disrupted' 'truant' career. In this sense, they are (or are well on their way to becoming) the 'pure deviants' or 'secondary deviants'

that Becker (1963) and Lemert (1967) refer to respectively[91]. Being defined and/or self-defining in this way may essentially lead to 'role conflict' for the young people (Goffman 1961), as the role of 'truant' conflicts with the role of 'pupil'. The consequences of which seem to be increasing educational and social marginalisation tipping the young people towards full detachment rather than adjustment.

Moreover, wider discourses might compound the fate of these young people. As Francis (2006) highlights under the hegemonic individualist discourses within the neo-liberal education context, pupils like those identified within this section are criticised for failing to take responsibility for their actions, either because they are unable or unwilling. They display characteristics and behaviour that run counter to dominant education discourse and conceptions of what is to be a 'good' or 'ordinary' pupil. They are, therefore, portrayed as a problem and a threat and subjected to an increasing raft of 'tough' punitive policies designed to punish and make these 'problem' youths (and their parents/mothers) take responsibility. The 'official' discourse on truancy reflects this, with may also play a part in the fate of the 'disrupted' 'truants'. The seemingly widespread truanting behaviours of the self-managing 'contained' pupils are overlooked. Instead, the 'official' discourse on truancy is enmeshed in a moral agenda, where the failure of these young people to embrace the educational options open to them and to make 'responsible' choices regarding their school attendance and use of time is presented as haven arisen from the deficits of the 'truants' and their families. The representation as 'truants' as 'other' creates the impression that young people who engage in truanting behaviours are entirely different from us. By emphasising the inadequacies of the young people and their families, intervention through punitive control or 'alternative' provision is seen as a legitimate answer to the 'problem' which these young people create. In doing so, this further compounds their exclusion and marginalisation from the school system. This distracts attention away from the issues highlighted in chapter 5 and overlooks the potentially detrimental effects of the punitive processes that are put in place to manage truancy.

Conclusion

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[91] It is however notable that these young people are still in mainstream schooling. They have not yet reached the level of exclusion and rejection which might see them placed in a pupil referral unit for example.

This chapter presented two kinds of secondary adjustments, 'contained' and 'disrupted'. It was argued that the majority of young people within this study can be seen as 'contained'. They manage their truanting behaviours and educational careers, as well as make efforts to maintain a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others, thus minimizing the risks associated with their truanting behaviours. In contrast, a small minority were seen to have 'disrupted' school careers, partly because of the difficulties they experienced in managing their education and a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils. A series of factors have been presented that might be seen to contribute to the tipping point that leads to a 'disrupted' school career and the identity of a 'truant'. It is argued that the processes that schools put in place to manage truancy might be self-defeating, intensifying the practice.

Chapter 8:

Conclusions

Introduction

The main aim of this thesis was to explore the social worlds of truanting young people. This was realised through a qualitative multi-methods approach, whereby six broad research questions were addressed:

1) What is truancy?
2) Who are the 'truants'?
3) Why do young people choose to truant?
4) How do young people truant?
5) What do young people do when truanting from school?
6) What are the implications of their truancy?

The study also set out to address the paucity of depth within the truancy literature and the need to explore the everyday lives and realities of truanting young people. The problematic starting points of many previous academic studies on truancy were highlighted and as such this thesis is based on empirical research which started with a cross-section of young people, from which an understanding of truancy was established based on their understandings and experiences of the issue. I have explored the young people's worlds whilst considering the influence of macro factors and wider social and political discourses. Throughout the thesis there has been a central consideration of the dynamic interplay between agency and constraint and an acknowledgement of the existence of power and control, operating both inside and outside the school. In this final chapter I intend to draw these themes together and also point to the relevance of these findings for the wider policy arena and sociological debate before indicating possible paths for future research.

Rethinking Truancy

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the social worlds of truanting young people. Despite asking for a cross-section of young people, virtually all of the initial sample admitted to engaging in truanting behaviours. This included boys and girls from a range of different social and academic backgrounds, thus, representing a significant departure from the dominant and 'official' discourse. It was further suggested that the majority of the truanting behaviours undertaken by the young people in this study seemed to take an occasional but widespread

form and that truanting behaviours seemed to be apparent in each of the schools despite their different 'official' absence rates.

In chapter 5, reasons for truancy were presented from the young people's perspectives. It is from these perspectives that we are able to see how the young people interpret reality and in doing so make sense of their worlds and the act of truancy. The reasons for truancy are clearly complex, multifaceted and multi-layered. Yet the weight of reasoning was evidently concentrated among institutional 'push' factors. Un-engaging, and 'irrelevant' lessons and learning tasks, as well as particular teachers were the most strongly implicated among these 'push' factors. By choosing to truant from these lessons the young people make purposeful assessments and judgments regarding the quality and value of their education. This stands in contrast to the underlying assumption that truants are acting irrationally through their behaviour, whilst also questioning the automatic assumption that schooling is invariably an undeniable positive thing whereas absence from school is not.

How the young people define the situation is vital to our understanding of truancy, but there is a degree to which actions and strategic intentions will be grounded at the level of everyday experience. Heavily implicit in the young people's discussions and accounts regarding their reasons for truancy is the institution, whereby an inherent struggle between self and institution was evident. A Goffmanesque approach was thus considered to be a particularly illuminating way in which to understand these dynamics, and as such, truancy was seen as representing a 'secondary adjustment' to the institution of the school. Here truancy represents a way in which the young people stand apart from the role of 'pupil' and the expectations of the 'official self', an expression through which pupils hold off the embrace of the institution. The nature of truancy, when seen as a 'secondary adjustment' challenges the commonly held assumptions that truancy is a form of outright resistance. Rather, for the majority, truancy from school is presented as a temporary means of demonstrating to themselves at least that they have some self-hood and personal autonomy and agency beyond the grips of the institution. Truancy should not therefore necessarily be seen as symptomatic of complete disaffection and disengagement from school. Even the small minority who display greater discontent with schooling in its present form, have not necessarily abandoned a belief in or a desire for education altogether. Further, in this study truancy was rarely about individual shortcomings but can be seen as a knowledgeable and

strategic action undertaken on the part of the young person. Consequently the thesis undermines the 'pathological' approaches to truancy which has implicitly retained a prominent position within 'official' contemporary discourse on truancy.

Chapter 6 specifically set out to address the research questions: how do young people truant from school? and what do they do when truanting from school? It was suggested that this has been a particularly neglected area of study within the existing research on truancy. Yet paradoxically it is an issue that has captured significant media attention and has been constructed as a growing political and social concern, principally with regards to assumptions of criminal and deviant intent. To address the research questions the chapter explored the young people's use of space, place and time when truanting and was formulated around three dominant places: the school, outside space and the home. It was argued that the vast majority of what the young people do when truanting is not particularly extraordinary behaviour at all, rather it is relatively mundane and harmless. For some, a low-level of 'deviance' was apparent but these pupils appeared to be in the minority.

Young people's presence in public space outside of the school is often regarded of utmost concern. However, the informal interaction which collective truancy offers the young people can, in some ways, be seen to play a positive though scripted role in their lives, in which they develop, explore and negotiate their personal and social identities in relation to others. Crucially, in this case, free from the grasp of the institution and the expectations of the official self. There has been a tendency to view young people's behaviour from an adult gaze, in which truancy is seen as dangerous and out-of control. Yet, for the young people their use of outside space is often no more than a place of social interaction in which they can control and shape their own temporary worlds, away from the control of adults and the institution. Moreover, the majority of the truancy within this study was purposely 'hidden' from the public and institutional gaze as the young people attempted to actively avoid been caught. The chapter highlighted the extensive use of the school and the home as dominant places for truancy. It was thus suggested that truancy appears to be enacted in a largely covert and non-conflictual manner which stands in contrast to their largely conflict-based narratives regarding their reasons for truancy. These findings appear to question the political preoccupation with the contentious and superficial link between truancy and crime. The validity of such claims is slightly weakened by the fact that the young people may have been

reluctant to participate in such behaviour when I was observing them. However, criminal activity or overly delinquent behaviour was not discussed by any of the young people via the other methods of data collection either. It was argued that the disproportionate widespread focus on this particular activity is detrimental to our understanding of truancy, as it does not include the majority of young people who engage in truanting behaviours, failing to pick up on less visible forms of truancy.

Chapter 7 looked at how young people manage their educational careers and their identities in the eyes of others. A distinction was made between 'contained' truanting behaviours and 'disrupted' 'truants' based on Goffman's (1961) model of secondary adjustments. It was suggested that the majority of the informants can be regarded as 'contained' pupils, whereas a small minority might be seen as 'disrupted' 'truants'. In the first half of the chapter the young people's attempts at the self-management of their behaviour, in line with the instrumental aims and goals of the institution were presented. It was argued that the findings question the dominant and popular assumption that young people who engage in truanting behaviours are of anti-school orientation and academic failures. The reflective capacities of the young people were noted with regards to the young people's efforts to maintain a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils in the eyes of others, highlighting how they remain committed to projecting an image of self which adheres to the 'official self' and role of 'pupil', for the majority of the time. In contrast, a small minority, were seen to have 'disrupted' school careers, partly because of the difficulties they experienced in managing their education and a positive identity as 'ordinary' pupils. A series of factors were presented that might be seen to contribute to the tipping point that leads to a 'disrupted' school career and the identity of a 'truant'. It was argued that the punitive processes that schools put in place to manage truancy might be self-defeating, intensifying the practice.

In summary, the findings of this research point to a very different image of truancy than that which is presented within the 'official' discourse. Paradoxically the dominant discourse on truancy appears to exclude the majority that engage in truanting behaviours.

Sociological and Policy Implications

This thesis suggests that truancy might be a widespread phenomenon. That is that large amounts of young people might engage in truanting behaviours, rather than a 'maladjusted' minority. For the majority of pupils, it seemed that their truanting behaviours were 'contained', resulting in few negative consequences for them, the school, or the wider community. However, importantly, for a minority their truancy was more problematic. The implications of this, and hence what should be done, are not straightforward. From a policy-makers perspective there are two different angles here; policies which might attempt to reduce ubiquitous truanting behaviours and policies that might try to help 'contain' the truancy for those who it has become a problem. This section will trace out some of the possibilities resulting from the implications arising from the findings of this thesis.

One possibility is that nothing needs be done. This thesis indicates that truanting behaviours might well be ubiquitous among pupils in schools throughout Britain. At the very least truanting behaviours seem to be ubiquitous in the three Welsh schools included in this study. However, importantly, the thesis also argued that for large amounts of these pupils their truanting behaviours were 'contained'. These pupils 'self-managed', they tried to keep up with their school work and made efforts to maintain a public and personal identity of an 'ordinary' pupil. Their behaviour when truanting also seemed to pose very little threat to the local community. When viewed in this light, these findings could question whether the panic over truancy is a false panic. Nevertheless, for a small minority their truancy was more problematic, seemingly damaging for them and perhaps disruptive for others. For these pupils then, doing nothing would seem socially and educationally unjust and indeed there is also much we can learn from the ubiquitous 'contained' truanting behaviours of the majority.

A central implication from this study is how do schools stop pupils from tipping over into a 'disrupted' career. In Chapter 7 a range of factors were identified as contributory to this tipping point and the intensification of truancy. Labelling, a difficulty in keeping up with school work, punitive sanction and associated exclusion all contributed to this. It is clearly a very difficult balancing act for institutions to deal with but it does seem that if measures are too punitive then institutional practices might be self-defeating. Greater consideration of the factors that seem to contribute to the tipping point might help in supporting young people

(for whom truancy has become a problem) in 'containing' or inhibiting their truanting behaviours. Some possibilities are explored here.

With regards to labelling it seems that it is particular pupils from particular backgrounds that are being more readily labelled as 'truants' and subjected to the punitive measures designed to tackle truancy. How school staff respond to absentees or suspected absences is therefore crucial. Awareness of staff to the impact of labelling is important here. 'Labelling' is now a popular mainstream concept. Most teachers are familiar with labelling theory, they know that pupils may live up to or down to expectations of them and that this can become an important factor in young people's learning and behaviour. Nevertheless, the wider social forces and historical power relations operating beyond the classroom can have a strong impact on teachers' interpretations of certain pupils and so although teachers might be aware of the negative implications of labelling, their reaction to certain pupils might occur independently of their conscious intentions. The training of school staff[92] to be more aware of the ways in which they respond to particular absentees (and problem behaviour) and to how this can intensify such behaviours or create secondary problems and to the underlying forces which can influence teacher's interpretations, would therefore be useful (Fontana 1985). Not only should school staff be made more aware of the intricacies of how certain pupils can become more readily labelled, increased awareness of the types of secondary deviant behaviours that might occur as a result of negative sanction and a conflict with teachers or the school itself would also be useful. These behaviours can often overshadow original reasons for absence and difficulties experienced. School staff should be encouraged and supported to rigorously explore motives for truanting behaviours to prevent the escalation of these behaviours. However, based on what has just been discussed, the question arises as to whether all those involved in truanting behaviours should then be labelled as 'truants' rather than a small minority of pupils. Clearly this would be dangerous, with the potential to intensify truancy. However, as discussed, the label associated with 'truants' did seem to play a part in encouraging pupils to 'contain' their truanting behaviours. Furthermore, the identification of 'truants' is often necessary to allow for intervention. The manner of the labelling is clearly crucial here. Hargreaves (1978) suggests that:

> The amplification of deviance may be reduced if it is the *act* rather than the *person* which is labelled ... for only then can the labeller indicate to the offender that his acts

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[92] Including teachers, teaching and learning assistants, learning mentors, attendance officers, EWOs etc.

are discrepant with his self and thus provide him with the opportunity for interpreting his act as inconsistent with both his self-concept and the identity that the labeller imputes to him (Hargreaves 1978: 80-81).

Labelling the act of truancy as 'deviant' rather than the person would still act as a deterrent for pupils to 'contain' their truancy but crucially could reduce the risks of exacerbating truancy and a 'disrupted' school career if done in a way that facilitates limited social shaming and moral indignation. Nevertheless, achieving this in practice would clearly be difficult.

With regards to supporting pupils to catch-up with work missed when absent from school, Chapter 7 highlighted that some pupils find this easier than others and some are able to draw on greater resources and support than others. Often it is considered the pupils responsibility to liaise with staff (or peers) to catch-up on work missed. It is clear that particular pupils will need help and encouragement to do this. It is easy to see how the demands and pressures involved in teaching might make this difficult and how teachers might resent pupils whom they believe to have chosen to 'truant'. However, finding ways to help pupils with this would seem to be crucial in order to prevent them from falling behind with their work, resulting in the escalation of their truancy and disruption to their learning. This level of effort is likely to be difficult without help from relevant support staff. Early intervention would seem to be crucial here, preferably taking place before a more formalised reintegration plan for extremely persistent absentees is required, which tend to be delivered outside the classroom context. Time constraints, the lack of appropriate resources and application of resources for support are however notable barriers here that can vary from authority to authority and from school to school.

Schools might also consider reducing the extent to which pupils identified as 'truants' are removed from their usual classroom contexts when sanctioned for their truancy. This may not be practicable or desirable for some pupils especially when truancy occurs alongside other behaviour issues. However, excluding pupils from the classroom context as a sanction for truancy is nonsensical, especially when this does not occur alongside support. Some schools (e.g. the St Lawrence Academy in Scunthorpe) do try to encourage a 'culture of inclusion' and make efforts to keep pupils within a classroom context even if this means temporarily placing pupils in another class to be monitored by a different teacher, though crucially an 'ordinary' lesson that is not designed for 'special' provision of any kind. It seems that strategies such as

this could be useful in trying to prevent the 'othering' and sense of exclusion that can occur from segregating 'problem' pupils away from the mainstream.

Essentially although there has been much policy emphasis on 'inclusion' it would seem that exclusionary processes are still very much apparent in both Wales and England. The policy response to truancy in recent years in Wales and England is one that has been distinctly punitive, with a focus on 'tough' measures designed to 'crackdown' on truancy. This has been exacerbated by the relentless focus on reducing 'official' absence statistics. Under such a system schools have little room for manoeuvre with increasing pressure to reduce their absence figures upon which they are increasingly judged. Moreover, the Government's approach to 'cracking down' on the 'persistent hardcore' makes this particularly worrying for the pupils perhaps in most need of help. Furthermore, the level of focus on 'official' statistics is worth questioning given that much of the truanting behaviours documented in this thesis would either be recorded as 'authorised' in the 'official' statistics or would not be recorded at all. Under New Labour there was a move to focus on 'all absence' statistics, rather than 'unauthorised absence' which was previously held to be synonymous with 'truancy'. This was a positive move (despite some continuing to focus on unauthorised). However, there is still reason to believe that the statistics, and measures of recording absence, fails to pick up on the variety and extent of truanting behaviours that might occur in schools.

As discussed the findings of this thesis have highlighted how truancy for the overwhelmingly majority of young people seems to be an everyday, ordinary part of their school lives which they self-manage. Nevertheless, there is much that we can learn from the ubiquitous 'contained' truanting behaviours of the majority and their views about schooling that might be symptomatic of inadequacies in the current education system. As Rudduck *et al.* (1996: 1) suggest, 'what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important – perhaps the most important – foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools'. If we listen to the 'voices' of both the 'contained' pupils and the 'disrupted' 'truants' benefits may ensue for both groups. Listening to the voices of young people in a bid to improve education and schooling has been advocated by a number of researchers (e.g. Riley and Docking 2004, Levin 2000, Pollard et al. 2000). The young people express a range of needs and desires and are extremely capable and observant of their education and processes of schooling, yet this is often expressed through their truancy and

thus potential insights are dissolved. There is much to be learnt from what the young people of this study have said, for example, their desire to see more vocational and applied subjects, their dislike of didactic styles of teaching, their calls for more autonomy etc.

The young people expressed extremely instrumental views with regards to their education. This did seem to have some benefits but not when it occurs at the expense of an intrinsic value to education. It was suggested in Chapter 5 that the pupils' instrumental mindsets could be partly responsible for some of their truancy and an education system which focuses purely on the instrumental is likely to be heavily classed. Clearly this would introduce additional problems with regards to social justice and social mobility. Thus, if we followed the young people's views with regards to curriculum re-construction it is likely that a very narrow curriculum may result. Narrow instrumentalism is also often at odds with student voice (Fielding 2001). Indeed, the question of how institutional change should be achieved is far beyond the scope of this thesis alone. Principally it also largely dependent on a much broader sociological and philosophical question namely; what is the purpose of schooling? Many of the young people's views currently support the hegemonic view which seems to emphasise instrumental aims and goals. However, it is suggested that given the degree to which the 'self' is implicated within the young people's discussions a more radical institution may be better for them, one that recognises there is more to education. A curriculum and pedagogic process, which allows them to express themselves in ways other than truancy, which engages all learners, is based on collegiality, offers pupil's greater legitimate opportunities for agency and autonomy, recognises and encourages self and social empowerment and fosters and embodies an intrinsic satisfaction to learning.

There are quite clearly obvious limitations as to what is immediately possible but the first necessity is to develop an increased degree of awareness about the nature of truancy and the possibilities of viewing truancy in an alternative light. Echoing Fielding (2001, 2002), and Riley and Docking (2004), what is also needed is an open *dialogue* between pupils and institution where all voices are heard. As part of the pupil voice movement in Wales and England, school councils have become compulsory in Wales (The School Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005) and were spurred on in England as a way of achieving the 'positive contribution' goal set out in Every Child Matters (2003), though they are only endorsed as a potential strategy under the Coalition government. However, many (e.g. Alderson 2006, Wyse 2001) have highlighted

that school councils can often be tokenistic, with a limited role to play in changing school practice. Going beyond this limited conception of pupil voice then would be necessary if pupils are to find other ways to express issues that would reduce the need for them to opt for truancy. Empirically, it is also important to highlight the advantages to be gained from working with children and young people for the purpose of social and educational development and to stress the continuing importance of doing so. The social worlds of young people are complex and sophisticated in a way that is often overlooked by adults or inadequately understood. Through their appropriate engagement there is much that we can learn. On the other hand, forcing these young people back to school through increasingly punitive measures, only for them to leave again, is likely to change very little.

Directions for Future Research

Although an increasing amount of data on truancy has been produced in recent years, relative to other areas of educational study it still remains a significantly under-researched area. The possibilities for further study are potentially vast. The findings of this study certainly merit the need for further investigation. The in-depth nature of this research and the necessary focus on the pupil's perspectives meant sacrificing detailed attention of the processes by which teachers facilitate or exacerbate truancy and marginalisation understood from the teacher's perspective. Current research already exists on the teachers' views of why pupils truant (e.g. Malcolm et al. 1996). However, a complementary study which observes teachers in practice may be potentially illuminating. Restraints on time and the need to address the paucity of information on the young people's behaviour when truanting also meant that sufficient observation of interactions and processes within the school grounds were forfeited. In one sense, we already have a wealth of intensive, in-depth ethnographic study on pupil interaction inside schools and some have also commented briefly on the issue of truancy (Furlong 1976, Pollard 1985, Willis 1976, Woods 1979). However, as the findings of this study have centrally implicated institutional factors, further intensive ethnographic research inside schools, focusing specifically on the issue of truancy, would be a useful starting point in which to build on the findings of this study. It may also be particularly fruitful to extend this research into various different institutional forms (e.g. boarding schools, primary schools, F.E colleges, H.E institutions, work placed learning etc.). A study of whether truancy exists in the most elite schools would be especially interesting. An extension of truancy research on an international

scale might also be merited, to examine reasons for truancy in different countries and to see how different systems are more or less affected.

One might also consider researching more closely the 'disrupted' 'truants' who have entered pupil referral units, to see what happens to these young people when they are completely removed from the system. The significance and meaning attached to truancy by different social groups, beyond those that have been included within this study also seems of great importance. For example, there is a need to further explore truancy in different racial and ethnic groups. The time structuring of truanting young people has also been highlighted as an area of importance within this study, which could be further explored. It is also proposed that based upon the findings in Chapter 6, there is a continued need to warrant further theorisation and subsequent research into the study of the truanting young people's use of space and place, especially given the recent shift in sociology and education to consider space more theoretically. A specific area of interest is the despatialised interaction occurring among young people in 'cyberspace'. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we might also follow the young people of this study longitudinally, to allow for the analysis of duration, to follow more closely the ways in which the young people attempt to manage their truancy and to examine the possibility of change over time from one period to another. Such enquiry would also allow for a closer investigation into the social and academic outcomes of this truancy in later life at discreet time points. This might also uncover more factors that might contribute to the tipping point by which 'contained' pupils become 'disrupted' 'truants'.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Absenteeism by Pupils of Compulsory School Age in Maintained Secondary and Special Schools by Local Education Authority and Year[93]

Local Authority	Percentage of half-day sessions missed due to unauthorised absences								Percentage of half-day sessions missed due to all absences							
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Isle of Anglesey	1.4	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.3	1.3	0.9	1.1	9.8	10.3	10.6	10.8	11	10.1	9.1	9.4
Gwynedd	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.1	8.1	8.4	8.6	9.5	9	8.6	9.1	8.7
Conwy	1	1.3	2.3	2	2.2	2	2.1	1.6	9.1	9.5	8.7	9.5	9.7	8.8	8.4	8.1
Denbighshire	1.6	1.9	2.1	1.6	2.2	2	2.3	2	10	10.5	10.4	10.6	10.1	8.8	9	8.8
Flintshire	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6	8.5	8.7	8	8.1	8.2	7.5	7.8	7.8
Wrexham	0.9	1.7	1.6	1.4	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.8	8.8	9.7	9.6	8.7	8.8	8.2	8	8.5
Powys	0.7	1	0.9	0.8	1	1	0.8	0.4	7.9	8	8.4	8.8	9.4	8.6	8.7	8.3
Ceredigion	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.7	1.2	1	1.1	1.1	8.6	8.6	9.5	10.2	9.2	8.4	8.2	8.3
Pembrokeshire	1.3	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.5	8.5	8.6	9.1	9.6	8.2	9.1	8.9	9.3
Carmarthenshire	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.7	9.3	8.7	9	10	9.1	9.3	9.2	8.8
Swansea	3.1	2.4	2.2	2.4	2.3	1.9	1.9	2	10.8	10	9.9	10.3	9.7	9.2	9.3	9.4
Neath Port Talbot	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.6	8.4	7.7	8.6	9.3	8.5	7.9	8.2	8.3
Bridgend	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.9	1.9	2	1.8	1.8	8.5	8.7	8.5	9.9	9	9.1	8.8	9.1
The Vale of Glamorgan	1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1	1.1	1.1	1.3	8.5	8.4	8.3	8.7	7.9	8.4	8.3	8.3
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2.2	2.4	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.3	1.8	10.5	10.1	10.9	10.6	10.2	10	10.3	9.5
Merthyr Tydfil	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.7	1.5	1.8	1.3	1.3	10	10	10.8	11	10.4	9.4	9.2	9.1
Caerphilly	1.9	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.1	2	1.9	10.7	10.6	10.3	10.9	9.9	9.7	9.6	9.5
Blaenau Gwent	1	2.3	1.5	1.8	1.8	2.2	2	2	9.9	9.9	9.5	10.3	9.3	9.2	9.4	9.4
Torfaen	1.4	2.1	1.8	1.8	2.5	2.6	3.6	3	9.9	9.4	8.5	9.3	9	9.3	9.7	9.5
Monmouthshire	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.8	0.6	8.6	8.8	7.8	8.4	8.4	9.4	8.2	8
Newport	2	2.2	2.1	1.9	2.3	2	2.2	1.9	10.3	10.6	10	10.4	9.8	10	9.4	8.7
Cardiff	**3.4**	**3.3**	**3.3**	**3.4**	**3.7**	**3.3**	**2.9**	**2.8**	**11.2**	**11**	**10.7**	**11.1**	**10.6**	**9.7**	**9.5**	**9.6**
Wales	**1.6**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**1.7**	**1.8**	**1.8**	**1.7**	**1.6**	**9.5**	**9.4**	**9.4**	**9.8**	**9.3**	**9**	**9**	**8.9**

Source: StatsWales (2011e)

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[93] The information in this table relates to secondary school pupils of compulsory school age (11 to 15) registered at mainstream, special and independent schools. Absenteeism data for independent schools is not included in the LEA figures, but is included in the Wales figures.

Appendix 2: Pupil consent forms and information sheets

Parent/Guardian information sheet for a proposed research study

Dear Parent/Guardian   **09/08**

I would like to invite your child to take part in my research study. Before you decide whether you wish to give consent for their participation, it is important that you understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

Why am I doing this research?

Issues concerning school attendance and non-attendance have received a lot of attention in recent years but to date very little research has studied these issues in-depth, particularly from the perspectives of young people. I wish to study the views and experiences of young people over a period of one year.

Who will take part?

Sixty year nine pupils from three secondary schools in Cardiff will be taking part in this study. Children are randomly selected for their participation by a member of staff within the school.

What will be involved?

This project will be conducted over one school year and will involve numerous different forms of research (for instance, interviews, focus groups, observation, walking tours, communication over the internet, photo research etc.) which will take place both inside and outside school. The research will focus on issues of attendance and non-attendance as well as the young people's everyday lives. The research will start with focus groups which all of the young people participating in the research will be involved in. Focus groups are basically group discussions which focus on a particular topic. The topic in this case will be 'missing and attending school'. The focus groups will take place in a private place within your child's school and will last roughly one hour. The young people can say as little or as much as they like. They will not be pressured to answer any questions they do not want to.

After the focus group research I intend to ask the young people if they would like to stay in contact with me throughout the year of study, for the purpose of research. If they agree I will be asking them their preferred choice of contact, this may include internet communication (e.g. by email, instant internet messaging, social networking sites), communication over the telephone or via text message etc. The discussion that takes place via these methods of contact may also be used as 'data' and contribute to the findings of this study. I will be making it clear to the young people that this communication may be seen as 'data' by me. Again discussion will be focused on missing school and attending school, as well as the young people's everyday lives. I will be careful not to encourage their non-attendance via these methods of communication.

Some young people will also be observed and interviewed whilst they are not attending school, but I will not encourage non-attendance by any young person. At this stage I am seeking your permission for your child's participation in the focus group research, their continued contact with me via their choice of communication and any observation and interviews that may take place outside of the school, throughout the year of study. The young people will then decide if they wish to take part in any other forms of research and I will seek parental consent for each subsequent research method used.

When will this research happen?

The research will start in September/October and will continue for approximately one year.

What will I do with the information gathered?

Data from this research will form the basis of my PhD thesis and may be published in academic journals, books or within the media (e.g. newspapers). I might also use the data to give presentations to academics, practitioners or other members of the public.

Will their taking part be confidential?

Any data gathered will be kept securely and in accordance with the UK data protection rules. Data will not be used for any other purpose than those outlined above. The young people (or anyone they mention) and their schools will not be named in my thesis or any publication or presentation. All children involved are free to give as much or as little information as they wish.

What if parents/guardians do not wish their child to participate?

If you do not wish your child to take part please complete the attached form and return it to the school. If you do not return the form, your child will automatically be included in the study.

What if I or my child changes their mind about taking part?

Participation is voluntary and anyone can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

Who am I?

My name is Philippa James and I am a doctoral researcher at Cardiff University, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I am doing research on issues surrounding school attendance and non-attendance. I will be supervised throughout my research by two Senior Researchers and the research has the approval of the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. I have clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau to work with children. If you have any questions concerning the research, feel free to contact me on Tel: [no. removed] or email: [address removed] I would be happy to answer any questions.

Research into school attendance and non-attendance

You need only complete this form and return it to your child's school if
you <u>DO NOT </u>wish your child to participate in all or part of the study.
 PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT RETURN THE FORM, YOUR CHILD
WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE ELIGIBLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY.

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the attached information letter (dated 09/08). I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw my child at any time, without giving a reason	

If you ARE NOT willing for your child to be observed and interviewed outside of school whilst they are not attending school, please initial here …………………

If you ARE NOT willing for your child to take part in a focus group as part of the study, please initial here   ………………...

If you ARE NOT willing for your child to stay in contact with me after the focus group via communication over the internet or by telephone, as part of this study for the purpose of research, please initial here ....

_____

Name of child

_____   _____   _____

Name of parent/guardian   Date   Signature

RESEARCH ABOUT MISSING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL
Information sheet for young people

Would you be interested in taking part in some research?

I'm doing some research on attending school and missing school and I'd like you to be involved. Please read the following information carefully and let your teachers know if you are not interested in being involved.

Why am I doing this research?

The reason I'm doing this research is because very little research has spent a lot of time asking young people about their views and experiences of attending and missing school. I want to understand these issues from the point of view of young people and want to give you the chance to have your views and experiences heard. This is not about what your teachers or parents think, this is about the young people of Cardiff. I want to get to know you and others within the school in enough depth to provide a real understanding about missing school and attending school.

Who is being invited to take part?

Sixty year nine pupils from three secondary schools in Cardiff. Your teachers chose you to take part – this was done randomly.

What would be involved?

In order to get a real understanding of your lives and issues related to missing school and attending school I want to spend as much time with you as possible – outside school and inside school. I have a few ideas about different ways that this research could be carried out but I want you to be involved in these decisions as well. The ideas I have so far are:

Focus groups - in school *(These are group interviews with some of your classmates)*

Interviews - outside school *(Mostly informal and some could be done through texting, over the internet etc)*

Observation - outside and possibly inside school *(this will involve me hanging around with you, watching and observing what you do and asking some questions)*

Walking tours – outside school *(This involves you showing me around places that are important to your lives)*

Photo diaries – outside school *(This involves you taking pictures of places and spaces that are important to you, which we will then discuss)*

These are my ideas but I'm open to any suggestions you have too. Not all of you will be involved in every stage of the above research, you could be involved in some but not others. I want to start with focus groups first and would like to know if you would like to take part in one of these groups? There is no pressure for you to be involved in any of the other forms of research. This project should be pretty simple and a bit of fun for you, it will also be very helpful for my research.

When will this research happen?

The research will start in September/October and will probably last about a year.

What will I do with the information gathered?

The information I gather will be used to write a project (called a thesis) for a university qualification, where I will become a Doctor (PhD) of my subject at the University. The information might also be used in articles or books read by academics and members of the public and I am likely to use it for presentations and I might also share the findings with newspapers and other forms of media.

Will the things you say be kept private?

Your teachers, parents or anyone else will **NOT** be told what you say or do. I will <u>not</u> use the data gathered for any other purpose than those outlined above. Your personal names will <u>never</u> be used in any publication or presentation. I will be giving all of you a fake name instead. You should not be identified in any way. I will also give your school a fake name and anyone you mention.

But I do have a legal obligation to report any criminal activity that I witness or you tell me about **_if_** it has or will cause great harm to others (e.g. GBH).

What if you change your mind about taking part?

Taking part is your choice and anyone can withdraw at anytime, without giving a reason. I will keep asking you if you still want to be involved in the research and you can say 'no' at anytime. Every time a new method of research is used I will ask for your consent again. On the day of the focus groups I will give you some more information and ask you if you still want to take part.

Who am I?

My name is Philippa James, I'm 23 years old and I'm currently doing a PhD at Cardiff University. I am researching missing school and attending school for my PhD research project, which is why I need to carry out the research I have described in this leaflet.

If you want more information about the research or want to have a chat with me about it before deciding, please feel free to get in touch with me:

Philippa James: 07743862059 (text or phone)
Email:JamesP2@cardiff.ac.uk

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

Information sheet for young people

Would you be interested in taking part in some focus group research?

I would like to invite you to be involved in some focus group research. Your teachers should have already given you an information sheet about the research I am carrying out on missing school and attending school. You should have been given time to read this information and indicated that you might like to take part – that is why you are here today.

What would be involved?

I would like to carry out focus groups with you and other pupils from your year group. Focus groups are basically group discussions about a certain topic – the topic in this case is 'missing and attending school'. You can say as little or as much as you like, there will be no right or wrong answers. I am interested in everything that you have to say on the topic. The focus group should not take longer than an hour.

What will I do with the information?

With your permission, I will record our discussion and then write it up into what is called a transcript. This will allow me to read what you've said again. I will then write a report which will be assessed as part of my degree. I might use the data gathered to write articles for journals or give presentations to people interested in the subject. I might also share the findings of this research with newspapers and other forms of media.

Will the things you say be kept private?

When I create the transcript, I will change the names of yourself and everyone you mention. I will give you all fake names instead. I will also give your school a fake name. I will ask everyone attending the focus group to keep everything that was said during the discussion private. The original recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place and only me and my supervisors will have access to it. You should not be identified in any way. Your teachers, parents or anyone else will <u>not</u> be told about what you say here.

But, I do have a legal obligation to report any criminal activity that I witness or you tell me about ***if*** it has or will cause great harm to others (e.g. GBH).

What if you change your mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. It doesn't matter if it's before, during or after our discussion, all you have to do is let me know.

Who am I?

My Name is Philippa James, I'm 23 years old and I'm currently doing a PhD at Cardiff University. I am researching all about missing school and attending school for my PhD, which is why I want to carry out the research I have described in this leaflet.

If you want more information about the research at any time please feel free to get in touch with me:

Philippa James: 07743862059 (text or phone)
Email:JamesP2@cardiff.ac.uk

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

Consent form for young people

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided today. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I give permission for you to record the discussion.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
I agree to take part in this study.	

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

CONSENT FOR FURTHER CONTACT

Consent form for young people

	Please initial
I confirm that I have talked to Philippa about staying in contact with her after todays focus group for the purpose of research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I give my permission for Philippa to contact me using the contact details I have given her.	
I give permission for Philippa to record or save our discussions.	
I understand that our discussions are being viewed as data and agree that it is ok for Philippa to use anything I say for her research.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
I agree to take part in this study.	

My preferred way of staying contact is …………………………….

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

OBSERVATION RESEARCH
Information sheet for young people/participants

Would you be interested in taking part in some more research about missing school and attending school?

Thank you for taking part in the focus group research today. As you know, I'm trying to find out as much as possible about missing school and attending school, and as part of this I'm trying to get an understanding about your daily lives. On the first information leaflet you were given I said that I would be trying to research missing school and attending school in lots of different ways. One way for me to get a better understanding of this would be to observe and talk to you when you are actually missing school. To do this I need your permission. You don't have to agree to let me observe you – it is totally your choice. Please read the rest of this leaflet carefully before you decide.

What would be involved?

With your permission I would like to spend some time hanging around with you when you're missing school. I would be observing you and may make notes or audio-recordings on what I see or what you say. I might also ask you some questions when observing you. I don't want to change what you do in any way. I simply want to see and understand what you do when missing school. You should carry on doing what you normally do when I'm around so that I can get a proper understanding of what you do and what missing school is all about. It's important that you do **not** miss school for me to research you. Just carry on doing what you normally do and going to school on the days when you normally would. The observations will mostly take place outside of school. I won't contact you to tell you when I'm going to come down to your area to research you, you can just expect to see me popping up. You might never miss school and hang around outside school – that's ok – you don't need to worry if you haven't seen me. There will be other ways that you can be involved in the research again. It's very important that you don't change anything you do just because I'm researching you. At the moment I'm just asking for your permission to observe you if I happen to see you when you are missing school.

What will I do with the information?

The information I gather will be used to write a project (called a thesis) for a university qualification, where I will become a Doctor (PhD) of my subject at the University. The information might also be used in articles or books read by academics and members of the public and I am likely to use it for presentations and I might also share the findings with newspapers and other forms of media.

Will the things you say be kept private?

Your teachers, parents or anyone else will **NOT** be told what you say, what you do or where you go when missing school. Your personal names will never be used in any publication or presentation, this includes the names of anyone you mention or any of your friends that might be with you when I'm observing you. You should not be identified in any way.

However, I do have a legal obligation to report any criminal activity that I witness or you tell me about ***if*** it has or will cause great harm to others (e.g. GBH). If you did tell me about this I would tell you before I reported it. If you are involved in criminal activity that does not cause great harm to others then I will **not** report it so it is ok to tell me about this.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. It doesn't matter if it's before, during or after observation has taken place, all you have to do is let me know. Also if you're missing school and you decide you don't want me around at a particular time, please feel free to tell me to go away. I won't be offended.

If you want more information about the research or want to have a chat with me about it at any time please feel free to get in touch with me.
Philippa James: Tel: [No. removed] (text or phone)
Email: [Address removed]

OBSERVATION RESEARCH

Young people consent form

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet on 'observation research' provided today and that Philippa has also talked to us about being observed by her when missing school or outside of school hours, for the purpose of research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this research and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I give permission for Philippa to audio-record or take notes on any of our discussions or actions that take place when she is carrying out this research.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason	
I agree to take part in this study	

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

Dear Parent/Guardian

I wrote to you at the start of the school year asking for your permission for your child to be involved in my research on school attendance and non-attendance. In this letter I said that I would write to you again if I planned to introduce any different forms of research which you did not originally give your consent for. I am now undertaking photo-elicitation research and your child has indicated to me that they would like to take part in this. Before you decide whether you wish to give consent for their participation, please take time to read the following information. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

What is photo-elicitation research?

Photo-elicitation research is where participants take photographs and are then interviewed about the photographs that they have taken. In this study I will be asking the young people to take photographs of things, places or people that are important to their lives and who they are (good or bad). The aim of this task is to try and understand the young people's everyday lives and any influences that can affect decisions to miss school or attend school. I will provide each young person with a disposable camera and will give them a week to take their photographs. I will then get the photographs developed and will meet with each young person so that they can tell me about their photographs. I will also ask the young people questions about their photographs and their lives in general and will probably ask more questions about school attendance and non-attendance. This meeting will take the form of an informal interview. I am letting the young people decide where they would like this interview to take place (e.g. at home, at school, in a park etc). You might want to discuss this with your child.

Who will see the photographs and how will the young people's identities be protected?

The young people's photographs and what they say in the following interview might be included in my PhD thesis and might be published in academic journal articles, books or within the media. I might also use this data to give presentations to academics, practitioners or other members of the public. However, the young people will not be named in my thesis or any publication or presentation. Additionally, I will be using computer software to edit the photographs in order to further protect the young people's identities. If the young people take photographs of people, the faces of these people will be blurred/distorted so that it is not possible to identify them. I will also edit any other details that may lead to the identification of the young people or their school. For example, if their school uniform featured in any of their photographs the computer editing software makes it possible to change the colour of the uniform so that the school is not identified. With your permission I also intend to record the interviews with your child. All of this data will be kept securely and in accordance with the UK data protection rules. Data will not be used for any other purpose than those outlined above. Only myself and my supervisors will be able to access the original unedited forms of data.

What if parents/guardians do not wish their child to participate?

If you do not wish your child to take part please complete the attached form and return it to the following postal address:

[Address removed]

Alternatively you can contact me by email or telephone. If you do not return the form, or contact me, then your child will automatically be included in the study.

What if I or my child changes their mind about taking part?

Participation is voluntary and anyone can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

Who am I?

My name is Philippa James and I am a doctoral researcher at Cardiff University, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I am doing research on school attendance and non-attendance. I will be supervised throughout my research by two Senior Researchers and the research has the approval of the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. I have clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau to work with children. If you have any questions concerning the research, feel free to contact me on Tel: [No. removed] or email: [Address removed]. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Yours sincerely

Philippa James

Photo-Elicitation Research

[Used for both photo-elicitation projects]

You need only complete and return this form if you <u>DO NOT </u>wish your child to

participate in this study.

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT RETURN THE FORM, YOUR CHILD

WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE ELIGIBLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE STUDY.

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the attached information letter. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw my child at any time, without giving a reason	

If you ARE NOT willing for your child to take photographs for this research, please initial here …………………

If you ARE NOT willing for your child to take part in the related interview, please initial here   ………………...

_____

Name of child

_____   _____   _____

Name of parent/guardian   Date   Signature

Photo Research

Consent form for young people

[Used in both photo-elicitation projects]

	Please initial
I confirm that Philippa has spoke to me about participating in photo research and I understand what is involved. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I give my permission for Philippa to use the photographs I take in her PhD thesis, articles, and books or in presentations.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.	
I agree to take part in this study.	

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

Photo Research Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this photo research.

As you know, I'm trying to find out as much as possible about missing school and attending school, and as part of this I'm trying to get an understanding about your daily lives. I'm using lots of different kinds of research to help me understand. This time I want you to be the researchers.

What should I do?

In this pack you'll find a disposable camera. Basically I'd like you to take photos of things, places, or people that are important to your life and who you are (good or bad).

You can take as many photos as you want but you don't have to use all the camera film if you don't want to. There are no right or wrong pictures to take, I'm interested in whatever you decide to take your photos of.

I'll give you a week to take the photos and then I'll arrange to pick the camera up from you and I'll get the photos developed. I'll print two copies, one set for me and one set for you, which you can keep.

Then what will happen?

After I've developed the photos we'll meet again so that you can tell me about the photos and so that I can ask you some questions about the photos and I'll probably ask you some more questions about missing school and attending school. It's up to you where we meet for this, I'm happy to meet you wherever is best for you. For example, it could be at your house, at your school, in a park, in a café, or anywhere else you can think of. It's your choice.

In the interview I will let you look at the photos you have taken first and you can get rid of any photos that you don't want to talk about and that you don't want me to include in my research.

Who will see my photos? and how will you protect my identity?

I might include your photos in my PhD thesis or in articles or books that I may write and I might give presentations to people interested in the topic. So these people might see your photos but, no one will know **you** have taken the photos. I will give you a fake name again and if you take photos of people I will use special computer technology to blur the faces of the people so that no one will be able to see who they are. The only people that will see the faces of these people will be me and my supervisors. Your parents, teachers or anyone else will not see the faces and they won't be told what photos you have taken. I can also use the computer technology to disguise other things in order to protect your identity. For example, if a photo showed a street name I could blur that and if your photos included a picture of your school uniform I can also change the colour of that uniform so that your school will not be identified.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. Taking part is your choice and you can pull out at any time just let me know. You will not have to give the camera back if you do change your mind.

If you have any questions whatsoever about this research or if you are confused about what you should do please get in touch with me on my mobile: [no. removed] (phone or text me) or by MSN or Email: [address removed]

Thank you – Philippa

Photo Interview

Information sheet for young people

What's involved today?

Thank you for taking part in my research. You have been taking the role of researcher for me and have produced some really useful photographs, today we are going to talk about these photographs. In a minute I will give you the photographs that you took. You should look through these and get rid of any that you do not want to talk about or do not want me to use in my research. After you have done this we will spread the photos out on the desk and you can tell me about each of the photos in any order you want. I will then ask you some more questions about the photos, your life in general and about missing school and attending school.

What is going to happen with the information from today's interview?

With your permission, I will record our discussion and then write it up into what is called a transcript. This will allow me to read what you've said again. I will then write a report which will be assessed as part of my degree. I might use the data gathered to write books or articles for journals or give presentations to people interested in the subject. I might also share the findings of this research with newspapers and other forms of media.

Will the things you say be kept private?

When I create the transcript I will change the names of yourself and everyone you mention. I will give you all fake names instead. I will also give your school a fake name. Your personal names will <u>never</u> be used in any publication or presentation, this includes anyone's name you mention. The original recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place and only me and my supervisors will have access to it. You should not be identified in any way. Your teachers, parents or anyone else will <u>not</u> be told about what you say here.

But, I do have a legal obligation to report any criminal activity that you tell me about ***if*** it has or will cause great harm to others (e.g. GBH).

Do I have to take part today?

No taking part is totally your choice. You can choose to leave now if you wish. If you do want to take part, please read and sign the consent form.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. It doesn't matter if it's before, during or after our discussion, all you have to do is let me know.

Photo Interview

Participation consent form

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided today and have previously talked to Philippa about this research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason	
I agree to take part in this study	

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

Dear Parent/Guardian

I wrote to you at the start of the school year asking for your permission for your child to be involved in my research on school attendance and non-attendance. In this letter I said that I would write to you again if I planned to introduce any different forms of research which you did not originally give your consent for. I am now undertaking photo-elicitation research and your child has indicated to me that they would like to take part in this. Before you decide whether you wish to give consent for their participation, please take time to read the following information. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

What is photo-elicitation research?

Photo-elicitation research is where participants take photographs on a particular topic and are then interviewed about the photographs that they have taken. In this study the topic is attendance and non-attendance. Some young people will be taking photos when not attending school. However, I will not encourage non-attendance by any young person. I will be providing the young people with disposable cameras, although if they prefer they may also use their own cameras. I will then get the photographs developed and will meet with each young person so that they can tell me about their photographs. I will also ask the young people questions about their photographs and will probably ask more questions about school attendance and non-attendance. This meeting will take the form of an informal interview. I am letting the young people decide where they would like this interview to take place (e.g. at home, at school, in a park etc). You might want to discuss this with your child.

Who will see the photographs and how will the young people's identities be protected?

The young people's photographs and what they say in the following interview might be included in my PhD thesis and might be published in academic journal articles, books or within the media. I might also use this data to give presentations to people interested in the topic. However, the young people will not be named in my thesis or any publication or presentation. Additionally, I will be using computer software to edit the photographs in order to further protect the young people's identities. If the young people take photographs of people, the faces of these people will be blurred/distorted so that it is not possible to identify them. I will also edit any other details that may lead to the identification of the young people or their school. For example, if their school uniform featured in any of their photographs the computer editing software makes it possible to change the colour of their uniform so that the school is not identified or if a street name was included in a photograph I would blur the street name etc. With your permission I also intend to record the interviews with your child. All of this data will be kept securely and in accordance with the UK data protection rules. Data will not be used for any other purpose than those outlined above. Only myself and my supervisors will be able to access the original unedited forms of data.

What if parents/guardians do not wish their child to participate?

If you do not wish your child to take part please complete the attached form and return it to the following postal address:

[Address removed]

Alternatively you can contact me by email or telephone. If you do not return the form, or contact me, then your child will automatically be included in the study.

What if I or my child changes their mind about taking part?

Participation is voluntary and anyone can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

Who am I?

My name is Philippa James and I am a doctoral researcher at Cardiff University, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I am doing research on school attendance and non-attendance. I will be supervised throughout my research by two Senior Researchers and the research has the approval of the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. I have clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau to work with children. If you have any questions concerning the research, feel free to contact me on Tel: [No. removed] or email: [Address removed]. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Yours sincerely

Philippa James

Photo Research No.2 Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this photo research.

As you know, I'm trying to find out as much as possible about missing school and attending school, and as part of this I'm trying to get an understanding about what you do when missing school and where you go. I'm using lots of different kinds of research to help me understand. In this research I want you to be the researchers.

What should I do?

In this pack you'll find a disposable camera, if you said you wanted to use one, if not use the camera you said you preferred to use (e.g. your own digital camera or camera phone etc.) Basically I'd like you to take photos of what you do when mitching/on the knock from school and photos of where you go. It would be best if these photos were taken when you are actually mitching/on the knock. But, you must **not** mitch just to take these photos. Only take the photos if you were going to mitch anyway. You can have as long as you want to take the photos, I'll be in contact with you to see how you are getting on but there is no need to rush. If you have not mitched or do not plan to mitch again this year then you can take the photos outside of school hours. Just take photos of the places where you have been before when mitching or what you did before when mitching.

You can take as many photos as you want but you don't have to use all the camera film if you don't want to. There are no right or wrong pictures to take, I'm interested in whatever you decide to take your photos of.

When you are done I'll arrange to pick the camera up from you or if you are using a digital camera or camera phone you can send me them via MSN. I'll print two copies, one set for me and one set for you, which you can keep.

Then what will happen?

After I've developed the photos we'll meet again so that you can tell me about the photos and so that I can ask you some questions about the photos and I'll probably ask you some more questions about missing school and attending school. It's up to you where we meet for this, I'm happy to meet you wherever is best for you. For example, it could be at your house, at your school, in a park, in a café, or anywhere else you can think of. It's your choice.

In the interview I will let you look at the photos you have taken first and you can get rid of any photos that you don't want to talk about and that you don't want me to include in my research.

Who will see my photos? and how will you protect my identity?

I might include your photos in my PhD thesis or in articles or books that I may write and I might give presentations to people interested in the topic. So these people might see your photos, but no one will know **you** have taken the photos. I will give you a fake name again and if you take photos of people I will use special computer technology to blur the faces of the people so that no one will be able to see who they are. The only people that will see the

faces of these people will be me and my supervisors. Your parents, teachers or anyone else will not see the faces and they will **not** be told about what you do when mitching/on the knock from school or where you go. They will not be told what photos you have taken. I can also use the computer technology to disguise other things in order to protect your identity. For example, if a photo showed a street name I could blur that and I can edit pictures so it is less obvious where the photo was taken. Also, if your photos included a picture of your school uniform I can also change the colour of that uniform so that your school will not be identified.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. Taking part is your choice and you can pull out at any time just let me know. You will not have to give the camera back if you do change your mind.

If you have any questions whatsoever about this research or if you are confused about what you should do please get in touch with me on my mobile: [No. removed] (phone or text me) or by MSN or Email: [address removed]

Thank you – Philippa

Photo Interview

Information sheet for young people

What's involved today?

Thank you for taking part in my research. You have been taking the role of researcher for me and have produced some really useful photographs, today we are going to talk about these photographs. In a minute I will give you the photographs that you took. You should look through these and get rid of any that you do not want to talk about or do not want me to use in my research. After you have done this we will spread the photos out on the desk and you can tell me about each of the photos in any order you want. I will then ask you some more questions about the photos and what you do and where you go when mitching or on the knock and I'll probably ask some more general questions about missing school and attending school.

What is going to happen with the information from today's interview?

With your permission, I will record our discussion and then write it up into what is called a transcript. This will allow me to read what you've said again. I will then write a report which will be assessed as part of my degree. I might use the data gathered to write books or articles for journals or give presentations to people interested in the subject. I might also share the findings of this research with newspapers and other forms of media.

Will the things you say be kept private?

When I create the transcript I will change the names of yourself and everyone you mention. I will give you all fake names instead. I will also give your school a fake name. Your personal names will <u>never</u> be used in any publication or presentation, this includes anyone's name you mention. The original recording and transcript will be kept in a secure place and only me and my supervisors will have access to it. You should not be identified in any way. Your teachers, parents or anyone else will <u>not</u> be told about what you say here.

But, I do have a legal obligation to report any criminal activity that you tell me about ***if*** it has or will cause great harm to others (e.g. GBH).

Do I have to take part today?

No taking part is totally your choice. You can choose to leave now if you wish. If you do want to take part, please read and sign the consent form.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

You can change your mind at any time about taking part. It doesn't matter if it's before, during or after our discussion, all you have to do is let me know.

Photo Interview

Participation consent form

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet provided today and have previously talked to Philippa about this research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I give my permission for you to record this interview.	
I understand that participation is voluntary and that I would be free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason	
I agree to take part in this study	

_____

Name

_____   _____

Date   Signature

Appendix 3: Contextual information by pupil

	Sample	Gender	Frequency of Truancy		Social Class Composition (NS-SEC)			Set Position
			Occasional	Persistent	Professional & Managerial	Intermediate	Routine & Manual	
Hillsden High School	Adam	Male	✓		✓			Low
	Zack	Male		✓			✓	Middle
	Tom	Male	✓		✓			High
	Joe	Male	✓		✓			High
	Robert #	Male	✓		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Duncan	Male	✓			✓		Middle
	Justin	Male	✓		✓			High
	Ethan	Male	Never truanted		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Harry	Male	✓		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Bradley	Male	✓		✓			Middle
	Chelsey #	Female		✓			✓	Low
	Ella	Female	✓		✓			High
	Stacey #	Female		✓			✓	Low
	Jenny	Female	✓			✓		Middle
	Sasha *	Female	Never truanted		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Zoe	Female		✓	✓			Middle
	Kym	Female		✓	✓			High
	Anna	Female	✓		✓			High
	Ruby	Female	✓			✓		Middle
	Helen #	Female	✓				✓	Low
Cooperfield High School	Aaron #	Male		✓		✓		Middle
	Alfie	Male		✓			✓	Low
	Marvin #	Male		✓	✓			Middle
	Mark	Male	✓			✓		Low
	Harvey	Male	✓			✓		Data unavailable
	Carla	Female	✓		✓			High
	Lizzie	Female		✓		✓		Middle
	Whitney	Female	✓				✓	High
	Emma	Female	✓		✓			Middle
	Sonia	Female		✓			✓	Middle
	Kerry	Female		✓		✓		Middle
	Sarah #	Female		✓		✓		High
	Tao *	Female	✓		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Tiffany	Female	✓				✓	Low
	Leanne	Female	✓				✓	Low
	Scott	Male	✓			✓		Middle
	John	Male		✓	✓			Middle
	Kai	Male	✓			✓		Low
	David	Male	✓		✓			High
	Calum	Male	✓			✓		Low
Pen-Y-Peel High School	Hayley	Female	✓		✓			High
	Lauren	Female	✓			✓		High
	Katie	Female	Never truanted			✓		High
	Hannah	Female	✓			✓		Middle
	Joanne	Female	✓				✓	Middle
	Lucy	Female	✓			✓		Middle
	Steph	Female		✓			✓	Low
	Harriet	Female	✓			✓		High
	Alice	Female	✓				✓	Low
	Naomi	Female		✓			✓	Middle
	Shaun	Male	✓			✓		High
	Delwyn	Male	✓			✓		Middle
	Richard	Male	✓				✓	Low
	Joshua	Male	✓			✓		Middle
	Owen #	Male		✓			✓	Low
	Bryan	Male		✓			✓	Middle
	Dylan	Male	✓				✓	Middle
	Craig	Male	✓		Data unavailable			Data unavailable
	Andrew #	Male		✓	Data unavailable			Low
	Connor	Male	✓		Data unavailable			Data unavailable

* = Black and Minority Ethnic background

\# = Special educational need

Appendix 4: Focus group photographs