

Playground Romance:
An ethnographic study of friendship and
romance in children's relationship cultures

David James Mellor

School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University

Ph.D. 2006

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Summary of thesis

This thesis explores the prominence of romance and romantic love in the relationship cultures of a cohort of children aged between 10 and 12. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork that took place at three primary schools and one high school over the period of a year, it examines the various ways that the children invested in and understand romance and romantic love during the significant rite-of-passage of the transfer between primary and secondary educational phases. Using qualitative and ethnographic methods – including participant observation, group interviews, story and diary writing – rich forms of spoken, written and pictorial data were gathered. These are discussed and analysed with reference to sociological theories of sexuality, friendship and social solidarity. Although the research was situated in schools, it is important to highlight that this was a cultural, rather than an educational study. It shows that romance was a key part of the children's negotiations of their own and others identities and relationships, and that this was shaped in powerful ways by discourses of gender, sexuality and social class. Key points of discussion include: the development of the concept of 'hetero-sociality' as a way of discussing how heterosexual practices shape children's everyday lives; the differences between girls' and boys' articulations of and investments in romance; how romance shapes friendship practices, particularly 'best' friendships; how understandings of and investments in romantic love are classed and gendered; the importance of gendered sexuality during the transfer between primary and secondary schooling and in children's conceptions of the life-course; and, the use of the adult researcher's 'ethnographic self' as a tool for investigating the personal relationships, friendship cultures and solidarities of children and young people.

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank all the children who took part in the fieldwork throughout this project. Without their enthusiasm and willingness to participate this would have been an impossible task to undertake. Thanks also to the staff at each of the schools for their assistance and for letting me spend time in their classrooms.

I very much appreciate all the support and encouragement from colleagues within the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, particularly those in the Sexualities and Gender Research Group, the Childhood Research Group, and the Post Grad Café. I'm also extremely grateful for all the support I've received from my friends and family.

Special thanks to Debbie Epstein and Emma Renold for their unwavering belief and for keeping me buoyed up when I hit low points and difficult patches – you've been truly amazing supervisors.

Finally, thank you Bec for taking every step with me. It would have been impossible without you.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Shanice comes to see me on the playground. She says, “Hey David do you still go out with Rebecca?” I nod and say “yes”. “Have you married her yet?” she says. “No”, I reply. “When *are* you going to marry her?” she asks.

Field notes, St. Baker’s

In some ways ‘romance’ is an unfortunate term, conjuring up visions of pink chiffon and a couple wandering off dreamily, hand in hand, into the sunset, ready to live happily ever after. The Cinderella of the fairy-tale, blissfully in love with her Prince Charming, the Sleeping Beauty awakened with a kiss. In other words, a fantasy – but what’s wrong with that?

Baker 1997:3 – from the Introduction to *Writing a Romantic Novel and getting published*

Introduction: Playground romance

I begin with the title ‘Playground romance’ because it encapsulates a certain way of thinking about children’s relationships with each other. It is the kind of phrase that we might hear being used to position children as immature or innocent; they are having a ‘playground romance’, someone might say, because they are too young to engage in adult relationship practices or because they do not *really* know what those relationships or practices mean. It is also a phrase that says something about the institutional spaces and practices of childhood, as governed and perceived by adults. Someone might say that, primarily, children learn, in school and from each other, and that this is what they are doing when they are having so-called ‘boyfriends’ or ‘girlfriends’ – they are learning how to have future *adult* relationships. Children’s other principal activity, our

hypothetical person might say, is play, and when they say they are 'going out' or 'dating' they are *playing* at real relationships rather than actually having them; this is how they learn.

Like many scholars working in both childhood studies and critical sexualities, the position that I argue for in this thesis is that children's relationships amount to a great deal more than this. While children are undoubtedly learning how to be members of society, this process of socialization is far more complex than the common perceptions outlined above suggest. Children's own practices and systems of value – known as their 'relationship cultures' (Epstein et al 2001b) – must be understood and appreciated in their own right, if a balanced view of contemporary childhood is to be assembled. Such a perspective, importantly, values children's own voices and opinions in their own right, rather than positioning children as proto-adults. The foci for work of this ilk are the 'frameworks of understanding' about relationships that children have an active part in negotiating and re-constructing through their day-to-day interactions. So when children claim to be 'going out' and to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, this is understood as a genuine relationship practice, involving the uptake of specific subject positions made available by a socially maintained culture of relationships. Similarly, it is within their cultures that children govern and assert the complex understandings of their peer group bonds – their friendships – which they often invest in deeply. Moreover, it is within these relationship cultures that children negotiate the meanings and practices of their everyday lives.

That being said, discourses of gender and sexuality have a great bearing on how children conduct their friendships and other relationships, just as is the case for those at other stages of the life course. Along with other researchers who work on sexuality, I

contend that sexuality is much more than just sex. Rather, it consists of a myriad of cultural understandings and social interactions developed in particular situations, times and places (Mellor & Epstein 2006). As theorists like Weeks (1986; 1991) and Foucault (1978) have effectively argued, the cultural and social construction of sexualities takes place through discourse. Identities, and consequently genders and sexualities, have been and continue to be shaped by historically specific cultures, rather than simply being determined by nature. And as a number of scholars who have drawn on Foucault, Weeks, and other social constructionists have shown, it is possible to explore sexuality in terms of people's creativity and agency, while retaining an understanding of how professionals and institutions exert considerable influence over the subject positions made available to them (see Vance 1995).

Sexuality, then, includes all the cultural practices adopted by people (in this thesis, specifically children), from childhood games like 'kiss-chase', through dating and dumping practices, romantic ideals and stories, to the social and legal institutions (like marriage) through which we organise our sexual lives (Mellor & Epstein 2006). Of course, it is a particular form of *heterosexuality* that it institutionalised through these social structures and lived cultures (Rich 1980; Bhattacharyya 2002). This form of institutional heterosexuality is supported by a dominant body of normative ideas about gender. As Butler (1990) has argued, the matrix of everyday gendered practices, and the mass of naturalised gendered knowledge that informs these practices, renders unnoticed the heterosexual framework by which people are compelled to live. So although gender is not simply collapsible into, or a natural expression of sexuality, the compulsory and institutional nature of heterosexuality makes it appear so (Rubin, 1984). The ensuing discourse of normatively gendered

heterosexuality is supported by and dependent on certain narratives – compelling stories about the way things are and *should* be (like romantic love) – that inform, shape, and are negotiated by people as they try to go about, and make sense of, the world that they live in (Bruner 1990; Plummer 1995). Therefore, to take or desire a subject position like ‘girlfriend’ or ‘boyfriend’ is to position oneself within the discourse of institutional heterosexuality. And to be a member of a gendered friendship group depends on performing a type of friendship in relation to culturally dominant notions of femininity or masculinity, which are, in turn, mediated by heterosexuality.

Any analysis of children’s relationship cultures then, must surely take into account both the creativity and agency of children, and the powerful, even hegemonic, influence of compulsory heterosexuality and dominant discourses of gender. Throughout the chapters of this thesis I construct an analysis of how these joint forces manifest in a group of children’s negotiations of the events, meanings, and episodes of their everyday lives. I do this by focusing on how the participants in my research understood and invested in romance and romantic love. As I will explain below, romance is taken to mean a variety of things, but all of these involve *a specific way of thinking about the self and the real or imagined bonds between the self and significant others*. One such way is the popular romantic bond between the heterosexual couple, epitomised through the narrative of the wedding; but equally romantic, I argue, is the bond experienced in certain kinds of same-sex friendship, particularly at transitional points of the life course. So while ‘popular romance’ is a key narrative that operates in support of institutional heterosexuality, the romantic sensibility more broadly affects the core values we attach to our being together with others. Furthermore, romance is an important area for sociological investigation because it consists in a mixture

of individually experienced emotions, interpersonal relations, institutional discourses and economic systems. Moreover, both romantic love and something we might call romantic friendship, are forms of relationship that the majority of people in Western cultures invest in immensely. But love and friendship are topics that are often under-theorised and seldom researched by sociologists (Johnson 2005). This project is intended to be a contribution to the field of what might be called the sociology of personal relationships.

This thesis explores the prominence of romance and romantic love in the relationship cultures of a cohort of children. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork that took place at three primary schools and one high school over the period of a year, it examines the various ways that the children invested in and understand romance and romantic love during the significant rite of passage of the transfer between primary and secondary educational phases. Although the research was situated in schools, it is important to highlight from the outset that this is a cultural, rather than an educational study. It shows that romance was a key part of the children's negotiations of their own and others identities and relationships, and that this was shaped in powerful ways by discourses of gender, sexuality and social class.

Research questions

When I first started to approach this topic I had one overarching research question. That was:

- *How do children understand and invest in romance and romantic love?*

As the design and staging of my project developed (as outlined in Chapter 2) a range of other research questions clustered around this initial point of inquiry. These can be summarised as follows:

- *How are the children's peer groups structured in terms of gendered sexuality? And how do they understand and govern their own hetero-gendered relationship cultures?*
- *When constructing narratives about relationships, how do they negotiate and draw on meanings from both popular and local culture?*
- *How does gender and social class affect the children's investments in different kinds of romantic relationships? How do these investments shape their imagined futures?*
- *How are these children's experiences and understandings of their own childhoods affected by gender and social class culture?*
- *How do the children negotiate various kinds of sexuality knowledge, within the contexts of their own cultures, their schools, and the research project?*

- *How do they understand and define friendship? And in what ways are their friendships romanticised?*
- *In what ways do romantic narratives manifest before or after the transfer between primary and secondary phases of education?*

Throughout the following chapters I address these research questions by drawing on a rich variety of data from my fieldwork.

An outline of the thesis

In **Chapter 2**, I provide the story of the beginnings of the research, showing why the topic of romance was chosen and why I decided to situate the fieldwork during the primary-secondary transfer. I also talk about how my theoretical stance developed during the initial phases of the project. I then provide the background details for the various settings for the fieldwork, introducing the schools and other sites where the research took place, and discussing the many and continuing points of access that had to be negotiated.

Chapter 3 covers two significant topics: romance and childhood. To begin, I discuss romance and explore the *romances* at work in this thesis. Specifically, I identify and work with the following:

- *Playground romance*: The children's own practices, meanings, investments and understandings with regard to relationships.
- *Popular romance*: Themes and practices woven and represented throughout popular culture that are heavily influenced by institutional heterosexuality.

- *Subjects of Romance*: The idea that a historic, genealogical conception of ‘the Romantic’ is crucial to understanding how subjects are formed in late modern societies. A shared cultural history that continues to be played through all spheres of meaning making.
- *Sociological romance*: The romantic notions that, twinned with enlightenment notions of truth and progress, are embedded within the idea of social research and much sociological theory.
- *Writer’s romance*: My own motivations and meanings for pursuing this (and any) research project, known and unconscious.

In the second half of the chapter I discuss how childhood has been theorised within recent social studies of childhood, outlining and critically engaging with the major themes of the paradigm. I then move on to analyse how these theories might be put into practice by examining various arguments about how adult researchers should go about conducting research with children. The chapter ends with a discussion about the complexities of children’s cultures and how they are structured by gender/sexuality relations.

Building on the previous chapter, **Chapter 4** looks specifically at the methods of data gathering and analysis used in my fieldwork. Starting with a critical discussion about the model of ethnography that was adopted for the fieldwork, the chapter goes on to detail the various methods that were used within this methodology, including, observation and participation, group interviews, diary writing, creative writing, drama, friendship maps, and improvisation. Data from the fieldwork are used throughout to provide examples. The chapter then moves on to outline what I

have called the 'social strata', which represent a heuristic way of thinking about overlapping and intersecting socio-cultural forces. These are as follows:

- *Gendered sexuality*: The heterogeneous assemblage of practices and meanings that govern conduct in terms of gender relations and objects of desire.
- *Social class*: Defined principally in terms of cultural practices, but also factoring in the complex matrix of socio-economic and financial determinants.
- *Ethnicity/race*: Conceptions of shared descent that affect the uptake of subject positions and classification of identities.
- *Age and the life course*: The social ordering of the passing of time and of bodily changes in an individual's life, and in the lives of a generational cohort.
- *Media*: From local news to global cinema and the Internet.
- *The state and government*: The Government and legislature, political rationalities and neo-liberal technologies.
- *Economic markets*: National, international and global commercial forces that shape subjectivities. Through products and services they manipulate the conditions of desire and create consumer subject positions.

As I argue in the chapter, these strata reflect the major ways that the contemporary social world is structured and understood. I conclude by outlining how this complex, multi-causal, inter-relational picture of social processes will be used to analyse the data from my fieldwork, detailing the four main perspectives that I take: *discourse, dialogue, intersubjectivity, and context*.

Chapter 5 looks at how the children in the study understood and organised their 'relationship economies.' Drawing on interview

data and field notes, I explore how the children defined 'going out', 'seeing' and other everyday relationship practices and the rules by which they were governed. I begin with the ways that the children spoke about what I term the 'archaeology of love' in their primary schools; the ways they spoke about their younger selves as having relationships in the early years, and how they talked about the practices of previous Year 6 classes. I then analyse how girls and boys talked about their gendered peer groups, how they understood the differences between boys and girls, and how they discussed the organisation of friendships and 'going out' relationships. The last sections of this chapter look at how their relationship practices evolved over the transfer to high school, focusing specifically on how a set of relationship 'rules' can be developed and analysed from a detailed interview extract.

Chapter 6 explores the intersections between popular and other 'global' cultures and the children's local relationship cultures. It begins with an in-depth analysis of how the children used the research notebooks to draw pictures of and write stories about their friends, focusing on how one group of girls defined themselves in hetero-gendered ways by negotiating their membership of two sub-groups: the 'single crew' and the 'lover losers'. I then discuss how the children navigated different forms of 'official' and 'unofficial' sexuality knowledge in the school context, using the examples of a group of boys discussing pornography, and a group of girls and boys talking about sex education. The last sections of the chapter illustrate some of the ways that sexual/gendered knowledge was produced as a result of my presence in the schools, and how the children drew on my hetero-gendered, embodied subjectivity to explore their own sense of self within their everyday cultures.

Chapter 7 begins by mapping out the different kinds of childhood that were evident in diaries that I asked the children to write as part of the research, showing how their experiences were influenced by social class and gender. These themes are carried through to an exploration of how romance was spoken during interviews and in other research contexts, as I analyse the different affects of class and gender on the articulation of romantic narratives. This analysis then focuses on how the girls in particular used my biography and loving relationship to draw me into their relationship economies, and to explore their own romantic fantasies. I go on to examine how the children's friendships were shaped by dominant discourses of hetero-gender and romantic ideals. Firstly, I take the example of a friendship between a boy and a girl and show how, despite their best intentions and protests, their friendship was heterosexualised. Then, using one of the primary schools as an example, I look at how boys and girls defined friendship and identified who their friends were. This provides the basis for the final section, where I introduce the idea of the 'friendship escape', whereby, I argue, the children attempted to use romanticised narratives of friendship to escape the uncertainties and instabilities of their social worlds; importantly, however, I show how these escapes were shaped by social class.

Chapter 8 takes a close look at two particular research activities. In the first half I discuss the stories written during a creative writing exercise where I asked the children to write anything they wanted to about friendship. Here, I juxtapose a number of extracts from the stories with my own analysis of the narrative resources and boundaries available to the children when telling such stories. Specifically, I illustrate how the stories fall into certain categories: biographical, fictional and other styles; fantasy, reality and spatiality; popular and local narratives; and, romantic

friendships. I then take one story by a girl called Anna and use it to develop the theme of romantic friendship, looking at how this relationship narrative is shaped by the psychosocial intersection of gender and social class. The second half of this chapter looks at an activity involving 'symmetrical interviewing,' where I asked groups of children to interview me on the themes of the research. This activity was undertaken at one of the primary schools and in this section I examine the transcripts of these interviews in detail, illustrating how, by putting my own relationship culture in conversation with the children's, such interviews can be used to build an insightful perspective on the children's social worlds, their relationship bonds and emotional investments.

Chapter 9 explores the transitions and endings of the project. It begins with the children talking about their anxieties and excitement about making the move to secondary or high school, and then illustrates how the final days of school created a liminal space where they could explore and disrupt dominant forms of hetero-gendered practice. I then discuss the 'rites and wrongs of passage' by looking at how the children managed their transition to the new hierarchy of high school student culture. This is accompanied by an examination of how the children used newly acquired mobile technologies in their representational practices and as forms of cultural capital that provided power within their peer groups and which disrupted the disembodied and asexual discourse of the classroom. The chapter ends with several examples of how the children 'blurred the boundaries' of the life course through their own constructions and definitions of childhood, the teenage and adulthood. In this presentation of their current lives and imagined futures, once again the influence of gender and social class is shown to be powerful.

In the overall conclusion in **Chapter 10**, I draw together all the analyses from the preceding chapters and illustrate how they have addressed the overarching research question by discussing each of the subsidiary research questions in turn.

Notes on the politics of writing

I feel that it is important to include some notes about the politics of writing here at the beginning of the thesis. Some of the issues I go on to examine below are also discussed in other sections, particularly the chapter about method/theory (Chapter 4), but it is vital to outline from the outset how this work is informed by certain theories and politics about the construction of academic texts and the claims to knowledge contained therein. This section then, is both a coda to the introduction, and a precursor to the broader discussion of methods situated throughout the following three chapters. Its focus is specifically the method of writing.

In the introduction to *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies* (2005), Glenda Mac Naughton explains how knowledge is inseparable from politics. Using the work of Foucault (1977) and other poststructuralist theorists (Derrida 1974; Deleuze & Guattari 1987) Mac Naughton demonstrates how she engages with the politics of knowledge in an attempt to work towards greater social justice and equity, thereby positioning her work within the “wider social project of education for emancipation” (Mac Naughton 2005:2). Although Mac Naughton’s book is about practice and research in early years education, its critical framework can be transposed to other areas of social research, especially the idea of the practice of research as “a *complex ethical and political endeavour borne of critical reflection informed by poststructuralist ideas of knowledge, truth and power*” (Mac Naughton 2005: 17-18, my emphasis). Indeed, there are many examples of such an approach in the field of sexuality and gender

studies (see, for example, Connell 2005; Davies 2003; Frosh et al 2002; Holland et al 1998; Jackson 1999). My research is positioned within this body of work, drawing from and building on many of these authors. Furthermore, while I am not claiming a position within educational studies, I do feel that the knowledge politics of my work can feed into the 'social project of education for emancipation', and as I discuss in Chapter 10, I hope this will be the case.

Through a dialogue with the work of theorists like Foucault (1972; 1991), Derrida (1974), Deleuze and Guattari (1977) and others, and feminist scholars like Mac Naughton (2005) and Walkerdine (1990; 1997), I have attempted to interrogate the 'regimes of truth' that inform and shape the construction of my own research texts. Moreover, Mac Naughton's is a key text for me in the construction of this thesis as it has been perhaps more instructive than any other concerning the actual practice of writing¹. Throughout *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies* Mac Naughton looks at how situations, texts, events, interactions and other kinds of data are interpreted and then represented in research texts. She asks difficult and searching questions about how forms of representation are chosen and the kinds of truth that are constructed through these choices. Furthermore, she outlines various tactics for confronting, troubling and deconstructing the meanings of data through different forms of interpretive writing. I feel it is critical for me to briefly discuss these issues at the outset as they fundamentally underscore my work in terms of the interpretation of data through the forms of textual representation in all of the following chapters

¹ I use the word 'writing' but of course all of my work (save some planning) has been undertaken on a computer and therefore typed. I think it is important to note that this is the case because it is an area of embodied research practice that is often hidden or unreported. It is possible that the notion of typing seems unpalatable because it suggests the alienation of the author from their work, which the romantic idea of the flow of ink onto paper (down generations of writers) apparently avoids.

Making stability from a messy world

Writing is a political act because it involves the construction of knowledge. It involves the selection and framing of data in a process that silences alternative readings, and therefore tidies up what is likely to have been a complex event, or sequences of events. Law (2003, 2004) argues that the social world is messy and that trying to impose simplification and stability onto mess does not really help us understand it, even though it may seem that way. Law's intuition, that the social world is a messy place, is one I share. To use a Freudian metaphor, many widely utilised approaches to writing research texts repress that which cannot be subsumed into a streamlined, orderly and, to use one of Law's terms, 'hygienic' manuscript. He offers an alternate view, arguing that,

In practice research needs to be messy and heterogeneous. It needs to be messy and heterogeneous because that is the way it, research, actually is. And also, and more importantly, it needs to be messy because that is the way the largest part of the world is. Messy, unknowable in a regular and routinised way. Unknowable, therefore, in ways that are definite and coherent... Clarity doesn't help. Disciplined lack of clarity, that may be what we need.

Law 2003:3

Law (2004) also helps us to build a strong case for viewing research writing as political. I suggested above that research texts are political in one sense because of the choices they contain about representation. Law adds another level here by explaining how research texts are political in terms of the differences their construction makes.

Since social (and natural) science investigations interfere with the world, in one way or another they always make a difference, politically or otherwise. Things change as a

result. The issue, then, is not to seek disengagement [either through defeatism or political quietism] but rather with how to engage. It is about how to make good differences in circumstances where reality is both unknowable and generative.

Law 2004:7

He goes on to suggest that,

[We can] subvert method by helping to remake methods: that are not moralist; that imagine and participate in politics and other forms of good in novel and creative ways; and that start to do this by escaping the postulate of singularity, and responding to a world that is taken to be composed of an excess of generative forces and relations.

Law 2004:9

For Law then, it is vital that we engage with the political and other effects of our research practices. To write about our fieldwork encounters and observations as if we can view ‘what’s *really* going on’ if we apply the correct methodology is to mistakenly believe that properly applied methods of writing can reveal truths about the social world in straightforward ways (Scheurich 1997). Others too have argued that we should abandon the idea that interpretative methods give the researcher greater proximity to *the* truth (see for example, Walkerdine 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001). Moreover, if we respond with reductionist strategies when faced with the ‘excess of generative forces and relations’, how can we hope to get any sense of the dynamic, relational and ever-shifting network of conflicting forces that play through us and our research participants? (Eagleton 1997). The social world, as Bakhtin (1981) highlights, is a ‘heteroglossia’, “a vast congeries of contesting meanings” (Holquist 2002:24), a disorderly jumble of signs whose meanings are historically and culturally contingent. The ordering of signs and the suppressing of the heteroglot is something that a structural system of power relations – a regime

of truth – demands. The genre of academic research writing is one such structural system, as it depends on the presentation of a series of events that have been through the hygienic process of generic positioning. I argue that, if one is attuned to the ethical and political nature of research, it is important to recognise that this form of structuring occurs within one’s texts. This is an ongoing and open-ended practice, which is concerned with recognising the process through which regimes of truth are at work in the rhetoric of the academic text. Furthermore, it requires that authors use reflexive techniques and other forms of writing as part of a wider strategy for taking responsibility for the knowledge claims that their texts construct. I hope to do this by ‘troubling truths poststructurally’ (Mac Naughton 2005).

Following this commitment, the methods we choose to represent the world – our forms of writing – should not aim to reduce the excesses revealed by data to singular interpretations and meanings, or models of straightforward cause-and-effect, but should be used to build a more complex story about research (Mac Naughton 2005; Walkerdine et al 2001). As Mac Naughton (2005) stresses, we should aim to confront and challenge our own efforts to produce the truths that govern us, our participants, and the way we see the world. The violent nature of knowledge created by research texts lays in the capacity for such texts (their power) to present one view of the social world that captures, holds, frames and enslaves people within certain parameters (Bourdieu 1991). As Foucault contends, inequalities are generated whenever people are positioned within such a regime of truth:

Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason... Rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence.

Foucault 1977:163

Yet, it is possible to disrupt regimes of truth and to use power/knowledge tactically. Many feminist scholars have argued that the tactics of research should focus on a search for marginalised and multiple truths in an effort to illustrate and reveal the workings of power relations, most notably patriarchy and the constructed inequalities of the dominant gender order (see, for example, Naples 2003; Oakley 2000). Similarly, postcolonial theory and research has sought to unveil the relations of power that position certain groups on the basis of ethnicity/race (see, for example, Gilroy 2002, 2006; Said 2003). Moreover, those working within critical sexuality studies have used comparable techniques to disrupt notions of biological determinism, and to reveal how heterosexuality is compulsory, institutional and historical (see, for example, Lacquer 1990; Weeks 1995). Throughout this thesis I hold in mind the perspectives of feminism, postcolonialism and critical sexuality studies to trouble and re-imagine the politics and methods of writing in an attempt to use power/knowledge tactically.

But this approach is not, and cannot be a 'complete' one, because of the very nature of power and the practice of knowledge construction. The practice of research itself is an inescapably modernist undertaking (Law 2004; Scheurich 1997) and even with concerted effort on the part of the writer to make a text 'post-modern', they will almost certainly end up with a mixture of modernism and postmodernism in their work, especially when there are recognised political and emancipatory intentions

underlying the research (Francis 2002). Moreover, as Butler (1993) highlights, the resources available for disruption and radicalism are always 'impure', as they are inevitably anchored in contemporary conditions of possibility, carrying the traces and scares of previous power struggles.

Rhizomes and rhetoric

If, as a consequence of textual practice, realities (or regimes of truth) are enacted, then the singularity of 'truth' is displaced as the only standard by which representations can be judged². A resulting argument can then be made in favour of additional *political* reasons for the enactment and preference of one reality rather than another. Following Mol (1999), Law (2004) defines this as 'ontological politics:' the implication being that there are a variety of possible reasons, especially the political, for enacting one kind of reality rather than another. This has immense implications for the writing of research, the construction of rhetoric, and debates about interpretation. And it has been argued that one particularly effective approach to ontological politics is rhizoanalysis. Here I will briefly outline how such an argument might be framed.

The metaphor of the rhizome is contrasted with that of the tree of knowledge, which offers explanations in terms of cause-and-effect relationships, of roots and branches, beginnings and ends, traces of descent. As Deleuze & Guattari explain, "a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance" (1987:25). Rhizoanalysis focuses on the dynamic and 'always-becoming', as opposed to the fixed and

² This is not an outright denial of the possibility of truth, rather a reframing of the issue in terms of multiplicity. In place of the singular and reducible is positioned the multiple and shifting. However, this is not the same as pluralism, which is arguably a version of singularity (see Law 2004 for an extended argument about these issues).

finished 'being' that is supported by linear logic. Thus, to think rhizomatically is to deploy a lateral form of logic that is flexible, and which accommodates the heterogeneous and the changing. This perspective challenges more mechanical and hierarchical notions of social structure by emphasising its dynamic properties, and, by extension, the fluctuating and shifting nature of power (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Mac Naughton 2005). Power envisioned in this way requires strategies for disruption and social change that are radically different from those that are founded on the idea that power is fixed in finalised formations. Deleuze & Guattari (1987:7) characterise the rhizome as something that "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles".

These and similar metaphors, emphasising the endlessly rewritten and inscribed, the reiterated, the becoming, planes, and flows, have been used to great effect in gender and sexuality theory (Braidotti 2002; Butler 1990, 1993; Grosz 1994). This view of the always-becoming is also something I deploy in my constructions of children's relationship cultures. Looking rhizoanalytically at the data gathered during my fieldwork, one can see children's friendship groups and peer cultures as heterogeneous assemblages (Prout 2005) – that is, as complex, messy clusters of practice that are irreducible to simple relations. As I note in Chapter 3, this raises serious questions about how they are represented in research texts. One way of approaching this may be through the use of rhizoanalysis for political ends within the re-construction of research texts, because, as Mac Naughton (2005) argues, by

Using rhizomatic logic, we can deconstruct and reconstruct meanings and, in doing so, challenge our 'will to truth' and find strategies to 'become' differently. We can map other

possibilities and other ways of knowing, while remaining open to rewriting them...Rhizoanalysis offers a tool for critically reflecting on how meaning is produced through the choices we make about what we use to map them.

Mac Naughton 2005:145

In terms of writing research, rhizoanalysis involves the reconstruction of the text that is responsive to multiplicity. There are no hard-and-fast rhizomatic methods as such, as rhizoanalysis is a reframing of logic, not a 'how-to', prescriptive approach. In the following section I outline how I have tried to use tools for writing that anticipate and appreciate becomings and complexity, but retain a sense of critical focus and political purpose.

Viewed rhizomatically, this thesis is a matrix of moments, observations, texts, representations, and voices, that has been *wilfully* constructed; and this 'will to knowledge' is constantly reopened, excavated and reflected upon. By recognising the processes of its production, the underlying 'will to truth' (Foucault 1991) that underpins this thesis has undergone a process of confrontation and disruption (Mac Naughton 2005). The use of rhizomatic logic is an attempt to construct understandings and meanings in such a way that orthodox methods of rhetoric are questioned, the mess of social reality is not shunned but embraced, and the political nature of (and the systems of power within) all writing is appreciated and acted upon. Through this form of writing the complexity of culture, technology and subjectivity should be glimpsed, although of course it can never be captured (held in stasis) because culture, technology and subjectivity, as I argue throughout this thesis, are blurred flows of dialogue situated within economic and material social structures,

which are themselves twisting and turning through historical³ change. The thesis is in one sense then, a politicised conduit, because it has been shaped to present the fluxional nature of subjects, technologies and cultures in a way that represents a purposeful attempt to make writing an ontologically political practice for liberty. But, in concluding this chapter, I want to ask: how far is this possible without risking its status as a doctoral dissertation?

Troubling the genre of the thesis: taking lines of flight

Having noted some critiques of the act of writing and constructing research texts and outlined an argument that might be used in favour of rhizoanalysis, it seems pertinent to ask how far these approaches can be incorporated into a doctoral dissertation, and, rather crucially, how desirable this incorporation actually is. A dissertation, of course, must fulfil certain criteria in order to ‘pass’, both in the sense of receiving an acceptable grade (and facilitating an academic rite-of-passage) and in the sense of having the appearance of a piece of work that falls within the correct generic boundaries. As Ramazanoglu (2002) explains,

Just as there is nothing neutral in your production of knowledge, so there is no way of presenting your findings that is independent of a particular style... The genre in which you present your findings may be dictated by your institution or other conventions, and choices of genre are generally limited... But conventions of any genre can be disrupted and radical critiques of method generally allow for authors to make their presence felt throughout the research process. (Feminists may bring in the personal, express emotions, ground abstractions or use poetry). But the point in presenting your findings is to be persuasive, and disruption of conventions may or may not serve your purpose.

Ramazanoglu 2002:163

³ In the terminology of Deleuze & Guattari this should perhaps read ‘geographical’.

The genre of the doctoral thesis cannot be ignored. The well-known requirements that the thesis has to be the original work of a single author, while simultaneously (and somewhat oxymoronic⁴) add to a certain body of work, are accompanied by an underlying requirement that the text be readable in such a way that these prerequisites are clearly seen to have been met. To construct a text that is overly playful or subversive may jeopardise the passing of the dissertation. The thesis itself must have answerability. Admitting, revealing and demonstrating that the processes of persuasion are underway in the text is one thing (Ramazanoglu 2002), but presenting a text that is too radical may mean that while one is tying together the garment of an argument, one is simultaneously unravelling it at the other end.

It is not my intention to place my work at this kind of risk and I will not take this path for several reasons. Principally, while experiments with style are important, I believe that the readability of the text (its answerability) overrides any necessity for experimentation. This is a key political point, as interventions in a wide range of areas will prove to be impossible if one's work is not easily understood. Also I doubt whether experimental styles can in themselves bring about the better or more ethical representation of research participants (a key and problematic concern I discuss in Chapter 4). I would suggest the political intentions of the author are still paramount and that the choice of textual styles – the tactics of representation employed – should reflect these intentions, as in Mac Naughton's (2005) use of poststructuralism for the 'deliberate practice for liberty'. Moreover it should be noted that 'traditional' research texts are not neutral in this respect, and nor are they necessarily predisposed to a more respectful or ethical representation of participants (Law 2004;

⁴ Especially from a dialogic viewpoint.

Scheurich 1997). The ethics/politics of the text can be unearthed in the acts of representation it contains. In Chapter 4 I make the argument that ethics/politics saturate all aspects of a research project, from inception to completion. Here I want to draw on Holquist's (2002) reflections on Bakhtin's arguments about authoring and authority.

For not only is snuffing out the "I" of other subjects bad aesthetics, it is bad politics. Dialogically conceived, authorship is a form of governance, for both are implicated in the architectonics of responsibility, each is a way to adjudicate center/non-center relations between subjects.

Holquist 2002:34

As far as possible I acknowledge that I am reflecting on experiences that are not entirely my own; but I chose to act openly, responsibly, democratically and reflexively with the data⁵. Consequently there are certain tactics that I deploy throughout the following chapters when I feel it is necessary to employ different styles of writing and/or analysis to achieve a particular goal that can be emphasised via representational practices. I do not entirely disavow what might be called the canonical 'social science genre'; far from it. Indeed, it is crucial to see that when placed within a range of approaches to writing, this generic style is revealed as being that which has crystallised around and been forged within a set of power relations – the Western culture of institutionalised, academic, social research. Deleuze & Guattari (1987) use the phrase 'lines of flight' to refer to movements made between assemblages, where what they call 'planes of organisation' (which are comparable to Foucault's 'regimes of truth') are overcome and a state of creative hybridisation is

⁵ There are a cluster of arguments about doing research with children as 'active participants' that reflect directly on these points. See the section on 'Doing Research with Children' in Chapter 4.

entered⁶. In terms of authoring, lines of flight are attempts to overcome the institutionalised culture, and in this sense they can be seen as “vectors of freedom, or at least freedom-from” (Bonta & Protevi 2004:107). The making of the thesis as a particular kind of assemblage rather than another is where its politics/ethics are amassed. In terms of thinking/writing this involves being nomadic: crossing solid boundaries in order to establish and present different becomings. My own limited attempts at engaging with this kind of work concern the voices of the research and how they are represented in this text.

By focusing on the processes of authoring and authority, the polyvocalism of the supposed singular author is recognised. As Bakhtin (1981, 1986) shows us, contained within the voice of one person are the voices of many others, so much so that we inhabit and navigate a ‘world of others words’. Likewise, the subject positions that are available to us are to a great extent ‘always already’ there in the culture we are delivered into (see Althusser 1971). The authorial voice is then, in itself, the site for multiple expression and dialogue. Similarly, as social research influenced by psychoanalytic theory has shown, the complex nature of a researcher’s subjectivity – the conflicts brought about by their anxieties and desires – can affect their understandings of particular data in a variety of ways (Hollway & Jefferson 2000, Walkerdine et al 2001). This seems to undermine any notion that texts produced by researchers can have their contradictions and discomforts ‘ironed out’ if only the right dose of method and the

⁶ It’s perhaps worth noting here that, along with Deleuze & Guattari (1987), I am not in favour of a simple switch to envisaging the world as entirely made of flows. As Bonta & Protevi (2004) point out, this entails a shift in underlying moral standards, rather than a Nietzschean move ‘beyond good and evil’. They state that, “rather than being postmodern moralists in favour of flow, [Deleuze & Guattari]... are cautious experimentalists, always demanding careful immanent (ethical) evaluation of the life-affirming or life-destroying character of assemblages” (Bonta & Protevi 2004:129).

right approach to writing is applied. To accommodate these perspectives I draw on dialogism and psychosocial theory.

In addition, it is likely that, while I make concerted efforts to disrupt power throughout this work, there will be moments, undercurrents and silences that reconstitute power relations in some way. Indeed, as Deleuze & Guattari highlight, “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given point, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:9). In my various attempts to disrupt this process of reterritorialisation I draw on various forms of reflexive writing, like autobiography, deployed in unison with a move away from traditionalist ways of representing research as a journey narrative, and towards a more dynamic and fluid, but nonetheless focused, text. Kehily (2002) makes a similar point when discussing her work on sexualities and schooling:

My approach has not attempted to recreate the reality-effect of field relations produced in a just-like-being-there linear narrative. Neither have I attempted to develop an overview of sexuality, gender and schooling based on empirical observations. Rather, I have looked for *moments* in the transcriptions that provide a commentary on the relationship between the domain of the sexual and the domain of the school. Having identified these moments, I began to think of them as discursive clusters – instances where ideas and relations are condensed in particular ways.

Kehily 2002:7, emphasis in original

These ‘discursive clusters’ could be thought of as kinds of assemblages. The point remains that one should, and indeed must, tell a compelling and convincing research story, but that there are alternative ways of doing this. In this section I have attempted to outline my rationale for this. My overarching point is that the creativity and the skill of writing should never

overshadow the politics/ethics of the text, yet there are many ways to tell an ethical story. As will become clear from the way I outline my approaches to the analysis of data in the forthcoming chapters, I do not believe that rhizoanalysis is a useful theory for engaging with the social world because, at the present time, I am yet to be convinced that it is a genuinely powerful tool for understanding people's everyday lives. I do think, however, that it can provide a useful way of thinking about the construction and presentation of texts, and the practice of academic writing.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis as a whole, underlined the central issues it explores, and outlined all the following chapters. It has also looked at some of the problematic politics of writing and how far these can be negotiated in writing and presenting a doctoral thesis for academic evaluation. In the next chapter I detail the story behind my doctoral research, including information about the development and framing of the research questions, the choice of sites for fieldwork and the processes involved in gaining access.

Chapter 2

Beginnings and Settings

“The use of ‘I’ explicitly recognises that... knowledge is contextual, situational and specific, and that it will differ systematically according to the social location (as a gendered, raced, classed, sexualised person) of the particular knowledge producer”.

Stanley 1993:50

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the course of the research project and provide details about the various sites and settings where the fieldwork took place. To begin, I look at the numerous ‘beginnings’ of this doctoral research project, exploring the reasons for taking the focus that I have on children’s friendship cultures and romantic love. Following this short overview I detail the timeframe for the research, providing explanations for the important practical and ethical decisions that shaped the course of my fieldwork. This leads into a broad description of each of the schools where the research took place, thereby ‘setting the scene’ for the data presented throughout the rest of the thesis. The emphasis on beginnings is then rejoined with a discussion of the many and continuing ‘entry points’ encountered during the fieldwork, from gaining access to schools in the first instance, to re-entering children’s cultures on a daily basis.

Backgrounds and Beginnings

I use the plural terms – backgrounds and beginnings – because I want to avoid presenting an overly simplified and linear narrative about the research. I do not wish not explain away multiplicity or contradiction (Law 2004). Rather, I hope to open up some of the investments that lead to this choice of research topic and look at some of the important events that shaped its undertaking. By

taking an autobiographical perspective I am not suggesting that it is possible to tell a 'truer story' about my research, because writing in this way necessarily serves a purpose and therefore creates many silences. However, I want to reveal some of the 'hinterlands' of the research that are often concealed in writing about research.

Choosing to research romance

The first stages of this doctoral project began when I was an undergraduate. As part of the study for my degree I undertook a short research project that looked at how men who identified as either heterosexual or homosexual talked about their relationships and, in doing so, took various narrative positions within romance, or, put another way, enacted different kinds of 'love styles' (Lee 1973). Although I very much wanted to do a research project of some kind (this was not a compulsory element of my degree) perhaps the key reason for choosing to research popular romance was that a course on 'Love and Society' that was sometimes available as an optional module was not being offered at the time. As this was a module that had caught my eye when I had been applying to study for a degree in sociology, I wanted to find some way of engaging with the literature.

Part of the attraction of studying sociology was the idea that I would have my own and commonly held perceptions of the world questioned, or, as I prefer to call it, 'troubled'. In this respect I was drawn to sociology because I thought it had exotic perspectives to offer and could provide specially and powerfully perceptive answers. (In many ways my engagement with the sociological and academia was itself a romanticised journey of self- and Other-discovery). I was certainly attracted to the idea that I could find new perspectives and answers about my own relationships and

personal life. I was driven, one could say, by a mixture of narcissism and the 'will to knowledge' (and, therefore, power).

This, of course, is one story that I am able to tell in this particular place. It is not an entirely comfortable story to tell, as I would like to think otherwise to this narrative, but it is this kind of uncomfortable reflexivity that can be the most revealing and important (Pillow 2003). In other times and places the story may be, and indeed has been, constructed differently. Moreover, taking a psychoanalytic lens, one could say that there are investments that I am myself unaware of or defend against, and I believe that this is likely, but obviously beyond the scope and remit of this study. Having said that, as I explain in the forthcoming chapters (see Chapter 4 in particular), I have found a psychosocial perspective helpful for interpreting research relationships and data (see Hollway & Jefferson 2000 for example). Although I have not and will not go into extended detail here about the various personal reasons for doing a research project about romantic love, I am hoping to achieve some level of transparency by noting that these personal investments are key to understanding my choices. There is, moreover, no singularly real or true story to tell. However, where apposite, I do deploy certain stories about myself where they are capable of shedding alternative light on data and the complicated circumstances of its production (see Chapter 9 for example). Indeed, it should always be remembered that personal biographies play a large part in determining the focus for any research project, as do the historical, cultural and social positionings of the researcher (Ramazanoglu 2002). Furthermore, the theoretical model of subjectivity that I present in Chapter 3 requires that this is a primary consideration.

Setting questions and selecting settings

One of the questions that I raised during the conclusion of my undergraduate project was 'how do people learn to be romantic?' Although I had read many theories I found them unsatisfactory. It seemed that while love and romance were of monumental if not central importance to people's lives, there was little sociological attention paid to this area of everyday experience (Jackson 1999). Similarly I would discover that friendship was also underdeveloped sociologically (see Spencer & Pahl 2006). Many approaches to love and friendship remained anchored in models of socialisation or ideology that did not attend to the nuances, subtleties, differences and urgencies of people's socio-emotional lives. A case in point is Berger & Berger's (1976) explanation of how young people came to take on the dominant beliefs of their society.

Socialization is a process of initiation into the social world, its forms of interaction and its many meanings. The social world of his [sic] parents first confronts the child as an external, vastly powerful and mysterious reality.

Berger & Berger 1976:63-64

The problem here was the assumption that children had little choice in how they thought about or conducted themselves in their personal relationships and were therefore granted little agency. But it was these and other, similar theories (Goode 1973; Spaulding 1970) that provided the starting position from where I would undertake my review of relevant literatures, and begin to shape my research. Furthermore, through engaging with texts dealing with critical studies of sexuality I became aware of how romance and romantic love were part of 'institutional' and 'compulsory' heterosexuality (Rich 1983). This helped me go on to frame my research within studies of gender and sexuality. The impetus for my engagement with this area of study was a course

on 'contested sexualities', convened by Celia Kitzinger, which I undertook at the very end of my undergraduate degree.

Having determined that I wanted to study romantic love and personal relationships, I had to find a setting to do this⁷. At the time my thinking was not entirely dissimilar to the theories that I found so lacking. I started with the most basic assumption that I could reduce my thinking to, reasoning that there must be a time when people learn to act romantically and consequently regenerate the dominant 'feeling norms' of their society (Hochschild 1979, 1983; Simon et al 1992). At the heart of this problem then, is a fundamental issue in sociology: the relationship between the individual and the society. The problem in understanding this relationship is that theoretical frameworks often get stuck describing social action in terms of either volunteerism or determinism (Giddens 1991)⁸. It is not just sociology but much of western philosophy that has grappled with this problem. I recognised early on that the best approach would be to hold these issues in tension by accepting a position of 'complex determinism' (Eagleton 1997). As my work progressed it became clear that poststructuralist theory was the conceptual framework best suited to provide me with the analytic tools required for interpreting the phenomena of romance and romantic love. As Bronwyn Davies (2003) explains,

⁷ At the time I was thinking about doing a PhD I drafted up two quiet different research proposals. One was developed and the other was not. My other proposal was about the construction of gender and sexuality in the texts of evolutionary psychology. I intended to look at how these scientific models were shaped by hetero-normative discourses, how they were disseminated in the genre of popular psychology, and how people used these models in understanding their own gendered and sexual conduct.

⁸ The work of Foucault has been accused of getting stuck in both these perspectives. His earlier work describes agency in terms of resistance, while his latter writing on the 'technologies of the self' can be seen as strongly emphasising volunteerism (Hartmann 2003).

Poststructuralist theory undoes the boundaries between the disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and studies of literature. It demonstrates that we need to look not just at the work that collectives collaboratively do to construct gendered worlds but also to look at the work the language does to limit, shape, make possible, one kind of a world or another. At the same time, it makes relevant the emotional, psychic and physical embeddedness of individuals in the discursively constituted categories to which they are subjected. [...] Poststructuralist theory looks at the constitutive force of social structures and of language as well as at the individual person (or subject) and sees each of these in their social and historical contexts.

Davies 2003:xx

Throughout the thesis I infuse perspectives from several key theorists in an attempt to produce a rich picture of the complex social processes at work within the children's friendship cultures. I use these closely with the data I have gathered, working and blending (or at least holding in tension) the 'insider' perspectives of the children and the 'outsider' perspectives of the analysts, including myself. In short, this is my version of a contemporary critical ethnography.

Drawing on Foucault (1972, 1991, 1998) (and interpretations of his work) I look at how processes of subjectification occur, thinking about how individuals are objectified by certain professions and categorizations, through binary oppositions such as 'good' or 'bad', and how the subject is created *and* actively lived through power relations. Building on this, I use Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1991) to think about how subjects are formed in – and then inhabit – particular contexts. With his use of *habitus* Bourdieu offers a way to begin to think about how the social and the subject are necessarily intertwined and, when used in conjunction with theories from critical psychology (see Layton 2004), provides a fruitful way to think about how subjects are multiply mediated by the psychic and the social; how the former is embedded in the

latter and vice versa. Furthermore, I am interested in how Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) work provides templates for thinking about the dialogical nature of social and cultural life. His theory of dialogism provides a useful perspective on the actual processes through which culture is re-spoken through people's intersubjective social lives. This then makes it possible to envisage how global forces and local relations interact in a multilayered system.

Through using Bourdieu and Bakhtin, together with Foucault, I can talk about the 'conditions of possibility' of relationship practices and cultures, exploring how it is possible to speak of relationships in particular ways, and undertake practices that are ascribed with particular meanings in late modern societies. People have agency – they make choices, driven by both the rational and emotional – but these choices are always shaped psychosocially and are under a compulsion to be interpreted in certain ways: the social influences the subject from above and below.

In my writing and representing I attempt to disrupt the systems of power I recognise (rather than reproduce them) by drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), particularly the concepts of assemblage, rhizome, and the nomadic. Deleuze and Guattari also provide the apparatus for thinking about contemporary childhoods as certain kinds of assemblages; comprised of subjects, technologies, markets, temporalities and spaces (see Prout 2005 for example). However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, I am unsure at present how far this particular approach can be usefully applied to the analysis of data from people's everyday lives.

The conceptual framework of poststructuralism helped me to overcome many of the problems that I faced with the older

socialisation or ideology models of romance and romantic love. At the point at which I chose the setting for my research however, these were issues and theories that I had yet to fully engage with. As a result I was drawn to the idea that children learned to understand their personal relationships in heterosexualised and romanticised ways through a process of socialisation that involved their families, their friends and their schooling. This then led to my initial research question: *How do children come to understand and invest in romance and romantic love?* As the introduction to this thesis illustrates, this central question was to develop subtly but substantially in its focus. This was mainly due to the ways that I re-focused the research as a result of my engagement with poststructural theory. Although the importance of the family, friendships and education remained, the question was altered to become: *How do children understand and invest in romance and romantic love?* In contrast to its earlier incarnation, this was an answerable question; there was no way within the context and confines of this project that I could make a sensible attempt at addressing how children *came to* understand and invest in romance. This refined focus laid the way for the later theoretical developments discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

It was clear that my main research participants would be children and I would need to find a setting where I could work with a suitable cohort. I was certain that if I wanted to approach my research question in the most productive way then I would need to undertake extended qualitative research, utilising a range of ethnographic methods. Aware of the difficulties of doing research with children and young people outside of educational settings, and influenced principally by the work of Debbie Epstein (1998) and Emma Renold (2000) (both of whom would become my doctoral supervisors by choice and by chance) I considered the primary school to be the ideal place to undertake my fieldwork.

However, because I had worked voluntarily in primary schools for several years I was conscious of my own comfort in this kind of setting and I wanted to challenge this to some degree, so that I did not risk producing a set of my own assumptions about the research topic based on previous observations⁹. As a result, I decided to conduct research in both primary and secondary schools, following a single cohort of children as they made the transition between phases of schooling. This early decision then opened up a range of further research questions. Most importantly it presented questions about identity and transition.

Turning to autobiography, memory work and subjectivity

My own experience of secondary school was not entirely positive, beginning as it did during a period of family break up and the loss of friendships. It was not a comfortable time to revisit and I experienced a great deal of anxiety about taking the decision to spend time in a secondary school. When I actually went to St. Baker's high school during the final phase of the fieldwork I confronted many of these emotions head-on, but I also used them at the development stage of the project to shape my approach to the study of the transition. Drawing on writing about autobiography and 'memory work' (Kehily 1995; Letherby 2003) I began to explore my own feelings and understandings about the primary/secondary transition. I found that the value of this memory work lay in the way it provided an opportunity to examine myself as a 'subject' and to place my own experience within the social context (Letherby 2003:9). However, aware of the limitations of such an approach, I did not use memory work in an effort to access my own 'real' or hidden feelings about this time in my own life. Rather, I drew on this strand of feminist theory and

⁹ Although over time I began to see the necessity in exploring these assumptions.

methodology¹⁰ to examine the way that research can very often begin with personal issues and that fieldwork itself can begin with people that we are already close to (Letherby 2003). (An example of this can be found below when I discuss the ethical shaping of the research timeframe and in Chapter 9).

Following this thread I began to discuss feelings and experiences about the primary/secondary transfer with my friends. As the following extracts from our informal focus group¹¹ show, their responses were varied but emotionally charged.

Overall I'd say it was a very positive time, actually, although I was obviously very nervous about moving to a new school, we all were I guess. But I went with all me mates and we were just like one big crowd... I supposed it's the biggest change you go through when you're young... I can remember the last days of primary school and the first days of secondary schools really clearly, even the games we played and what I had for lunch.

Mike, aged 28

I don't know if I really want to talk about it too much. It wasn't a happy time. I moved from a school where I was really comfortable and felt like I fitted in to a place where I felt just kind of lost... My primary school had a very local feel to it where it was very much a community and there was a sort of place for everyone. The secondary school I ended up at was nothing like that and it came as a big shock at the time, for many reasons... I'm not sure I ever fitted in there.

Claire, aged 29

It was clear that the transition was a complex time that involved a great deal of anxiety and a range of strong emotions. It was also

¹⁰ It is important to note, as I explain in Chapter 4, that I draw on feminist theory as a political tactic, but do not necessarily claim a feminist identity for myself.

¹¹ The names of all participants have been changed to ensure anonymity. All participants provided consent for their stories to be used as part of the research and reproduced in the thesis. The venue for the focus group was one of their homes.

apparent that these emotions could still be strongly felt, showing how the transition between schools was at the time, and could remain, an emotionally charged experience. This was echoed by the children's own feelings and stories about the transition, which are explored in Chapter 9.

It was during this period that I moved from using the sociological concept of 'identity' to drawing on theories of 'subjectivity'. This was important as it allowed me to think and write about what it is like to live the specificities of classed, gendered and raced discursive locations at a particular time and in a particular place (Walkerdine et al 2001:13). Notions of 'subject positions' have been particularly powerful in creating rich understandings of the children's everyday lives and their experiences of the transition. The complexity that theories of subjectivity permitted allowed for, and indeed demanded, the integration of the social, psychic, cultural, economic and historical. I discuss in detail how I use the concept of subjectivity in Chapters 3 and 4, but I think it is important to note that by drawing on concept of subjectivity to think about subject positions does not negate the use of the term identity. Rather, I continue to use the term identity at certain points where I discussing group dynamics, membership and social interaction.

What I have shown in the last two sections is that the selection of research settings and questions was a conjoined process; each fed into the other in a course that was bumpy and loosely defined. This is a confessional story about the very beginnings of my doctoral research that I have included because it provides an explanation of how I came to research romance with children during the transition between primary and secondary schooling. It also shows, albeit partially, the beginnings of my engagement with

concepts of subjectivity and the growing centrality of poststructuralist theory and feminist methodology in my work.

What happened when and where?

In the following sections I sketch an overview for the whole of the doctoral research that is used throughout this thesis. This includes the timeframe for the fieldwork and a discussion of the way this was shaped by ethical considerations, as well as a scene setting overview of each school visited during the research, which is also used to introduce the main research participants

The research timeframe: an overview

Before I give background information about each of the schools involved in the study I would like to briefly outline the chronology of the fieldwork that was undertaken. In January 2004 the fieldwork began with a pilot study at Hartnell Primary in the South East of England. This initial phase spanned 2 weeks and provided an opportunity to gain experience of observation in a school and to try various methods when working with children (I will occasionally make reference to this period as the *first phase*). Between April and July 2004 I alternated between St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's primary schools, undertaking 8 weeks of fieldwork in total (sometimes referred to as the *second phase*). Both these schools were in South Wales. I also returned to Hartnell Primary for 3 days at the end of the summer term and attended their 'leavers' day on the first day of the summer holiday. In January and February 2005 I spent 2 weeks at St. Baker's High School (sometimes referred to as the *third phase*), conducting in-depth interviews and undertaking observation.

The ethical shaping of the research timeframe

In this section I want to note some of factors that shaped this timeframe and place emphasis on the ethical decisions I made. Although my presence at each school was not directly under my control and had to be negotiated with, in the parlance of traditional ethnography, several 'gatekeepers' (a process that is discussed below), I also imposed certain restrictions on myself that fundamentally structured the course of the project. Principal in this was a consideration of the impact of my presence on the lives of the children. Following on from my memory work I began to consider how my joining the children on their transition might affect them.

While undertaking fieldwork at St. Pertwee's primary school, the children in the top classes were visited by staff and pupils from St. Baker's high school as part of their induction process. During one of the morning sessions the head of lower school, Mrs Williams offered me the opportunity to accompany the children on the second part of the induction, where they would spend a day at St. Baker's, going to classes just as they would when they made the transition in the autumn. The ease with which this opportunity was offered caught me off guard and, rather than accepting straight away, I thanked her and said I would give it some thought. Something was making me uncomfortable with the idea. Sitting in one of the classrooms during afternoon registration I jotted down my thoughts in one of my notebooks.

I've just been offered the opportunity to go to St. Baker's in 2 weeks and see the other part of the induction process when the children for all the feeder primaries attend a full day of high school lessons. I'm sure I should be pleased about this but I have to admit that I'm not. I'm beginning to question my right to intrude into the children's lives. Although they seem happy having me around at the moment, what kind of effects could this have when they move to St. Baker's? The induction process is very much

about them finding their feet in the new school and I already know that this can be a tough process. I don't think I can justify intruding on this day. And this raises some vital questions about the next phase of the project.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

I was also aware of the continuing nature of assessment and observation the children were subject to; I did not want to become yet another auditor of their lives. Reflecting on these notes at the time, I used the example of my own biography once again to try and understand the kinds of feelings that might be experienced during this rite-of-passage. I found my own memories of this period to be particularly vivid and as a result felt my caution concerning the time I spent occupying the children's social worlds justified. (These issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, where I look at what it might mean to be doing research with children). The timeframe of the fieldwork therefore reflects this process of ethical reasoning. Drawing on the theory and practice of feminist research I recognised that every stage and level of a research project involved relations of power and ethical decision-making (Ramazanoglu 2002; Letherby 2003). Indeed, while I could probably have organised extended periods of fieldwork, this would have been negotiated with the teachers rather than the children. And as the offer from Mrs Williams illustrated, the teachers never consulted the children about their views on my presence in their schools.

From a more formal perspective, my project was not required to be passed by an ethics committee – this stipulation was introduced soon after it had begun – so I had to confront and work with ethical issues in consultation with my supervisors, other colleagues, and guidance from previous research. In terms of consent, this meant focusing primarily on gaining on-going

consent from the children and giving them as many opportunities as possible to opt out of participation in research activities if they so wished. It also involved providing them with introductory leaflets explaining the research: one for the children and one for their parents or guardians. The letter to parents and guardians explained that if they did not want their children to be involved in the research they could contact me and I would not ask them to participate or include data about them in my writing.

Setting the scenes: the schools

The fieldwork that forms the basis for this thesis was undertaken in 4 schools and at a number of other sites. This section contains details of each of these settings and also includes a short discussion about the boundaries of the fieldwork¹².

Hartnell Primary

Hartnell primary school is situated in the small village of Hartnell in the South East of England. The area is among one of the most expensive in terms of property values in the United Kingdom, outside London. The children in Year 6 at Hartnell come from exclusively white families, the large majority of which were middle class, although a small number did come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the children lived within walking distance of the school, although a number are brought in each day by car. At the time of the study there were 34 pupils in Year 6. The class teacher, Mrs. Webster, taught Mondays to Thursdays, and another teacher, Mrs. Kennedy, took the class on Fridays when Mrs. Webster was busy with management duties. There were also two part-time female classroom assistants who work within the classroom. The school is well funded and over-subscribed, benefiting from a good local reputation built on

¹² Due to restrictions on space, these descriptions have been kept to a minimum and focus on some of the key characteristics of each school.

consistently good OFSTED reports. Hartnell is a Church of England school and acts of worship were undertaken each day in assembly.

St. Troughton's Primary

St. Troughton's is an urban Catholic primary school in South Wales. It is situated in an area that has been re-developed over the past decade due to the decline of local industry. Many of the homes near St. Troughton's are apartments and houses built within the last decade, and these new developments nestle alongside what remains of the older community, much of which is situated in housing from the early twentieth century. St. Troughton's is a small school, with only 15 children in Year 6 at the time of the research, within a class of 28 made up from Year 6 and Year 5 children. The area around St. Troughton's is the most ethnically diverse of all the schools in the study, with the children coming from Arabic, Somali, Indian, Afro-Caribbean and white Welsh families. Moreover, most of the children in the class were from working class families. The class teacher was Miss Cross, and despite the small class size, there were two adjoining classrooms (one I call the 'art room') that were used by the class throughout a normal school day. The children received religious education every day in assemblies and in the classroom.

St. Pertwee's Primary

St. Pertwee's is also an urban Catholic primary school in South Wales. It is situated in an economically deprived area, where the majority of the homes are part of the national housing association. Children from a wide geographical area attend the school, with some catching a special daily bus service from up to five miles away. The children in Year 6 were from exclusively working class backgrounds. Although the majority of the children were from white Welsh families, there were also children from Asian and

Afro-Caribbean families. The Year 6 at St. Pertwee's totalled 59 children and was split into two classes, 6L and 6J, taught by Mrs. Lewis and Mr. Jones respectively. Classroom support was limited to a single part-time assistant who worked constantly with different groups of children in a room adjacent to the hall. As in St. Troughton's, the children had religious education every day in the classroom and during assembly.

St. Baker's High School

St. Baker's is a Catholic high school, which is fed by St. Pertwee's, St. Troughton's and two other Catholic primary schools in the same city. When at St. Baker's I spent nearly all my time with children in the class 7A; these included children I had met and worked with at St. Pertwee's and St. Troughton's, plus some others who had attended one of the other feeder primary schools. During registration periods and break times I was able to meet with some of the other children from the second phase who had been placed in different ability sets. St. Baker's is a small secondary, with approximately 700 students across years 7 to 11 (ages 11 to 16). The school has no sixth form and the majority of the students are white Welsh and working class. In a similar vein to the Catholic primaries, the pupils at St. Baker's had religious education on a daily basis, which was provided by designated staff.

Other places, other spaces

While the principal sites for the fieldwork were schools, there were also other places and spaces that the ethnography spread to. These included a leisure centre, a bowling ally, a cinema, a shopping centre, a corner shop, and the streets and playing fields near the children's schools and homes. My presence within these places and spaces was sometimes 'official' and part of an out-of-school activity that I had been invited to, but often my presence

was not principally as an ethnographer. Indeed, as I lived so near to many of my participants I could not help but meet them outside of their schools. During the period of the study the boundary between my personal and professional life became blurred, as did spatial-temporal boundaries of the ethnography: Where, for instance, and at what time(s) did I become or cease to be a researcher? When walking to St. Pertwee's each morning I usually met some of the boys from Year 6 along the way and we would talk casually about anything they wanted to discuss. This kind of incident can be quite comfortably assimilated into the body of the ethnography and it can be explained to the participants (as I explained to the boys) that this talk is as much part as the research as that which occurs in the school. It is questionable though, when the ethnography is school based, whether the children were aware that I might be interested in any interactions that occurred outside school.

Gender, identity and space

On a similar theme, I learned from some of the girls at St. Pertwee's that one of the Year 6 teachers, Mrs. Lewis, would not let the girls speak to her as a teacher outside school.

Kat: Whenever we [the group of girls] see Mrs. Lewis outside school, in the shops or whatever and we say 'hello Mrs. Lewis,' she always says, 'no, outside school I'm Sally. I'm not a teacher when I'm outside school.'

DJM: She tells you to call her Sally?

Kat: Yeah, but not in school. If you calls her Sally, like by accident or something, she'll be all like [puts on stern voice and furrows brow], erm, Mrs. Lewis please.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

For the girls in Mrs. Lewis class then, there was an explicit distinction between in school and out-of-school identities. However, it must be noted that it was Mrs. Lewis who had the

ability to demand that the girls call her by her first name. This demand was enabled due to the generational power relationship between Mrs. Lewis and her students. She could ask to be called anything she liked, within reason and context, whereas the children could not. This rested not only on her adult status but also on the authority she had as their teacher. Thus, despite Mrs. Lewis wishes, she had to rely on her position as a teacher in order to attempt to overcome it. Furthermore, there is an issue of gender. None of the boys confessed such a relationship with Mrs. Lewis outside school. To what extent, then, was this attempted informalisation an act of symbolic union between Mrs. Lewis and the girls in her class, based on a common feminine identity?

Because of this external informality, and considering my constant negotiation of an informal position inside school, I thought it likely that the children would consider any interaction with me outside school as qualitatively different to that which occurred in the classroom or on the playground. Moreover, they were likely to consider me as detached from my researcher role as Mrs. Lewis was detached from her teaching role. I therefore sought explicit consent from those children I spoke to outside what they might have deemed the legitimate boundaries of the research concerning the use of data collected outside their school. Where this was not possible, I have avoided using such data.

Gendered heterosexuality

Perhaps the most striking example of an 'other' space becoming part of the project occurred during my time at St. Baker's and St. Pertwee's. Both these schools were in walking distance of my house, which meant that I was living in the same community as the students and teachers from both schools. On my street, for example, there lived one of the teachers and two of the children from St. Pertwee's, and a number of students from several year

groups at St. Baker's. During the phase of fieldwork at St. Pertwee's I returned home at the end of the day and went into my back garden. In the garden of an adjacent house was Jackie, one of the St. Pertwee's girls.

Jackie: [surprised] Is your name David?

DJM: Yes, hello.

Jackie: [quickly, still surprised] Do you work in my school?

DJM: [laughs] yes.

Jackie: Do you live there [points at my house]?

DJM: Yes I do.

Jackie: Really?

DJM: Yes!

Jackie: I live just over there! [Points to a nearby house]. This is my Aunt's house.

Field notes, researcher's home

The next day Jackie called at my house with one of her friends from the street. I talked to her briefly and both the girls were interested to meet my partner, Rebecca. This meeting became the main topic of many of my conversations with the girls in Year 6 the day after Jackie had called over. Of course, it is quite difficult to speculate on how this blurring of personal life and school/research life affected the research process (for me, Jackie and the other girls). What is clear from our conversation is that to begin with, meeting me outside of school momentarily disrupted Jackie's sense of place. Here I was, a figure from the school sphere, appearing unexpectedly in her play space. Likewise, I was initially troubled to think that all the children at the school might find out where I lived, as I was unsure as to the ethical dilemmas this might raise, particularly if they kept coming round to my house! As it turned out, although Jackie and her friends walked by my house several times a day, they did not call at the door again¹³. What seemed to have been most instructive to them about our meeting was the opportunity to view me outside of the

¹³ Although at the time of writing they do still say hello when passing in the street.

framework into which I had been placed – the school – and in doing so to ‘colour’ their picture of me as fully as possible. This appeared to entail calling at the house to check that I really did live there, and then to meet my partner. These two acts seemed to provide enough information for Jackie to understand who I was, as an adult, heterosexual male with a life outside school. I lived in the house with my adult, heterosexual female partner, which, once established as true, was all that Jackie needed to know. The rest of my life could be assumed to follow the script that both these details suggested to her and I was positioned accordingly.

Overall, this episode gave me an insight on what it might be like to be ‘observed’ by someone with an agenda over which I had little control and a framework of understanding that ill fitted my own personal, ethical and political stance. (My ‘straightness’ being taken-for-granted on, from my own perspective, apparently slender evidence). This changed my perception of the whole research process. In particular, it made me consider thoroughly the implications of entering the school and the cultural sites of children as an outsider and ‘viewing’ them through the lens of research. What assumptions would I make, despite my best efforts, which would mark a drastic departure from the reality of children’s lives as they saw them?

Gaining access: a multitude of entrances and exists

Having described the main settings for this research, I now turn to a discussion of ethnography. Looking at how access is gained at the level of the ‘site’, I progress by discussing how access is then negotiated through the nexus of power relations at the level of the ‘peopled institution’, and the level of children’s cultures.

When access is discussed in research literature, the focus is often on being permitted access to a site by a principal gatekeeper, such

as a head teacher, a manager, or, in the case of subcultural groups, an individual who holds power through cultural capital (Hammersley 1995; Walsh 1998). This type of access, which might be called 'first access,' is undeniably important as without it a research project might be over before it has begun. It amounts to gaining access to 'sites'. In this instance, of course, first access needed to be negotiated with the head teachers of various schools. Initially I sent letters to several secondary schools within reasonable travelling distance. Although I would be beginning my fieldwork in some of the primary schools that fed into one of these secondary schools, it was my understanding that gaining access to secondary schools could often prove to be more difficult than gaining access to primary schools. It also occurred to me that if I spent an extended amount of time conducting fieldwork in primary schools and then found access to the secondary school problematic, my efforts to situate the project during the transition would be jeopardised. The letters I received back from the head teachers of the secondary schools illustrate general difficulties with access. For example, one read:

Dear Mr. Mellor

Our pupils have filled out their share of surveys and questionnaires this year and we do not wish to increase the burden on them.

Yours truly,

*Mr. Gatekeeper,
Head teacher*

The problem with these schools was their proximity to the University; they had been saturated with research. St. Baker's was further away from the University, but closer to where I lived, and, importantly, had not been involved in much recent research. So through several letters and telephone conversations I was able to secure the site for the third phase of the project. With this vital

piece of the jigsaw in place I was able to contact St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's, and use the access I had already secured at St. Baker's to present a complete project plan to the head teachers, and gain access to their schools as well.

The pilot study at Hartnell was arranged through contacts I already had at the school, where I had undertaken several years of part time voluntary work. During my first day at Hartnell there were two events that initially highlighted for me the way power relations shape the ongoing processes of access. The first event was my introduction to the whole school during the morning assembly – what might be called my introduction to the peopled institution (Fine 2003). Mr. Malcolm, the head teacher, explained who I was as I stood with the teachers at the front of the hall.

Mr Malcolm: This is Dr Dave, he's going to ask you lots of questions and talk to you, so make sure he feels welcome and help him whenever you can because that's how we are at Hartnell.

Field notes, Hartnell

In several ways I was being positioned as powerful and with authority. Standing with the staff I was clearly associated with them in a manner I had hoped to avoid, as I was looking to take a position as an 'unofficial adult' (see Chapter 4 for details). I was also ascribed a professional status (albeit in jest) that was not yet mine to claim, and the children were instructed, under the auspices of this title, to do what I asked of them. Mr. Malcolm then, was not only a gatekeeper in terms of the site of the school, but also in terms of my relationship with the children.

The actions of teachers also shaped the research on this level of access in other important ways. For example, on my first day at

St. Baker's I met with the Head of Lower School, Mrs. Williams, in the reception area of the main building. I explained to her that I would like to spend each school day with a self-selecting group of children¹⁴, following them around as they went about their normal lessons and break times. Mrs. Williams decided that I should be placed with 7A as they would be the least 'trouble' and the most 'giving'. Although this was not a problem, as many of the self-selecting children were in 7A, through this action, Mrs Williams positioned the research as an academic activity, to be undertaken by the most academically competent children. It was impossible to gauge how the children would interpret my entering St. Baker's at this level, but I had become very aware during my time at their primary schools that they had a heightened sense of fair and inclusive participation (an ethos encouraged by the schools), which could be disrupted by my association with 7A. There was also the possibility that this would risk the research being positioned as 'school work', and I had worked hard to make sure that this was not the case during my time at the primary schools.

The second event at Hartnell occurred during the morning break time of the first day. Walking onto the playground with a group of boys, I asked one of them about the games they played.

DJM: What do you usually do out here? What games do you usually play?

Ollie: Is this another one of your question thingies?

DJM: Well... I'm just interested in finding out.

Ollie: Oh. Ok.

Field notes, Hartnell

¹⁴ This group had identified themselves at the end of the second phase. In reality, all the children who were transferring to St. Baker's said that they would be happy to continue to be involved. However, given the time that had passed since the summer, I allowed the children to seek me out and get involved as they wished. Also, given time constraints and the fact I could only be in one class at any one time, my placement in 7A turned out to be very useful. During tutorial periods I was able to move between classes and make contact with some of the other children from St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's. This also happened during break and lunch periods.

Ollie's cautious reaction could be read as his positioning me as powerful and acting with resistance to my questioning. I was certainly an unusual adult outsider who had ventured into a space that was usually free of this kind of 'official' speech. There is also the dialogical presence of Mr. Malcolm's voice in Ollie's question, showing that the way I had been introduced to the school by a powerful individual had fundamentally affected my positioning by other participants. All these factors played out simultaneously in this exchange, underlining the difficulties that can be experienced by an adult researcher first entering the relationship cultures of children. These issues are rejoined in Chapter 4.

In addition to these examples, it is vital to note that access at all levels is affected by gender, age, social class, dis/ability and ethnicity. My identity as a white, middle class, man, who at the time of the study was in his late twenties, undoubtedly influenced access in multiple ways. Throughout the following chapters I try to take account of this as I reflexively engage with the data. As with ethics, access cannot be simply boxed-off into a single section, as it is constantly at play throughout the research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the autobiographical story of my doctoral research project and provided details about the settings for the fieldwork, showing how they were shaped by practical and ethical concerns, and the power relationships between myself and my participants. In Chapters 3 and 4 I detail the theoretical and methodological positions taken during the project. I explain why it is important to consider these issues together, as theory/method and method/theory because of the nature of my ontology and epistemology.

Chapter 3

Theory/method

Foucault's role for the 'specific intellectual' is exemplary: to excavate one's own culture in order to show the contingency of power and to find the spaces for creativity and resistance.

Cohen & Taylor 1992:29

[What I am] is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.

MacIntyre 1985:132

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss two themes that are central to my project: romance and childhood. In the first half of the chapter I unfold and expand the five romances outlined in the Introduction, exploring heterosexuality as performance and practice, popular romance as an economic construction, the genealogy of Romantic subjectivity, the romance of sociology, and the romances of the researcher. This provides a foundation for the romances as they are analysed and encountered in the following chapters. In the second half of the chapter I show how my work is located in relation to recent and ongoing developments in the new social studies of childhood. In doing this I look at theoretical positions concerning the social and material character of childhood, and methodological debates about conducting research with children. This culminates in a discussion generated by an extended extract from my field notes, which considers the complex processes of power and creativity within children's relationship cultures, and culminates in a working model of agency. But to begin, I make a further short note on the politics of writing.

Why theory/method and method/theory? A further short note on the politics of writing

This chapter and the one that follows it are about the theories and methods of my research project. I have chosen to write under the titles theory/method and method/theory as a way of illustrating their entwined nature; as a way of acknowledging that research methods are laden with theory, and that theories are shaped by methods of thought, as well as the methodologies of previous research. Moreover, choices of method and theory are in a great part political and indeed emotional, as much as they are practical, rational and logical. So neither methods nor theories are entirely value neutral or value free, as they carry within them a political history, and take the forms we recognise because of struggles over the creation of knowledge. It is for this reason that I am cautious of taking a ‘toolbox’ approach to methods that sees them as tools that can simply be picked up and used when the situation appears to deem it appropriate (see Mauthner & Doucet 2003; also see Diriwächter & Valsiner 2005 for further discussion). This is not to say that I am against the use of various methods in a responsive mode when encountering particular things in the field, as these theory/method, method/theory chapters will make clear. Rather it is to note that the theory- and politically-laden nature of method needs to be reflected upon as this will influence and shape the form of the knowledge that is created. As I will argue in Chapter 4, a coherent methodology – where theory and method most clearly converge – is essential if research is to be reflexive and ethical.

The five romances of this thesis

In the following sections I unpack and expand the five romances of this thesis that were presented in Chapter 1. These are: playground romance, popular romance, subjects of romance, sociological romance, and the writer’s romance.

Playground romance

In this context, playground romance is the term I use to signify the children's hetero-gendered relationship practices. This particular romance then, is about gendered sexuality as practice and performance. Following other researchers I see the school as a site (or more correctly, a cluster of sites) where sexualities are produced and inscribed in discursive practices that are imbued with normative heterosexuality (Epstein & Johnson 1998; Kehily 2002; Mellor & Epstein 2006; Renold 2005). The production of sexualities occurs through the daily routines and official structures of the school, and through the children's cultures of friendship and play. Heterosexuality then, is seen as a practice that involves a set of socially situated performances (Kehily 2002): heterosexuality is not something that is 'natural,' but rather something that is socially constructed (Hawkes 1996; Katz 1995; Weeks 1986), and reproduced via situated performances, consisting in a "myriad of social interactions and cultural understandings developed in particular situations and places" (Mellor & Epstein 2006:379). In the school context, such practices and performances include childhood games like 'kiss-chase,' students dating and dumping practices, stories and ideals of romance, and the reiteration of hetero-relationship norms within the curriculum.

All sexuality practices are at some point supported by a set of narratives – stories about the way things are and ought to be – that can be called upon to reinforce their legitimacy and acceptability (Plummer 1995). In the social settings of the primary and secondary school and within children's relationship cultures, narratives of romantic love are an important element of widespread heterosexualising social processes (Epstein 1997; Renold 2000, 2005). Moreover, these narratives are one of the

major ways that children learn how to be 'properly' heterosexual, to 'think straight' (Ingraham 2005), as they shape (but do not completely determine) their emotional investments and expectations about current and future relationships (Walkerdine 1990).

Although the romantic relationship narrative is culturally dominant, the manner in which children invest in particular relationship narratives depends to an extent on their locality, community and social class culture. Within different communities, and within their children's relationship cultures, there may be different 'economies of value' in operation, which influence the shape that narratives and attitudes take (Skeggs 1997; Thomson 2000). Therefore the operation of the romantic narrative within a system of symbolic capital is far from simple. Moreover, its character will be affected by the intersection of discourses of gender, sexuality, social class and ethnicity, which are themselves underpinned by 'logics of practice' that influence the currency of certain social, cultural and physical capital in a given community (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). This thesis looks at how the child participants in a particular study arranged their social networks in terms of hetero-gendered relations, how these relations were shaped by narratives of romance, and how their investments in and understandings of such narratives were shaped by the realities and structures of their everyday lives. A further important issue, which is discussed in detail below, concerns the relationship and dialogue between the situated practices of the children and wider societal and cultural forces.

Popular romance

Many social scientists have noted a trend in the ways that close, intimate relationships are formed in contemporary society (for example, Bauman 2005; Fevre 2000; Giddens 1992). The bonds of

tradition have been eroded, some argue, meaning that people in Western societies are now free to choose who they fall in love with, how this happens, and then manage their relationships reflexively to gain maximum benefit, dissolving them when they see fit. Love and intimacy have, in these terms, become 'democratised' in Western societies in late modernity. This is certainly the view proposed by Giddens (1992) in his much-criticised notion of the 'pure relationship' (Evans 2003; Jamieson 1999; Langford 1999). Yet while the changing character of society has certainly provided new opportunities for the creation of intimate bonds between people, these new arrangements have brought with them not just freedoms, but also constraints. The freedom to choose that is gained from the breakdown of industrial society and increased secularisation is accompanied by chaos and instability, as people are left to find intimacy without the aid of traditional social arrangements or expectations (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995).¹⁵

In this context, some commentators have argued that popular romantic love has gained great significance as a 'secular religion' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Illouz 1997). In Western societies it has replaced or reshaped many older ways of understanding relationships, such as those provided by religious orthodoxy. Others meanwhile have suggested that romantic love has become so culturally ubiquitous that it has lost much of its effect; so where once the narratives of romance were treated unreflexively, now people can only approach them with irony and caution, knowingly reciting the romantic 'script' (Illouz 1998). Whatever the veracity of these perspectives it is clear that romantic love has a sustained influence within people's framing of their relationships. Popular romance, then, is a product of contingent, historical,

¹⁵ And as Weeks (1998) notes, we must all define ourselves somehow as 'sexual citizens': the constraint being that we *must* belong to one of the sexual identities available in the late-modern world (even if they are multiple, fractured, and so forth).

socio-cultural forces, which provides narratives and techniques of self through which our most intimate bonds with other people are understood (Hendrick & Hendrick 1992). Popular romance is a contemporary meta-folklore that exists beyond and across social divisions and cultural boundaries, providing stories for living and feeling, frameworks for conduct and emotional investment.

Conceived this way, romance is not directly equitable to love; rather they have a complex, ambiguous relationship. Something that might be called love appears to exist in all places and throughout human history. Within reason, it can be said that, at its core, love is universal: but the nature of this core is obtuse. Evolutionary theory has tried to explain the universality of love with recourse to concepts of species survival and adaptation (e.g. Buss 1994, 2000), but, despite the strengths of such scientific explanations, they are often blind to their unreflexive reproduction of contemporary social arrangements in the guise of transhistorical essences (see Fausto-Sterling 1992, 2000; Rees 2000).

Therefore, regardless of the insistent persuasiveness of evolutionary theory¹⁶, *love has a history*, which makes it likely that its supposed origins are destined to remain illusive (Armstrong 2002). What we can comprehend and analyse is how intimacy is understood and arranged in different locals and periods, including the present day. For example, Chodorow notes that,

Stories of passion, sexual desire, and fulfilment are found in all cultures, but heterosexual erotic love as we read, see, and hear about in contemporary Euro-American culture is a specific cultural product. Many cultures do not have such a

¹⁶ For an excellent discussion of these issues and a discussion of feminism, gender theory and evolution, see Vandermassen (2005).

concept, and even in Western civilization erotic love floats around historically: it is marital and heterosexual in some eras, extramarital in others, heterosexual and tied to notions of intimacy in the current period, passionate (though questionably genital) between women in the nineteenth century, erotic between older men and younger boys in classical Greece, normatively carnal today, and normatively reserved for spiritual love of Christ in the Middle Ages... Cultural resonance and cultural saturation ensure that sexual and romantic fantasies, mediated as they partially are through language, will incorporate cultural stories. These cultural stories and their psychological specifications often entail commonalities that allow us to label some man's or woman's fantasy by gender, but these fantasies are so culturally loaded that we run grave risks in saying that *this* is how men and women love – as if such a fantasy is a product of biological or psychobiological endowment. In a different culture, or within different subcultures in our own, how men and women love varies tremendously.

Chodorow 1994:5

What Chodorow refers to as 'heterosexual erotic love' is central to contemporary popular romance. Indeed, there are many points of crossover or blending between popular romance and heterosexual culture – contemporary popular romance is decidedly (but not entirely) hetero-gendered in character (Ingraham 1999). Chodorow also alludes to the psychic dimension of romance, its existence as and within gendered fantasy. People's emotional investments are therefore shaped to a great extent (but not entirely) by dominant cultural stories about relationships, which are reproduced and retold into culture by those same people (Lupton 1998). Such stories are powerful at an unconscious level and they affect the processes of subject formation and the experiences of different classed and gendered subjectivities (Brown 2005; Butler 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001). Layton (2002) uses the term 'normative unconscious' to explain how cultural inequalities are sustained through the splitting of the good and the bad, the appropriate and inappropriate, the tasteful and distasteful, within the psyche. The

normative unconscious draws power from the way self-identity and relationships with others are threatened or disrupted when the boundaries between correct and incorrect behaviour are crossed. The normative unconscious is therefore “a significant locus of dominant ideology” (Layton 2002:203), and provides a way of understanding how the reproduction of societal inequalities occurs and operates at a psychic level (Benjamin 1988; Chodorow 1978). So while there may well be some forces of democratisation visible or available (especially to male theorists like Giddens and Bauman) when considering the changing character of heterosexual sexuality, many structural inequalities between groups in society remain (Johnson 2004); particularly between men and women (Evans 2003; McNay 1999). This theme is discussed in relation to the children’s gendered and classed subjectivities in Chapter 8.

The hetero-gendered character of popular romance not only affects people subjectively, it also affects them through the institutions of the state. A clear example of this is marriage. Today, marriage is less about the fixing of one’s self to a position in social structure, and more an option or fluid sign of commitment (Langford 1999). That being said, the dominance of marriage as the most legitimate form of intimate relationship remains. Despite recent changes to British law that have seen the introduction of civil partnerships for same sex couples,¹⁷ the heterosexual marriage is still commonly regarded as the most important, serious, and valid relationship in Western society. It is also considered to be the most romantic, particularly at its inception: the wedding. And it is here that the hetero-gendered character of popular romance is

¹⁷ It could be argued that civil partnerships are marriages in everything but name. The resistance to officially calling them marriages reflects a politically conservative desire to protect the ‘sanctity’ of the heterosexual couple/family. Non-married heterosexuals cannot obtain the same rights as married heterosexuals and cannot enter into a civil partnership. This illustrates how cultural notions about the apparent hierarchical legitimacy of a relationship are supported by legislation.

supported and sustained by capitalism. The modern wedding has been shaped more by marketisation than by religion and tradition. As Ingraham (1999) points out, wedding dresses, diamond rings, and all aspects of the 'white wedding' are not heterosexual traditions, but the effect of successful marketing campaigns, aimed at the white middle classes. Therefore weddings are nebulous clusters of economic, ethnicity and sexuality discourses. Those in social and financial positions that allow them to take advantage of the democratisation of intimacy must increasingly depend on narratives of romance to support the notion of marriage (Ingraham 2005), narratives which are embedded in the marketing of the wedding industry.

Furthermore, popular romance is connected to consumption more broadly (Boden 2003). As Illouz (1997) argues, to be romantic is to participate in certain forms of cultural consumption, and such activities are financially restrictive. Romantic activities are defined by holidays on deserted sandy beaches, diamond rings, dozens of red roses, and expensive dinners. Those on low incomes cannot afford to participate in extravagant consumption, so their understandings of and access to what is deemed to be 'romantic' differs from those with greater financial security. Narratives of romance then, are saturated with classed, raced, gendered and economic systems of power (Ingraham 1999; Illouz 1997). These themes are discussed with relation to the children's cultures in Chapters 6 and 7.

Subjects of romance

Romanticism and the Romantic Movement are generally perceived to have been a 19th century phenomenon. But as the historian Chase (1993) notes, the problem with Romanticism is that it resists definition as a period or set of qualities. This is largely due, Chase argues, to the fact that the central changes and ideas of the

Romantic period still dominate the contemporary world. Quoting de Man, Chase (2003:1) notes that “Romanticism is our past: ‘we carry it within ourselves as the experience of an act in which, up to a certain point, we ourselves have participated.’” Romanticism does not equate to popular romance, but it is a state of thought, framework for thinking, or subjectivity that, in conjunction with capitalism, created the conditions of possibility for popular romance to flourish in the form we currently recognise. To use Raymond Williams’ (2005) terminology, Romanticism is one of the most influential ‘residual cultures’ in Western societies.

Romanticism affects the way we understand ourselves as ‘selves’ and consists in a range of values and practices that are commonly unquestioned aspects of people’s everyday lives. For example, Campbell (1987) has shown how the ‘romantic ethic’ came to prominence during the 19th century, characterised by the practices of daydreaming and longing. These practices created a space for the development of new forms of subjectivity that seem ‘natural’ in modern Western society. Campbell also notes that Romanticism, with its taste for novelty and experiential pleasures and indulgences provided the context for the development of modern consumerism. The subject of Romance – or Romantic subjectivity – therefore, is a certain kind of selfhood, substantiated within a particular cultural genealogy. The reach of this subjectivity is great, as it shapes our sense of belonging, our intimate and close relationships, and our ability to tell biographical stories about ‘our’ selves. In Chapters 7 and 8 I discuss these themes in the context of what I argue are the children’s Romantic friendships.

The consumer markets of popular romance exist in their current shape to a great extent because of Romanticism (Campbell 1987). Furthermore, popular romance in contemporary culture is shaped

by the re-tellings of myths and stories that took the formations we commonly recognise today during the Romantic period. Thus, the Romantic poets and novelists, along with their followers, bequeathed a cultural heritage that provides us with the narrative apparatus upon which we build our own understandings of our relationships and desires. Such apparatus, as Chodorow (1994) notes, are ubiquitous.

...in our society today no one can grow up without, from earliest childhood, shaping a sense of love from fairytales, myths, tales of love, loss, and betrayal, movies, books and television. These cultural stories and fantasies are experienced directly, and they are personally recreated through fantasy and the emotional and cognitive reshaping of introjections.

Chodorow 1994: 73-4

These cultural stories take many forms (Belsey 1994). Not only are they the myths and fairytales which are retold to generations of children, they also permeate other social strata and cultural fields. They are in the plot lines and character arcs of blockbuster movies, bestselling books and television soap operas. (As Barthes (2002) notes, someone says '*I love you*' on television every other night – now surely every other programme). They are interwoven through magazine stories, in the telling of the evening news, in the lyrics of popular songs, in the images of fashion photography, in advertisements for coffee, deodorant, furniture, and every other consumable, and even in the narratives of science, from the self-help bookshop to biology textbooks (Martin 1991; Potts 1998). They are embedded in the fabric of our society.

Romanticism's relationship with the present is a complex, overloaded one. To begin to understand its effects I have drawn on Foucault's ideas of investigating the 'history of the present,' not by trying to trace linear lines of descent, but by accepting the notion

that origins are not inviolable, and preferring to frame them as disparate and dissenting (Foucault 1991). Genealogy therefore provides an important dimension in the development of my methodology.

Genealogy, the analysis of descent and of emergence respectively, is radically different from traditional history, indeed it stands in a critical relationship to the latter in that first it seeks to reveal the historicity of qualities and properties which either have been thought to lack a history or to have been neglected (e.g. the physiology of the body, sentiment, feelings, morality, etc.). Second it affirms 'knowledge as perspective,' in other words that what is known is grounded in a time and a place, and, more controversially, in the historians preferences and passions. Finally, whereas traditional history has tended to abandon events or subordinate them to extra-historical structures and processes, genealogical analysis has sort to focus on their singularity in order to rediscover the *multiplicity of factors constitutive of an event*.

Smart 2002:57-58, emphasis added

These three approaches have greatly influenced my analysis of the data collected at the schools. The final approach in particular has shaped the way that I have dealt with data and the way I have taken short extracts and looked 'across' them to see how events unfold and connect to multiple factors (see section on the seven social strata in Chapter 4). I am not fully adopting a genealogical approach to my analysis. Rather it is an approach that has influenced and supported the ways that I have approached the data. As I emphasised in the extract from Smart (2002), genealogical analysis, by focusing on and imagining from small extracts and actions, can capture something of the multiply- or over-determined character of events. The importance of this is discussed below, in the second part of this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Sociological romance

The social sciences are part of the Enlightenment tradition and modernity. But the social sciences do not just contain the remnants of rationality; they too are shaped by the historical legacy of Romanticism. As Campbell (1987:4) notes, “Romantic thought, together with the ideas and attitudes of the Enlightenment to which it was, at least in part, a reaction, was the primary intellectual material out of which sociology as a discipline [was] forged.” Romanticism provided base material for modernist conceptions of the individual and political nationalism. For example, Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1998) is a work imbued with Romantic notions of history. And Freud's concepts of the unconscious and of the tripartite self owe a great debt to Romantic literature, especially Goethe. Freud in turn, presented a model of personhood that greatly influenced the development of social research and theory throughout the twentieth century to the present day (Frosh 1997). While in recent years, the traces of Romanticism have been detected in postmodernism (Matthewman & Hoey 2006). Although there is no space here to explore sociological romance (that would require another thesis entirely) it underpins much research and theory and consequently arrives in this thesis through its references and debts to other texts, whether acknowledged or otherwise. In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, it is necessarily in dialogue with the texts that have preceded it and those that will follow.

Writer's romance

The writer's romance is important in two ways. The first has already been discussed to some extent in the Introduction with reference to the politics of writing, and through the previous chapter where I explored my own motivations and for pursuing

this (and any) research project. This strand is explored again in Chapter 9 when I look at the practice of fieldwork (particularly PhD research) as a Romantic journey. The second way it is important concerns method. I could say that throughout my fieldwork I used my self as a research tool, but this would only be partially true. It was the children who began to locate me within their social worlds in such a way that my personal life and biography became part of our everyday conversation. Because I was asking questions about their personal relationships, friendships and families, they in turn took an interest in mine and began to re-construct my biography within their own frameworks of understanding. It was my participants then who provided the circumstances and context for me to explore the possibilities of using my self as a research tool, as they made sense of my identity by drawing on the resources available to them from within their relationship cultures. Examples of this can be found in Chapter 7 where I look at the children's fantasies about and constructions of my relationship, and in Chapter 8 where I explore the investments the children had in their friendships through asking them to interview me. This particular exercise of symmetrical interviewing raised many questions about my positioning as an adult male researcher, and these are discussed later in this chapter when I look at the issues associated with doing research with children. But first, having outlined the five romances, I explore the conceptualisation of childhood that underpins my research.

Theorising childhood

It is possible to add another romance to the above list: the romance of childhood. For childhood as it is commonly understood today owes a great deal to the Romantic sensibility. Indeed, it was Rousseau who first captured the image of the child as a natural and innocent being, noting; "nature wants children to

be children before they are men” (cited in Jenks 1996:3). During the 19th century the child sciences and charities concurrently advocated and reproduced this model of childhood, while acts of parliament shaped the institutions of mass education: a primary social space within which childhood is governed. In the 20th century, economic markets developed around childhood, meaning children were closely linked to capital and notions of national prosperity, while the normalisation and standardisation technologies of developmental psychology allowed the ‘normality’ of children to be assessed (Rose 1999; Walkerdine 1984). Contemporary understandings of childhood are products of the scientific, moral, political and economic discourses that have evolved over the last three centuries, so that, as Hockey & James (1993) note, there are four themes by which childhood has been shaped. Firstly, the calculation of age sets the child apart as temporally different; secondly, children are deemed to have a special nature that is determined by Nature; thirdly, the child is innocent; and fourthly, children are vulnerable and dependent.

The current sociological understanding of childhood is somewhat different. Within contemporary critical social sciences it is widely accepted that childhood is a social status, rather than simply a biological one, and that children are social beings with their own peer cultures, understandings and perspectives, equal to adult cultures in their richness and similarly imbued with power relationships and identity struggles. Notions that children are characterised primarily by their immaturity, whether physical or social, have been extensively problematised. So the strength of what has been called the ‘new social studies of childhood’ is that it recognises the validity of children as social agents, their abilities as creators and negotiators of culture, and perceives children as a marginalised group in an ‘adult’ society. As Jenks explains,

All contemporary approaches to the study of childhood are clearly committed to the view that childhood is not a natural phenomenon and cannot properly be understood as such. The social transformation from child to adult does not follow directly from physical growth and the recognition of children by adults, and vice versa, is not singularly contingent upon physical difference. Furthermore, physical morphology may constitute a form of difference between people in certain circumstances but it is not an adequately intelligible basis for the relationship between adult and child. Childhood is to be understood as a social construct, it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting.

Jenks 1996: 7

The new social studies of childhood or 'paradigm of childhood studies' (Prout & James 1990) developed across a range of disciplines through the 1980s and 90s in opposition to models of childhood that positioned children as the result of passive socialisation and child-rearing practices or where their social development was envisioned as a product of biological determinism (James & James 2004). Overall, the major theoretical strands of new social studies childhood can be summarised as follows:

1. Children are not a homogenous group, but a diverse one. We should therefore speak of childhoods.
2. Childhoods are historically and culturally located.
3. Children's cultures are not essentially different from the cultures of adult groups.
4. Children in contemporary western societies are a marginalised group.
5. The generational hierarchy between adults and children is a power relationship.

6. Contemporary childhood is a social institution constrained by an adult society.
7. Children are social actors and cultural agents. They are the negotiators of meaning and makers of knowledge.¹⁸

Strands 1 to 6 provide an important theoretical backdrop to my research. The first work to argue that childhood is socially constructed was that of the historian Aries (1962). Through his studies of childhood from the Middle Ages onwards, Aries shows how childhood emerged in the practices of a certain social group within a particular epoch, illustrating how the dominant understanding of childhood moved from one of participation to one of protection. Even though many historians dispute Aries ideas about childhood in pre-modernity (see Qvortrup 2005) they retain heuristic value because they very clearly highlight the historical and constructed character of childhood.

Although the materiality of childhood cannot be denied as a universal physiological fact, the way this fact has been interpreted into social structure and how the resultant structure has been organised has varied throughout history and across cultures (Lee 2001). Moreover, Qvortrup (1994) has argued that we should not forget that the social space of childhood, regardless of its organisation and government, is constant and universal in all human cultures. But as James & James (2004:20) point out, “its temporal location in generational history means that its character, nonetheless, changes over time, shaped by changes in the laws, policies, discourses and social practices through which childhood is defined.” Of course, all laws and policies, and the majority of discourses and social practices, are produced and governed by adults, meaning that it is they who are in the position to define

¹⁸ This list reflects the theoretical trends in evidence across the current field of childhood studies. James & Prout (1990) offer a similar list.

the shape of childhood. Even in contemporary Britain it is questionable how much self-determination children have, or whether they can genuinely influence policies that affect them, despite the Children Acts of 1989 and 2004¹⁹. It is for this reason that children are considered a minority group. But although they are a minority group, with certain common interests and characteristics, which are created by the 'generationing' (Mayall 2002) effect of the power relations between the concepts of 'childhood' and 'adulthood,' children remain a diverse, heterogeneous group. There are further differences that make a difference; namely, social class, gender, ethnicity/race, and a range of other structural factors and cultural determinants.

My own research takes these insights as part of its foundation and looks to build on them in certain ways. In particular, however, I am interested in exploring strand 7, which argues that children are social actors and cultural agents. Indeed, it is the central mantra of the 'new social studies of childhood' that children should be seen as 'social actors', participating in and creating their own social worlds²⁰. But as Prout (2005) suggests, this is now a well-established point that is accepted with virtually no resistance. The challenge, Prout rightly argues, is to seek ways to advance on this importantly won intellectual ground. Childhood is no longer conceived of as a stable entity and the adult/child binary created by modernity has become increasingly blurred as

¹⁹ The 1989 Act recognizes children's right to a proper say in decisions that concern them and that adults must take account of their wishes and feelings and ensure decisions are in the child's best interests. It effectively ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Britain signed up to in 1990. In 2003 the 'Every Child Matters' green paper set the policy agenda that led to the Children Act 2004. The 2004 Act heralded a new era and a major revision to service. The notion of 'joined up' and integrated Children's Services was introduced, with the requirement for close collaboration between schools, social services, health care professionals and the police. This approach is conceived of as unified and child-centred. Local authorities are required to establish Children's Trusts, under the auspices of which the integrated services will be co-ordinated, by 2008.

²⁰ Although in terms of the creation of child-centred social policy, it is not always the case that this view of children is upheld (James & James 2004). For a further discussion of this point see Chapter 10.

Western societies move further into the late-modernity, marked by the transformation of traditional social formations, like the family, and the extended reach of digital media technology into people's lives. For some commentators this is seen as beckoning a new era of culturally literate and technologically competent young people (Katz 1997). Yet for others, the 'disappearance' of childhood is viewed as cause for serious concern (see Postman 1983 for example). This has led to a crisis of representation and moral panic surrounding childhood in the West during the last decades of the 20th and first decade of the 21st centuries. Moreover, defending the innocence and sanctity of childhood has remained an issue at the forefront of the political agenda with the rise of New Labour and their neo-liberal project (Brooks 2006; Dyson & Davison 2005).

However, the supposed 'death of childhood' brought about by the dissolution of tradition and the increasing power of the digital media, whether viewed positively or with dismay, is a misnomer, as it suggests an essentialist view of childhood and an overly deterministic view of the media (Buckingham 2000). There is a great deal of conservative sentimentality here too. Indeed, in the UK, disputes over the future of children reflect a resurgence of traditional conceptions of childhood, coupled with post-millennial anxieties about the future of the nation in the face of an increasingly multicultural and less traditional society. The stakes placed on the rejuvenated universal model of childhood are high, because they reflect attempts at projecting certainty into a future that is – or at least appears to be – progressively more uncertain. And this is a model of childhood that is exported to the Majority world through Western cultural products, the Anglophone media, Anglo-American foreign policy, and Euro-American charitable organisations.

The late-modern situation, however, as Prout (2005:34) points out, is far from straightforward. For example, while global communication networks and imperialistic systems of capital disseminate a universalised version of childhood around the world, these selfsame systems are also making local and diverse worlds of childhood more visible to each other. Indeed, the same can be said for a mass of cultural practices and social formations. It is not just the case that global markets of capital or policy permit the domination of one culture over another, rather that various cultures intermingle at a local level, through social structures, carried to a great extent by the actions of networks of individuals. Dominance still occurs however, and it is vital that perspectives on how the media, economy and state exert a powerful influence on conduct within everyday lives are not abandoned. But it is surely a dominance that is always mediated within the personal relationships found in local contexts across social milieu.

Given this developing perspective, my interests lie with investigating the ways in which children are cultural agents. Rather than simply state that children are creative cultural agents as a matter of ontological politics (although this remains a strong politico-intellectual commitment), and label their everyday activities as such, I want to begin to explore how such a matrix of cultural agency might be operating. In doing this I begin by drawing on the extended, anthropological version of 'culture' established within early cultural studies (see Williams 1988 for example). This version of culture has, of course, been extensively developed (Inglis 2005; Tudor 1999). Moreover, the perspective of children and young people as a creative and active audience is well established in cultural studies of childhood and youth (for example, see Buckingham 1993; Willis 1990). In such work the symbolic creativity of everyday life is emphasised, and the concept

of cultures is extended to include a vast range of social processes. This has had a great influence not only on how children and young people are seen as consumers of the media (Buckingham 2000) but also on the wider conception and valuing of the social processes that constitute children's everyday lives and peer relationships (Wyness 2006). But to repeat the point made above, it is vital to retain a sense of the power of the media, the markets and the state in shaping children's subjectivities and day-to-day experiences.

As cultural agents and social actors, I would argue that children are not essentially different from adults²¹. However, they do occupy the socially structured places, spaces and identities of childhood within their society. Age then, remains an important factor, but it requires an alternative conceptual framework to one that characterises children as proto-adults. The life course approach (Hockey & James 2003; Hunt 2005; Prout 2005), with its focus on cohorts, complexity and multiplicity, allows a shift away from viewing the phenomenon of childhood through the dualistic child/adult lens, and anticipates the importance of viewing particular childhoods as shaped by external contingencies. As Prout (2005:79) explains: "It emphasises that life courses are open to the effect of a wide range of human and non-human factors in constructing multiple versions of childhood and adulthood as they shift through time." This is not to argue that the definition (the dichotomy) between children/childhood and adults/adulthood no longer exists. While its effects have certainly changed and perhaps weakened in recent times, it remains a deeply influential distinction that continues to function as if it is 'real.' "The point is that such differences are themselves

²¹ Bearing in mind that 'children' are a heterogeneous group, of course. Whether very young children – aged 2, for example – have cultural agency equivalent to children aged 10 or to adults is questionable, although I am sure that they are still social actors (see Grieshaber 2004 for example. Also see Mellor 2006).

the product of heterogeneous processes” (Prout 2005:82). To work productively then, in a way that bypasses or goes beyond modernist frameworks for understanding the social world, it follows that one must locate analyses within conceptual frameworks that anticipate and permit the heterogeneous, over-determined, and the open-ended. Given the complexity of the late-modern context, it is certainly sensible to search for analytic frameworks that can reflect the complexity of the epoch. However, it is vital that this is a critical mirroring, rather than one that reproduces the socio-cultural experiences of the analyst without critique (Skeggs 2004)²². In the remainder of this chapter and the one that follows, I explore how this might be achieved.

I think it is important to note here that it was my engagement in the fieldwork and latterly with the resultant data that led to the development of this position. It was in directly spending time with the children in their everyday worlds that I was able to generate this theoretical stance. In this sense, my research adheres to (but also modifies) the ideas of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1999) and theory generation in qualitative research (Charmaz 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, I began this project with a view of childhood that relied on out-dated notions of socialisation. By the time I entered the field these perspectives had been re-moulded by the new social studies of childhood literature, and they were further altered by my interaction with my participants.

Furthermore, the sociology of childhood connects to the major concerns of sociology as a whole. One of the aims of this thesis then, is to add to the shifting picture of social relations in contemporary society by capturing a partial but important picture of the everyday lives of a group of children. In the final section of

²² Skeggs (2004) criticises theorists like Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) for universalising their own classed cultural experiences of late modernity.

this chapter I look at how childhood can be constructed as an open-ended process of emergence and becoming, but first, I discuss some key issues about doing research with children.

Doing research with children

There are particular methodological issues that arise when researching with children that develop as a direct result of the theoretical concerns discussed in the previous section. Perhaps the most significant intellectual and ethical change that has occurred as result of the paradigmatic shift in childhood studies has been the reframing of research so that it is now considered to be *with* as opposed to *on* children (Christensen & James 1999). Research *with* children takes the theoretical strands outlined above and translates them into research practice, so that adult researchers anticipate and work with the particular competencies and cultures of their child participants. Many also actively seek to facilitate children and young people's participation in some, if not all, stages of a research project. In this section I explain how these ideas were deployed in my own fieldwork practice.

Same or different to adults?

Having established that children should be respected and treated as competent social actors, one of the most important questions that a researcher must consider is how far research with children is the same or different from research with adults (Christensen & James 2000; Mandell 1991). For example, if children occupy the socially structured spaces of childhood, in what ways might this make their life worlds so different to those of adults that the methods of research need be fundamentally different? This is an significant question to address as it has implications for every stage of a research project, from design to analysis. Some researchers argue that children are indistinguishable from adults, and that the same methods should be employed with both (James

et al 1998). Others suggest that while children are similar to adults, they possess different competencies, meaning methods should be adapted to children's skills (Nesbitt 2000). Punch (2002) argues in favour of the combination of visual, written and traditional methods, as these will create an interesting and enjoyable research environment for the children, which will help sustain their interest in the fieldwork while allowing the researcher to build rapport with their participants. These methods, Punch suggests, are not necessarily 'child' or 'adult' methods, but rather those which are, following reasonable and reflexive consideration of the competencies and interests of the group(s) being researched, most suitable for an investigation of their social worlds. As Chapter 4 details, this is the approach that I adopted.

In addition, I would argue that there are material as well as social differences between children and adults, and between children of different ages. So children's competencies, frameworks of understanding, and interests are, to a varying extent, likely to be different to those of adults. But this does not mean, as a matter of logical progression, that these understandings and investments should be treated as less important or socially/culturally immature in comparison. Moreover, the adult researcher must constantly question their assumptions about their child participants in order to avoid projecting adult-centric ideas onto their conduct, or homogenising children as a coherent rather than diverse group (Punch 2002). Indeed, such reflexivity is a central concept (and I would add vital aspect) of qualitative research, particularly ethnography (Coffey 1999). Prout and James (1990) contend that ethnography is the most effective method for conducting research with children because it is a method that forefronts and emphasises their understandings and investments, and I think that this is a strong argument. Through an

ethnographic lens, children's conduct can be viewed in terms of sub-cultural practice, with their own systems of value and rites of passage. A key concern for ethnographers is how far and in what ways they wish to involve their participants in the undertaking of the research.

Partnership, participation and co-research

There is a growing concern within childhood studies that, whenever feasible, children should be involved as either active researchers, co-researchers, or partners, working together with academics to conduct research about their lives and experiences (Grover 2004). What 'partnership' actually amounts to depends on the researcher. For some it means children should be 'empowered' as researchers themselves, taking ownership of the research agenda (Kellett et al 2004). For others, the levels of participation are more about the choice of methods that will increase informed involvement in fieldwork (Alderson 2001). However, Pole et al (1999) argue that the organisation and structure of research means that, despite the best intentions of the adult researcher, children are at best positioned as participants, at worst the objects of the researcher's gaze, because the methodology of research does not recognise children's knowledge as 'academic.'

As explained above, the impetus for this development in practice is the theory and policy context provided by the 'new' sociology of childhood and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child respectively. Therefore, the participation debate is framed in terms of ethics (Punch 2004), the children's rights agenda (Alderson 1995), and the growing involvement of children in making decisions about the things that concern them more broadly throughout society (Hill et al 2004; Prout 2000). Thomas and O'Kane (1998:336) point out that an ethical approach to fieldwork with children is also important in terms of the validity

and reliability of the research, as “effective methodology and ethics go hand in hand.” Research methodologies then must be attuned to children’s ways of relating to and seeing the world in order to produce meaningful data about their experiences. This point is echoed by Christensen (2004), who stresses that researchers must be aware of children’s ‘cultures of communication,’ and that such an awareness can be developed via reflexive and dialogic research practices (see Chapter 6).

In my own fieldwork I considered but ultimately decided against involving the children as ‘active researchers,’ preferring to design/select methods that were inclusive and respectful of the children’s rights, while being mindful to sustain the practices of reflexivity and dialogue in my overall methodology. Despite Pole et al’s (1999) position, which suggests that age is a form of capital that grants status in the organisational structure of research practice, I would argue that my approach does respect children’s agency (albeit within a relatively traditional research structure)²³. I believe that there are sound reasons for taking this approach because, as Punch (2002) notes, while children and young people are competent in their own cultures, this does not mean that they are skilled researchers. I would concur that this is an important point. I myself am a trained researcher with a range of skills, and I also invest in and practice reflexivity, theoretical analysis and the sociological imagination in ways unavailable to the children, or *anyone* not trained as a sociologist. Along with Punch, I think it is best to avoid involving children and young people in research in ways that could ultimately be tokenistic, thereby paying empty service to the rights agenda, and also risking a detraction from the theoretical engagement and richness of the work by over-

²³ Pole et al (1999) argue, with some validity, that it is the *methodology* (rather than the methods) of research should be restructured so that children are better positioned to contribute to the creation of knowledge about their lives. While I partially agree with this, the nature of PhD research made the exploration of these issues too problematic (see Chapter 1).

privileging the children's voices at the direct expense of the researcher's.

Being an adult researcher

There are, of course, further implications of being an adult male researcher undertaking fieldwork with children: just as there are limits regarding the children's involvement in the processes of research, so too there are limits on the researcher's participation in the children's cultural worlds. These can be best summed up by saying that it is impossible to ever not be an adult, and therefore the social distinction between one's self and one's participants are materially and culturally ever-present. Some researchers have argued contrary to this, however, stating that it is possible to adopt the 'least adult' role (Mandell 1991). Similarly, Davies (2003) presents a vignette from her fieldwork with preschool children where she occupies a space on a climbing frame and acts in a 'childlike' manner, which leads to sustained aggravation by some young boys. Davies (2003:97) suggests that it is gender power at work in this event: "the vehemence of male maintenance of their power". Despite her suggestion however, the data can be read another way. As Epstein (1998) argues, it is highly possible that the children saw Davies as an adult invading their play area, and that their reactions were as much or more to do with her age as her gender.

The 'childlike' and 'least adult' positions are deeply problematic notions because they take little account of children as co-negotiators of the adult researcher's subject position. Moreover, it could be argued that within children's cultural worlds, it is they who have the greatest influence in the negotiation of identity or the positioning of subjects. Throughout my fieldwork I was keen to understanding how the children positioned me in various ways according to their interpretations of my sexuality, gender, age and

ethnicity. Their negotiations of my gendered sexuality form substantial parts of Chapters 7 and 8, and I use these to explore the children's own investments and understandings.

For example, although I introduced myself by my first name and asked them to call me David, the children often referred to me as 'sir²⁴.' Keen to disrupt this officious positioning I would tell them that they didn't need to call me 'sir,' but they explained that they would get in trouble if they did not, as that was how all men in the school were meant to be addressed. So we agreed that they would call me 'sir,' but that we knew that they did not have to. Overall then, I strived to achieve the status of 'differently adult' – that being, an adult who did not hold an official position in the school and who was interested in letting the children tell him about anything that interested them, in a completely uncensored way. This 'differently adult' position affected my methodology, meaning that I thought of my ethnography less in terms of participant observation and more in terms of semi-participant observation, thereby recognising the limitation of adult participation in children's cultures (Punch 2002). As such, I constantly reflected on my embodied 'research performances' (Holt 2004), noting how my corporeality, and the cultural meanings attached to it, affected my positioning in the field (such as when I sat on child-sized chairs at the classroom desks of my participants).

Having outlined the important issues regarding research with children and explained how I approached them in my own fieldwork, I now turn to a discussion of how I envisage children as creative cultural agents, and further bridge the connection between theory and method.

²⁴ This was most often the case in St. Pertwee's.

Children as creative cultural agents

On several occasions I was able to listen to and sometimes record the unprompted and ‘naturally occurring’ conversations of the children in which I played no part. Most often this would involve my making hasty notes in my notebook, an activity of ‘active listening’ that I made as obvious as possible so that the children could know that I was detailing what they were saying. Witnessing the conversational style of a group of children was, for me, an education in itself. A criticism levelled at a great deal of research with children is that the categories and approach it depends on are fundamentally adult-orientated, adultist (Alderson 1995) or adocentric (Fraser et al 2004), meaning that they fail to account for the subtle yet real differences between adult and child cultures. For example, both adults and children orientate their cultures in spatial-temporal ways: arranging their social relations in terms of the spaces they occupy, the times they are compelled to be present in such spaces, and the activities undertaken there (whether they be compulsory requirements of the institution, or those chosen and driven by the adults or children’s interests). But a good example of how children’s cultures do differ from those of adults is the organisation, introduction and negotiation of topics within conversation. This then, provides the basis for the following discussion.

Negotiating complexity and power

The following (rather dense) passage is taken from my field notes at St. Troughton’s. I was sitting in the art room with a small group of children, including Steven and Vanessa, as they completed a project they had started the previous week. This task involved making a near to life-size picture portrait of themselves on a number of A3 sheets that had been cut to various shapes and sizes. They sketched and coloured with a mixture of pencils and paints. During this lesson their teacher, Miss Cross, was in the

main classroom with the rest of the class, who were mostly children from year 5. As I sat with the group I made notes following their conversation as it diverged and digressed across a wide range of topics.

The children talk about: which teams they support (football), girls and boys sport, they sing the tunes from adverts (particularly McDonald's), discuss the sounds names make, middle names, boys and girls try to bargain with each other to find out what happened in the research interviews, girls pick on Steven saying he is afraid of everything, "I'm not afraid of girls" he says, they argue about friends, claims to many and accusations of none, girls make fun of boys who are "close" friends (allusions to homosexuality), money for the school trip, who can hit girls?, "you can't hit girls cos that'd make you a poofder" says Steven, girls discuss beach wear, they correct each other on grammar and pronunciation, "are you smoking when you're older?" says Ryan, talk about smoking, then about having dreams, who wants boys or girls as children?, "If you want a boy and a girl but you only wants one kid, why don't you just have a gay baby boy or like a tomboy" asks Vanessa, talk about skin colour, ethnicity and chocolate, ask me what I'm writing and who will see it, discuss dogs, cats and other pets.

Short interruption from Miss Cross, as she makes sure the children are getting on with their work.

Bakers, fresh bread and muffins, Nintendo Game Boys, personal CD players, lots of "yeah well I've got..." and other kinds of bragging, talk about accents and voices, my "posh" voice is highlighted, weekend play, teenage pregnancy and periods (early occurrences), who's "at risk" in the class (of becoming pregnant), conjoined twins, girls tease boys saying they're "skinny", ethnicity and background (especially mixed-ethnicity), talk about what a "stiffy" (erect penis) is, sex videos, "doing it", eating glue, solvent addiction and poisoning, The Ring (a horror film, rated 18), Big Brother (television show), bad behaviour and classroom sanctions, images of God and Jesus seen in a 'Magic Eye' picture, marriages between parents and step parents, running away from home, body piercing at 13, nose piercing at home, girls as models in the future, future careers, what did I want to be when I was 11?, safety of air travel, grandparents.

Field notes, St. Troughton's

Clearly, there is a great deal going on here. The microcosm of this conversation, which spanned no more than 35 minutes, contains all the major themes of this thesis: gender, sexuality, friendship, popular culture, and social class; as well as others, such as ethnicity, the body and dis/ability, family, religion, researcher positioning, and economic markets. By pulling together the fragments and fluctuations of this extended period of talk, the complex and heterogeneous nature of the children's relationship culture can be glanced. The children talked over, at odds, and against each other; and the conversation hinged on disagreements, digressions, mockery and defence. It highlights the richness of their culture and the way it is shaped by power relations, as they laugh, discipline and argue about various contested subject positions, and tangle over forms of cultural capital.

This extract highlights the limits of a research text – children's cultures cannot be represented in their entirety or complexity, rather themes can be selected and supported by extracts that are glances at the density of their relationships and economies of value. As Inglis (2005) points out, *“everyday events’ cannot be comprehensively captured and set down on paper; but what we can do is get sideways glimpses of them, partial and limited perspectives of their overall complexity and abundance”* (emphasis added). This very important argument is central to my approach, and in Chapter 4 I discuss the analytical ways that cultures can be talked about and certain selected threads followed through the dense weave of everyday life.

It is also interesting to speculate what kinds of effects the activity of creating large self-portraits had on the ebb and flow of the conversation. Certainly it seems reasonable to suggest that the

many references to bodies made throughout the conversation may be due to the activity focused on self-image and representation. The material artefacts of the activity – the pencils, paper, etc. – are part of a social-technological assemblage that formed the particular type of childhood present in the art room (Prout 2005). The importance of such artefacts, contexts and intersubjectivity are discussed fully in the latter part of Chapter 4.

Gendered/sexual cultures

Looking again at the extract in the previous section, it becomes clear that gendered sexuality is a constantly recurring theme in the children's talk. This is a thread, or perspective, which I have chosen to follow throughout this thesis. As such, it represents the predominant ways that I have chosen to glimpse across the complexity of the children's cultures. Take, for example, this shorter sample from the above extract:

...teenage pregnancy and periods (early occurrences), who's "at risk" in the class (of becoming pregnant), conjoined twins, girls tease boys saying they're "skinny", ethnicity and background (especially mixed-ethnicity), talk about what a "stiffy" (erect penis) is, sex videos, "doing it"...

Field notes, St. Troughton's

Here, the predominance of gendered sexuality is clear. Concerns about pregnancy blend with fascinations with 'abnormal' bodies, as girls' maturing corporeality is framed in terms of risk; then boys are disciplined with reference to images of hegemonic masculine physiques, their identities positioned in relation to sexual drives, focused on the urges of their genitals, and the act of hetero-penetration.

These narratives of gendered sexuality also fold out into ethnicity and age, illustrating the complexity and richness of the children's

everyday talk. Primary here is a concern with the body. Indeed, it is vital to recognise the embodied experiences of the children and the ways they understood them. The materiality of childhood is not only important as a physiological reality that is interpreted through dominant (adult) culture; it is also interpreted through children's sub-cultural frameworks of understanding, making it a key aspect of their subjectivities. In these examples, and at other times, the children were negotiating, policing, re-constructing, challenging and hybridizing the socially constructed representations of puberty within their own contingent circumstances. These processes are discussed in Chapter 9, where I look at their educational and cultural transitions.

A working theory of power and agency

Having made the statement above that children are cultural agents and providing some discussion surrounding this, I feel it is important to clearly state how I am conceptualising cultural agency. The problem of agency is, of course, central to debates in social theory (see, for example, Archer 2000; Giddens 1979). It is also an important and complex political concern for academic feminism (see Clegg 2006). These debates are strongly contested and dense, so rather than attempt any ill-informed closure on the on-going discussions, I want to briefly explain the working philosophical model that informs my ontology of agency. In Chapter 2 I said that I was looking to develop a concept of 'complex determinism' (Eagleton 1997). Under this rubric, I am trying to work with a sense of the complex and multiple social and cultural construction of subjectivity; and it is this complexity that provides the basis for agency, as there are many points for resistance *and* creation. People are not 'cultural dupes,' acting unthinkingly in the face of overwhelming dominance (Inglis 2005). People can recognise, resist, reflect on, and negotiate the forces that shape their lives, although the extent of their recognition and

the shape of their re-actions will be determined to a great extent by the way their subjectivity is constituted by a particular habitus (Adams 2006; Bourdieu 1977; McNay 1999; Skeggs 2004 – this point is discussed in Chapter 8).

Similarly, in expanding the Foucaudian position in her earlier work, Butler (1997:15) argues that “agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled.” So subjects are something more than just positions in discourses, but are still substantiated by them. Discussing a similar idea in terms of language, Bakhtin states that,

An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth). But something created is always created out of something given (language, an observed phenomenon of reality, an experienced feeling, the speaking subject himself, something finalized in his world view, and so forth). What is given is completely transformed in what is created.

Bakhtin 1986:295

Although Bakhtin is probably overstating the case, I am drawn to this notion of creation. It echoes Butler’s (1993) idea that resistance to the dominant heterosexual order is possible, but any resistance must be built on sources that pre-exist the act, and that are consequently, ‘impure.’ But there is a prioritising of context here, which allows us to see both the dominance of the culture the subject is born into and also (admittedly, perhaps romantically) the agency of the ‘speaking subject’ as being achieved through the re-articulation of linguistic material within a shifting time/space continuum. In sum, the terms in which I consider agency are as follows: people are situated in history,

culture, and within their own network of social relationships and values (their habitus). They take biographical pathways through the life course that are shaped by power, social structure, and tradition; but the decisions about which way to turn are always their own. Therefore, while I cannot provide answers to the problem of agency, I can hopefully participate in an engaging re-framing of its questions.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the idea of theory/method, looked at the five romances of this thesis, and discussed theories of childhood and research with children. Romance was divided into the categories of playground romance, popular romance, subjects of romance, sociological romance and writer's romance, and I explored the various connections between these and indicated how they have been used to guide the analysis of the data and structure of the thesis. I then discussed how contemporary theories of childhood affected approaches to research with children and examined what this means in terms of the relationships between adult researchers and child participants, and how, in this context, children's cultures and agency might be considered. In the next chapter I build on these ideas by explaining in detail each of the methods for gathering data used during the fieldwork, and by outlining my methods for data analysis.

Chapter 4

Method/theory

The subjectivity of the autonomous individual, the humanist subject, the one that supposedly lives within but not of history and the one that is... the basis for what we think commonly a researcher is, is a kind of imperial subjectivity. It is a rather arrogant subjectivity that thinks it is its own master and that it can name, know, and communicate the really real.

Scheurich 2001:176-77

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the methodology and methods of my doctoral study, while retaining the perspective that method and theory are importantly and inseparably conjoined. I begin with the proposition that methodology exists in the choices a researcher makes about how to go about their fieldwork, connecting this argument with an outline of the model of ethnography that I used to inform my research and a discussion of reflexivity and the 'ethnographic self.' Taking these positions into consideration, the chapter then continues by detailing the methods that were used to gather data, with sections on observation and participation, interviews, diaries, creative writing, drama, friendship maps, and ad hoc methods. While explaining how each method was used during the fieldwork I provide illustrative data extracts and critically evaluate its success and the kinds of data that were produced. Returning to the idea of social strata outlined in Chapter 1, the chapter concludes with an outline of the methods of analysis I employed when dealing with the data, with a focus on discourse, dialogue, intersubjectivity and context.

Methodology: choices, ethics, politics and reflexivity

I introduced the previous chapter with a brief note about the entwined nature of method and theory (and politics), and of course where theory and method converge most clearly is in the methodology of research. I want to argue that a researcher's methodology is part of the researcher's subjectivity, and as such, a significant part of their world-view. So methodology lies in the *choices* that a researcher must confront when planning and undertaking a research project (Silverman 2001). These choices include but extend beyond the selection of research methods, and, in part, display the ethical and political nature of the research project. In Chapter 1 I discussed the politics of research with specific reference to writing research texts. Here, I rejoin those arguments and look at how the notion that methods do not just describe social realities but also help to create them impacts on the practice of fieldwork (Law 2004).

Epistemologically then, I believe that things *can* be known about the social world, albeit in a partial and provisional way, as long as we accept that the methods employed to investigate the social are to a great extent dependent on and part of the social itself. This means that we, as researchers, are implicit (and complicit) in creating perspectives on what is 'out there' in the social world, and we should therefore be aware of and account for the way we do this through our methods and methodologies. As we partially 'enact' the reality of the social world, we should excavate, interrogate and be clear about our ethical aims and political commitments (something I attempt to do in Chapter 2 regarding politics and Chapter 3 regarding ethics and agency), and align our methods to these. Through this lens the ethical-political dimension of research does not negate the possibility of reflecting and commenting on people's social worlds in a thorough and systematic fashion. Moreover, "*all attempts to produce knowledge*

of social life are political but the politically committed can still be scientific in the sense of connecting ideas and experience to underlying realities" (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002:54, emphasis in original). From this position one can recognise the power relations involved in the creation of knowledge at all stages of research activity, from the conception of what is deemed worthy of research, the research design and methods employed, to the analysis and dissemination. This is how I frame ontological politics with regard to methodology.

There are obviously connections between ontological politics and what is usually referred to as reflexivity. For most researchers reflexivity means "reflecting upon, examining critically and exploring analytically the nature of the research process" (Walkerline et al 2001:85). When deployed in research, reflexivity should not be an exercise in catharsis or confession (Pillow 2003), but should be taken as an opportunity to uncover and engage with the forces that influence the research process. Moreover, it *could* be argued that reflexivity is not an academic or scholarly skill *per se*, but actually something essential to the human condition. But this is perhaps beyond the remit of sociological analysis, and can certainly be bracketed off as such here.

There are strong arguments that suggest that reflexivity is a product or technology of social class positioning (see Skeggs 2004 for example). However, following Adams (2006) I would argue that while class cultures do influence people's awareness of their positioning 'within' social structures²⁵, and thus the character of their reflexive thought, it is not only those with a middle class habitus that engage in reflexivity. The ability to act on what has

²⁵ I realise that notions of agency and structure are highly contentious, but I use this idea as an explanatory tool.

been reflected upon will almost certainly be curtailed by material factors and power relations.

I have used points of critical examination to interrogate my own part in the research process, building on these to create different ways of thinking about the data as often produced in this relational and intersubjective context – especially interviews, observation and participation. Therefore, my acts of reflexivity in these cases are about examining the relationships between myself and my participants, looking at differences and similarities, and finding meaningful things to say about *all* our social/personal lives, while being able to emphasise what is meaningful to my participants.

Ethnography

The central, overarching method for my fieldwork was ethnography. What actually constitutes ethnography differs greatly depending on who one reads (e.g. Atkinson & Hammersley 1994; Denzin 1997; Karp 1999; Sanders 1999; Wolcott 1999), so I will briefly sketch the model of ethnography that I followed through the fieldwork before illustrating in detail the different methods used within this umbrella approach. The core of my position is very similar to that outlined by Hammersley (2006), who explains ethnography in the following terms,

...ethnography [is a]... form of educational and social research that emphasises the importance of studying *at first hand* what people do and say in particular contexts. This usually involves fairly lengthy contact, through participant observation in relevant settings, and/or through relatively open-ended interviews designed to understand people's perspectives, perhaps complimented by the study of various sorts of document – official, publicly available, or personal.

Also crucial to ethnography... is the tension between what we might call participant and analytic perspectives.”

Hammersley 2006:4, emphasis in original

As issues about participant observation, interviews and documents are discussed later in this chapter, here I will unpack what is meant by context and perspective, continuing to draw on Hammersley’s (2006) arguments, and then go on to discuss the ethnographic self.

Hammersley (2006) explains that contemporary ethnographic fieldwork in the social sciences tends to be much shorter than anthropological ethnography, due to negative pressures of time and positive advances of recording technology, meaning that ethnographers only tend to study *parts* of peoples lives, at certain times and in particular places. This necessarily places some limitations on what can be said about participants’ social lives. While accepting these limitations, in my own fieldwork I have attempted to reach beyond the contextual confines of my presence in the schools by asking the children to talk and write about their lives beyond the school gates, and by taking a longitudinal approach, situating the fieldwork across several sites. Moreover, influenced as I am by poststructural theories of subjectivity, I already anticipated some instability and fluidity in my participants’ subjectivities as they moved between different settings, within and outside the fieldwork.

Hammersley also notes that it is important to be aware that, despite regularity of practice and apparent rigidity of structure, one must remain critical of what one observes in a given situation, taking care not to assume that this is what *always* happens there. In the school context ethnographers must be aware of the ‘cyclical variability’ that occurs in educational settings – changes that

happen from day to day, across the week or the term and throughout the year. The ethnographer also makes a choice as to which settings count as part of the research (and often this choice is shaped by others in the field, those commonly named 'gatekeepers'). Moreover, the context is also, *up to a point*, constructed by the research. Therefore, in my fieldwork, the context encompasses the buildings of each school, their playgrounds and playing fields, and the pathways trodden by the children at the beginning and end of the school day. To a point these settings reflect the spatiality and temporality of the school day, but they do not do so entirely, as they also reflect the processes of research; the various legal and cultural restrictions on conducting research with children, for example.

Furthermore, situated in the located and truncated character of ethnography is a tension between what can be said about the local or micro, and what can be said about the global or macro. In Chapter 3 I discussed some of the social forces that have shaped the character of childhood and popular romance, and it is these themes, as well as the analytical theories I outline below, which I will use to bring depth to my analysis of the everyday events of the children's cultures (at least those that I am privy to). To an extent I agree with Burawoy et al (2000) that, to understand events in a particular site, our discussions must be set against the processes of globalisation. The seven social strata introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed below are my attempt to do this, while remaining anchored in the recorded events that constitute my data. Thus, my own 'sociological imagination' (Mills 1970) is used to enrich and bring multiple lenses of analysis to my readings of the children's cultures and interactions. As Hammersley (2006) notes however, there is a key tension in ethnographic research between the perspective outlined here – the researcher's perspective – and that of the people being observed, in this case the children. This

tension, Hammersley (2006:11) argues, “between trying to understand people’s perspectives from the inside while also viewing their behaviour more distantly” is the essence of ethnography. In my work then, I purposely draw on both or either perspective wherever they appear to provide the best lens for interpreting events, conduct or texts (while reflexively noting the forces that shape such interpretive positions).

Something Hammersley (2006) does not explicitly discuss is the nature of the researcher’s self as an integral part of ethnographic research, although he does note that the ‘reactivity’ of participants towards the researcher can shape the conduct under observation, and that ethnographers must be aware of this affect. Many feminist researchers have argued that it is vital that the researcher’s self be accounted for in their work in such a way that the self is located as a gendered, sexualised, embodied, emotional, generational thing, both *in* and *of* the processes of research (Coffey 1999:12; also see Letherby 2003; Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). As Coffey (1999:158) notes, “it is not necessary to make the self the explicit focus of fieldwork, for biographical work to be accomplished... The self is shaped by relationships, interactions and experiences which are not suspended for the duration of the fieldwork. To deny the impact of fieldwork on the construction of self rather misses the point.” Furthermore, Coffey notes that fieldwork is emotional, physical, and relational (what I often call intersubjective), as well as being structured by decisions and dialogues, which the researcher must navigate with their participants in order to find or construct a pathway through the research process. As with the process of reflexivity, this does not imply a self-absorbed preoccupation with one’s self; but “it does imply a self-conscious and self-critical approach to fieldwork” (Coffey 1999:158). Denzin and Lincoln (1994:559) identify such research as located within the ‘sixth moment’ of qualitative

research, which is characterised by texts that are “messy, subjective, open ended, conflictual and feminist influenced.²⁶” Moreover, as Foley (2002) argues, such ‘critical ethnography’ should still be written in a way that is open and accessible, and which builds thoughtful analyses on a reflexive epistemology.

Because qualitative research, and ethnography in particular, is about building relationships with one’s participants, it is important that the forces that shape the construction of such relationships be reflected upon. Moreover, it is (at least in part) through an extended exploration of these relationships that significant things can be said and meaningful, well-founded realities enacted about the everyday lives of my child participants. In the discussion of methods that follows therefore, when explaining how each of the methods worked in practice, I often return to the theme of the growing, shifting, fluid, sometimes convivial, sometimes conflictual relationships between my self and my participants.

Methods for gathering data

In this section I outline and discuss all of the methods that were used during the fieldwork for the gathering of data when working with the children. Although the main methods that I used were observation, participation and interviews, the children also undertook some more structured activities like keeping a diary for a short time, and creative writing. In each sub-section I explain how each method provided a particular perspective on the children’s social worlds and therefore produced certain kinds of knowledge.

²⁶ The other moments being: (1) traditional, (2) modernist or golden age, (3) blurred genres, (4) crisis of representation, and, (5) the present or the postmodern.



Observation and participation

Following the conventions of ethnographic method, my fieldwork was based on observation and participation (Coffey 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). I have chosen to emphasise a split in these terms, which are usually joined in the phrase 'participant observation', because of the particular nature of my research project. As I was an adult working with children in schools it was impossible for me to sustain a position as participant observer. To be a participant observer I would either have to become a child, which as I have already argued is obviously impossible (see Chapter 3), or take a position as a nominal member of staff (not ideal) or a different kind of researcher (i.e. working *on* rather than *with* children) (Christensen & James 2000). Moreover, my participation in the schools was always mediated by age, even though there was a great deal of conviviality and rapport between the key child participants and myself. And of course, gender, social class and ethnicity were also mediating factors with fluid effects.

In the classroom

Further to these points, I think that the observation/participation distinction is an important one to make, as observation and participation relate to two different kinds of activity that I undertook in the school. To illustrate this, I provide the following example of two girls talking to me in the classroom at St. Pertwee's. I show in bold parenthesis what I argue are the *general* shifts from observation to participation as the class participates in a lesson that involves drawing self-portraits. I do not want to overstate the point and suggest that they are two absolutely distinct activities, but I do want to illustrate how the idea of presenting a role as 'differently adult,' as described in Chapter 3, played out during the fieldwork. This extract also contains some of

the central themes about gendered sexuality, popular culture, and friendship that I go on to discuss in later chapters.

[Observation]

I am sitting at the edge of Paige and Renae's table as Year 6 enter the room and take their seats for their afternoon lessons. Registration is taken and they are introduced to the first task of the afternoon – they must draw self-portraits and write something about themselves as part of their transfer packs for St. Baker's. Paige and Renae get down to work with a colourful range of felt tip pens and begin to talk about whether or not they like their noses and chins.

Paige: I can't draw noses and I can't draw chins.

Renae: At least you's got a good nose. I hates my nose, it looks well stupid and I can't draw it. [Renae examines her chin in a small mirror] David? David? Can you draw us some good noses?

[Participation]

DJM: I'm not sure I should really because then it wouldn't be your picture would it?

Paige: No it's ok we always help each other.

Renae: What do think about my nose?

DJM: I can't see anything wrong with it.

Renae: Maybe we should just copy from magazines?

Paige: [Excited and grabbing copy of *Heat* magazine] Yeah, yeah! Which celebrity do I look like?

Renae: Everyone looks like someone famous and lush [flicks back hair]

Paige: Do I?

Renae: [To DJM] You know who you looks like?

DJM: Who?

Renae: Lilly Savage

DJM: Lilly Savage?

Paige: [Laughter] You do!

Renae: Yeah, yeah, only when she's a man though. I was looking at your chin and you look like Lilly Savage.

[Mrs Lewis the class teacher approaches.]

Mrs Lewis: Come on girls you've hardly done anything, I'll move you if you don't get a move on.

Renae: We was just asking David to help us with our drawings.

Paige: Miss, Miss do you think David looks like Lilly Savage?

Renae: When she's a man?

Mrs Lewis: [smiling] Look I don't think David wants to draw so I suggest you get with them yourselves quietly.

[Observation]

Both the girls get their heads down and carry on with their drawings.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

As this extract demonstrates, it can be argued that the boundaries between observation and participation were constantly shifting. Where possible I hoped to make these shifts under the control of the children, but I did not see this as a means for 'empowering' them or granting them the identity of co-researchers. Instead I saw it as an attempt to make my occupation of their desk space minimal and to present a 'differently adult' identity. Often however, it was the teachers who re-positioned me as 'officially adult.' In this case Mrs Lewis dismisses the idea that I might be interested in joining in with the drawing, inferring that I would not want to participate in a children's/pupils' activity, and thereby using my adult subject position to softly discipline the girls into working quietly. Such tactics of classroom governance were also employed by Mr Jones, the other Year 6 teacher in St. Pertwee's. During lessons Mr Jones would often defer to me so that I could affirm the validity of what he was saying, looking at me and saying something like 'isn't that right, sir?' At first, being 'called to witness' in this way seemed to seriously disrupt my attempts to gain currency for my differently adult status among the children. After a while, however, I discovered that the children had a different interpretation of such events. They saw it as an idiosyncrasy and weakness of their teacher; so I found that his attempts to bring me into the lesson in this way actually helped build a sense of commonality between myself and the children, contrary to my belief that such attempts would create a distance/difference.

Furthermore, it could be argued that I was participating right from the beginning of this episode because I was sitting with the girls at their table. As the above example shows, it is difficult to anticipate how the institutional power relations between adults and children might be working in a particular setting at any given time. Indeed, the girls may well have considered me to have been 'participating' from the outset: it is difficult to say. The character of participation and observation then, was constantly negotiated and shaped by a variety of factors, certainly age, but also gender and social class, as I will go on to discuss below.

The extract shows some of the features of the girls' friendship cultures and how these were negotiated, between themselves and also in ways that drew on my presence. Celebrity culture was clearly influential in how the girls saw themselves and each other, as they create a connection between their own lives and those of the celebrities by asserting that 'everyone looks like someone famous and lush' (i.e. attractive or beautiful). Therefore, a key feature of the exchange is the way that the girls constructed their own gendered identities, and playfully negotiated my gender. Renae is convinced that I resemble Lilly Savage, the drag identity of actor and television presenter Paul O'Grady. But I can only look like her/him when she is a man, even though her/his chin is the same when she/he is dressed and performing as a man and a woman. Moreover, I could only look like Paul O'Grady, and not Lilly Savage, because I was a man. This example illustrates how researcher/participant relations are fluid and cannot be fixed in terms predetermined by the researcher. My own subject positioning was not entirely under my control; the girls were able to openly explore my appearance in terms relevant to their cultural conceptions of identity and likeness. Yet within this fluidity, normative notions of gender are asserted.

My reply to the request to draw the noses on the girls' portraits – 'I'm not sure I should really because then it wouldn't be your picture would it?' – raises some interesting questions about social class. Between the children in the class there was a well-established system of co-operation and collusion ('it's ok, we always help each other') that operated across the encouraged/prohibited boundary in formal lessons²⁷. My concern is one of authorship: if I help then claims to the authorship of the work are brought into question or dispute in my understanding. This, though, is not a concern for the girls, who appear to hold their work in different esteem. Between us there is a difference in the value that we place on the established authorship of creative work. Partly this may be due to generational differences, but it may also be a factor of social class. Our differences in the placement of value displays alternative world views that, with the aid of reflexivity, provided a useful way for understanding the children's understandings and investments. So because of the interest the children paid to my biography (see Chapter 8) and drawing on the ways they drew me into their culture, I was able to use my 'self' as a research tool. I return to explore the varying social class positions and values that existed between my participants and myself in Chapter 8.

On the playground

Moving from the classroom to the playground, the practice of observation and participation changed as I entered a space that was shaped by children's cultures of play. At each primary school there were slight differences in the ways the children organised the playground spaces (see Chapter 6), but as a matter of continuity I will focus on my experiences at St. Pertwee's. I began

²⁷ At St. Pertwee's there were several posters on the classroom walls encouraging the children to help each other if they found someone was struggling with their work. It was clear though that this help was not expected to include undertaking parts of the work.

spending morning break and lunchtime on the playgrounds by standing or sitting at the edges of the playground. This had two consequences. Firstly, it meant that I found myself located in the play cultures of girls for Years 4 and 5. The St. Pertwee's playground was dominated by boys' football, so most other forms of play were pushed into the corners and peripheries. That is not to suggest that they were quietened by this, on the contrary, these cultures flourished. But as noted, they were primarily the play cultures of younger children and girls, so it was these groups that initially predominated in my playground encounters. Secondly, it resulted in my periodically becoming the subject of ridicule. I found a spot where I could sit on a blue bench so that my view would be similar to that of the children, so that my position would be different to that of the adult supervisors, and so the children were free to come up and talk to me²⁸. But quite soon several boys from year 4 were running up to me and shouting 'loser!' Confused, I asked one of the girls from Year 6 why they were shouting at me. 'You've sat on the bully bench,' she said, 'so they think you've got no friends.' The blue bench, I discovered, was introduced by the school for children to sit when they had been bullied and were in need of a friend. The children, however, had bestowed an alternative meaning on the bench; they preferred to stigmatise those who sat on it as 'losers' and 'Billy-no-mates.' This episode illustrates that way that the children negotiated the symbolically bestowed material apparatus of the playground, creating alternative and even opposite meanings to those provided by the teaching staff. As I discuss in Chapter 6, ways of seeing the playground, of understanding its material and spatial-temporal dimensions differed between adults and children.

²⁸ As noted in Chapter 2, I had discovered that walking up to the children and engaging them in discussion was difficult and was met with suspicion or miscomprehension. This made me realise that it was far better to let the children find their way to me out of their own interest and curiosity.

While conducting similar research about children's relationship cultures in a primary school, Kehily (2002) focuses on the meetings of a group of girls called the 'diary group.' The 'diary group' would meet each day at a certain place on the playground and discuss themes such as puberty, periods, erotic attachments, and imagined futures. Kehily contends that whilst conducting research at the school she was treated as an 'honorary member' of the group and a 'grown-up girl.' She explains how, at different times, she became a group member, an audience, and a source of knowledge, but was always positioned as such by the girls in the group. To be seen as a 'grown-up girl' shows how Kehily's access to the diary group was dependent on gender. Furthermore, the various positions Kehily held as speaker, listener, and knower, show how she remained a gendered *adult*. Similarly, in the classroom and on the playground, I was positioned in numerous ways by the children, but these positionings did not at any point negate my status as an adult and a man. This then, is how the role of being a differently adult, 'semi-participant' (Punch 2002) worked out in practice.

Field notes and the weather

The activity of taking field notes is also significant when thinking about observation, participation, and the writing of research texts. As Wolfinger (2002) suggests, field notes are often a hidden labour in ethnographic research. They may be hidden from the participants during the fieldwork and they may also be concealed from the reader of the resultant text (Warren 2000). Because of the way the children related to my note taking activities and the notebooks themselves (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of this), my field notes had a high profile at the schools and frequently became a subject of discussion. Some of the children, for example, became aware that what I was writing amounted to

representations of them and so wished to police how I was constructing my stories about them.

Furthermore, the activity of note taking and hence data gathering was shaped a great deal by the weather. I first visited Hartnell during the winter, which meant my time on the playground was characterised by squally winds, drizzle and frozen fingers, making sitting impossible and note taking problematic. At St. Pertwee's and St. Troughton's, during the summer months, I could sit and write with relative leisure, so staying cool in the sunshine became the only difficulty; while my time at St. Baker's, again in the winter, meant lunchtimes nomadically roaming with groups of children through various school buildings, in and out of classrooms, hallways, and canteens. It was difficult to judge when I would be able to stop to make note of the fast moving and quick talking culture of the children in such unpredictable circumstances. The weather then, and the way it determined that spatial context of observation, was significant in shaping the way that observational data were gathered.

Group interviews

Aims and perspectives

In Chapter 3 I looked at a detailed extract from St. Troughton's art room, where the children freely discussed a range of topics while undertaking some unsupervised project work. Being present at this particular event made me realise the benefits of an unstructured and 'free association' method when researching with children because of the way this context brought forth a way of speaking that emphasised their own interests and agendas, as opposed to those set by adults. Moreover, I began to see how the question-answer style of interview, even when loosely structured, could impede to a great extent on the way the children spoke and presented themselves. As I was interested in exploring

investments and understandings within their relationship cultures, I reasoned that it was desirable to arrange the interviews I planned with them in a way that encouraged this culture of communication from their everyday lives.

I do not see interviewing as an unproblematic way of generating data. Moreover, informed by poststructural and psychosocial perspectives I am aware that in the interview setting both interviewer and interviewee(s) will have multiple desires and intentions, only some of which may be consciously known (Hollway & Jefferson 2000; Walkerdine et al 2001). Likewise, the language used in the interview will be slippery and unstable, with shifting meanings that are often ambiguous (Scheurich 1997). The research interview context also brings about certain performances, some of which will be due to the ubiquity of interview and ethnographic culture in late modern society and people's awareness of this genre (Plummer 1999). Other performances will result from the complex conscious and unconscious interactions between the interviewer and their participants, brought about by social factors like age, gender, and social class, and defended emotions (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). Indeed, this is not just the case for the interview context, but for the research context as a whole, and I will discuss these points again in the analysis section towards the end of this chapter.

My conscious aim then, was to provide a space in the interviews where the children could talk freely in a manner similar to the ways they spoke during the episode discussed in Chapter 3. I was careful, however, not to make too many uncritical assumptions about the character of their talk or my ability to create a 'naturalistic' environment in which they would speak. The interview context is a product of the research, so I was always anticipating and accepting that their talk would, in multiple ways

– some visible and analysable, others undetectable and complex – be different to that of their everyday interaction. Yet importantly I am not suggesting that their conversations in everyday life are of a homogenous nature or in some sense predictable; this would be an adult-centric fallacy. What the interviews *did* provide was the opportunity to gather substantial amounts of data regarding their relationship cultures. As such, I decided to conduct the interviews with groups rather than individuals²⁹. Bloor et al (2001) argue that a major benefit of focus group interviews is the way group meanings are negotiated among the participants, and that the essential ambivalence and ambiguity of norms and practices is retained in the somewhat chaotic character of the conversations. This helps retain a sense of provisionality and contingency about the data; something that is important when looking at the fluid and multiply mediated nature of subjectivity and culture.

Taking this point and the others outlined above into account, I remained committed to trying to understand the children's perspectives on their everyday lives through the interviews. Even though the interviews were undoubtedly riddled with conflicts, desires and performances, I did not see any reason to believe that the data produced were too problematic to be used for any purpose other than the study of discursive strategies within the interview (see, for example, Potter & Wetherell 1987), or that the relationship between what was said in an interview and events outside it were too unstable and untrustworthy to be of analytical use. The position I adopt is not so radically sceptical. In a similar vein to my earlier argument about reflexivity, I strongly suggest that while the complex psychosocial constitution of all

²⁹ Partially this decision was made for me because of discussions I had had with friends who are teachers before undertaking the fieldwork. They advised me that it was common practice for male teachers to avoid situations where they were left alone in a room with a child. This arguably reflects increased fears about the risks of sexuality in the school and in relations between teachers and students (Epstein & Johnson 1998; Epstein et al 2003).

participants and their deployment of rhetoric devices (including those of the ethnographer – see Atkinson 1991) are interesting and worthy points of investigation, they should not overwhelm or obscure the ethnographic aim of inquiring as to the character of the social worlds being observed (Hammersley 2006).

Practicalities

The group interviews were undertaken throughout each phase of fieldwork. At Hartnell there were 5 interviews, 9 at St. Troughton's, 8 at St. Pertwee's, and 3 at St. Baker's. (In addition to these 'formal' group interviews there were 32 other recorded group conversations, some of which were made at the children's request). The 'formal' group interviews were always undertaken with groups of children who identified as friends, and as far as was possible I talked to a balanced mixture of single and mixed gender groups. The groups were organised depending on friendship and gender so that the children felt comfortable in each interview and so I could meet with them in the peer groups they ordinarily spent the most time with. This way I had some access to their friendship cultures, even through this was obviously mediated by the context of the interview. On the whole I aimed to make each group interview last about 40 minutes, although there were some that were shorter and some that lasted much longer (one interview with a group of boys at St. Pertwee's lasting almost 90 minutes). The vast majority of the children enjoyed the interviews, especially because, as they explained to me, it meant they could have an extended period of time out of class with their friends.

The interviews were recorded using a small handheld digital recorder. In an attempt to de-formalise the technical aspect of the interviews I asked the children to hold the recorder and become more actively involved in the processes of the interview (I mean

this in terms of what I defined as 'participation' as outlined in Chapter 3). In addition to interacting with the equipment I looked for other ways to involve the children in the processes of research. This often involved playing back parts of the interview following recording, talking about their responses and what they thought about them, and discussing what interviews were used for in research. In a few cases at St. Troughton's, this culminated in the staging of a semi-formal skills workshop where I explained to the children about some of the aims and methods of my interviews and asked them to interview me on the same topic (this particular exercise is discussed in Chapter 8).

The choice of which groups were interviewed and when was variously influenced by the children, the teachers, and me. There were frequently problems with finding interview venues in very busy schools, where all available areas were under almost constant use. Interviews also had to fit in with the daily structures of the school curriculum. This meant that the children and I had to rely on various tactics of territorialisation and time stealing, occupying spaces in moments they were not being used. For example, when I was left without a room in which to interview a large group of boys, I took them into the empty assembly hall where we conducted an interview on the floor, with occasional interruptions from passing staff members, quizzing our presence in the hall. While at St. Pertwee's, where there were two large Year 6 classes, I had trouble speaking to all the children who wanted to be interviewed and one group of girls arranged to meet me on the playground at lunchtime so that I could interview them there. In both cases the 'interview space' was not given or stable, but had to be constantly reaffirmed; its boundaries constructed and to an extent defended by myself and my participants. The practicalities of undertaking research in this kind of shifting environment

alerted me to the importance of understanding the part spatiality plays in the construction of the interview environment.

Structuring

Following Renold (2005) I chose to give the interviews very little by way of formal structure. In the first interview I began with a general question along the lines of 'what is a friend?' At some point I also usually included the question 'do girls and boys make different kinds of friends?' but I allowed the flow of the children's own conversation to dictate when or whether these questions were used to guide the discussion. The broad topic of friendship allowed the children to discuss their relationships with little direction from me, and they always worked together to construct and contest the meanings of friendship (see Chapter 7). This is an example of one of the two connected ways in which I used friendship 'tactically' in the research. The other concerns the broader framing of the research. For example, when approaching the schools and gaining initial access I framed my research in terms of friendships and not in terms of sexuality. This is because it was within friendships and relationships that I located the fieldwork, whereas gendered sexuality is how I have situated my analysis.

While my interviews were generally non-directed and open-ended, it would be naïve to suggest that there were not structures at work in the shaping of what was said by the members of each group (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). The general factors structuring the group interviews can be summarised by the points below. These points are arranged with reference to group interviews, but they are also relevant to all aspects of interaction within the research context.

- *Knowledge of the project* – due to the introductory handouts and numerous conversations, most of the children knew exactly what my interests were and came into the interviews ready to discuss friendships and relationships. Often they found out from classmates who had been interviewed before them.
- *Technique and technologies of the interview* – the interview is a well-established form of social interaction and, as noted above, a type of interaction and performance that is (very often, but not always) part of people’s subjectivity: most people can adopt the subject position of ‘interviewee.’ Moreover, many of the children in this project knew exactly how to take this position and thus perform the ‘correct’ form of speech and comportment; answering in sound-bites and sitting up straight and attentively in their chairs. (This was certainly the case at the beginning of the interviews, but many such performances subsided as the non-formal mode of communication was established. However, if I took steps to return some kind of order to the interview, perhaps due to noise, many children would re-enact the role of interviewee, sometimes overlaying it with the performance of a ‘good pupil’).
- *Activity of researcher* – although the interviews were open-ended and I tried not to interrupt the children’s discussions, I was always an active participant. At the most basic level, my very embodied presence had multiple effects on the dynamics of the situation. I also set many of the agendas for talk and spoke throughout each interview as a group member. For example, sometimes I would need to interrupt the flow of conversation to make sure something was being recorded clearly or ask for clarification. Other times I would

be brought into the conversation by the children, perhaps to be asked my opinion or used as a source of knowledge.

- *Skills and competencies of interviewer and interviewees* – the interviews succeeded or failed depending on the shared skills of the interviewer and interviewees. As I have explained, I tried to arrange the group interviews so that the forms of communication already present in the children's cultures would not be silenced. Therefore, as far as was possible, I attempted to ensure that the skill base for the interviews was located within the children's everyday ways of talking. (This form of structuring was always in tension with the previous one, because my presence as an adult and an outsider undoubtedly affected their talk in various examinable and undeterminable ways).
- *Baggage* – all participants, myself included, brought a great deal of interpretive baggage (in Bourdieu's terms, habitus) into the interview setting. This equates to more than our conscious world-views and frameworks of understanding, and includes many unconscious elements that have sculpted our biographies: our anxieties and defences for example. Furthermore, each participant could draw on various forms of cultural capital throughout the flow of the conversation. Given that the character of the group interviews was shaped to a large extent by the children's cultures of communication, I was often a relative 'outsider' because I did not fully understand their interests, terms of reference, or turns of phrase. All participants also carried a set of embodied identifications about who and what we are that will have been interpreted by the others in ways the can only be provisionally known. These identifications include, for example, our gender, social class, ethnicity, bodily dis/abilities and attributes.

- *Cultural scripts* – the technologies of the interview provided the context for the rehearsal of cultural scripts. Therefore, when ‘formal’ questions were asked, the answers were structured dialogically by the narratives extant in popular culture. In Chapter 7 I discuss this idea with reference to the ways the children spoke about romance and love in the group interviews.

Diaries

The use of diaries within social research has a long history (Plummer 2001). Similarly, researchers have used some kind of diary, whether written or photographic, when researching with children to build a broad picture of their social worlds (see Christensen & James 1999). Therefore, my rationale for asking the children to compile diaries was to try and create some kind of pathway to their lives outside of the school. As I was unable to meet with the children out of school, I was interested in gathering some data about this side of their lives so that I had an enhanced picture of who they were and the kinds of activities they undertook beyond the school gates. Clearly the diaries were constructions rather than wholly true representations of out of school activities, but this did not make them less relevant. Indeed, I was interested in the ways that the children chose to represent themselves through this medium, what they chose to highlight and how they did this. The contents of the diaries are discussed in Chapter 7. Here I will explain the different ways that the diaries came into being and how they were differently governed in ways that pushed the boundaries of what I believed to be reasonable participation. As it transpired, the practicalities of fieldwork resulted in the production of different kinds of diaries in the different schools. This happened as a consequence of the organisational structures and techniques of the schools, and the boundaries of my access to each site.

In Hartnell I asked the children to complete the diary task in my absence, after the first phase of fieldwork. I wanted them to realise that the diaries were part of my project and not a teacher designated activity, so I made a point of sitting in the classroom one afternoon, cutting and stapling together card and several sheets of paper so that the diaries had a number of pages (8 A5 sized sides). The Hartnell diaries were made to this size so that there was a page for each day of the week. The diaries were then distributed on my last day in the school and I requested that they be returned to the class teacher after a week. I asked the children to write or draw about anything they got up to outside of school and told them that I would be happy for them to decorate the covers of their diaries, stressing at several points that this was a voluntary task that they did not have to participate in. A few weeks later Mrs Webster returned the diaries to me by post and many were full with detail, but when I telephoned to thank her I discovered that the production of the diaries had not been as 'free' as I had hoped. Indeed, when the diaries were initially returned many had little or no content, at which point Mrs Webster insisted that the children take them home again and bring them back when they had been 'done properly.' Although I appreciated Mrs Webster's efforts to help, such compulsory production of data contravened the ethical stance that I had adopted.

In St. Pertwee's the diaries were filled out in school in a short period during and after morning registration. The St. Pertwee's diaries were much smaller than the Hartnell ones, amounting to a single folded sheet of A4. This provided 4 A5 sides (including the cover) that were subdivided to produce a half side for each day. As with the Hartnell diaries, the children chose how to decorate the covers. The children kept the diaries in their personal trays and left them in school overnight, writing each day about the activities

of the previous evening. This clearly blurred the distinction between research work and schoolwork as I relied on a period in the day provided by the Year 6 teachers. Moreover, although I explained to the children that the work was not compulsory, both Mrs Lewis and Mr Jones insisted that they undertake the task each day and produce some visible work. Therefore control of the task became a struggle between myself, the children and the teachers. As such, I spent much of the diary sessions moving through the class and reassuring children who did not want to write that they did not have to, while the teachers were engaging to monitoring who was not 'participating' and disciplining those with idle pencils. Many of the boys in particular objected to compiling the diaries and I intervened several times to find other tasks for them that helped avoid attracting the attention of their teacher. Despite my best efforts the tension became too great at one point and one boy was ordered to the head teacher's office in tears.

The children at St. Troughton's did not do the diary activity. I chose not to introduce it into this class for two reasons. Firstly, because of the mixture of year groups present meant that I would have to decide whether I would ask all children to compile diaries or just select those in Year 6, thereby possibly creating tension. Secondly, it was clear to me for the experience of asking the children to write diaries at Hartnell and St. Pertwee's that, while they produced interesting data, they also represented an additional work burden on the children that many of them were uninterested in or did not enjoy. Diaries played no part in my fieldwork at St. Baker's for the same reasons. By this stage I had begun to analyse the ways in which writing diaries was a classed and gendered activity, which is something I explore in Chapter 7. Overall then, I have mixed feelings about the diary task. Although it certainly produced some interesting data, it was a task that too

easily came to represent compulsory 'school work' for some children and even cause emotional distress, especially some of the boys at St. Pertwee's. Despite this, I have decided to use some of the data from the diaries where, as far as I can ascertain, the children did invest in and enjoy undertaking the activity. With the children at St. Pertwee's I also took as many opportunities as possible to ask those who had completed diaries whether they were happy for me to use their diaries in my work, and have included their texts accordingly

Creative writing

As the diary writing activity indicates, there are some difficult issues to be considered when undertaking research activities in the classroom. These were highlighted most keenly during the sessions when I asked the children to write creative stories about friendship. Clearly I had to thoroughly interrogate my own ethical use of these methods, as I did not want to generate a mass of data that was dependent on my ability to take a 'teacherly' subject position within the classroom. As the example of the diary sessions at St. Pertwee's highlights, organising research activities in the classroom involves a level of ongoing negotiation with the class teacher. Whatever the intentions of the researcher, the conduct and behaviour rules of the classroom will be well established, rehearsed and performed, and the teacher will be unlikely to let these slip or be disrupted for the sake of academic fieldwork. Moreover, the ethical option of non-participation that I worked to retain throughout the fieldwork stands at odds with the model of expected conduct by children in educational settings.

To make things more complicated, the creative writing exercise actually drew on the pre-existing structures of the curriculum and was therefore the most 'scholastic' set of data I collected. In negotiating the undertaking of the exercise I asked the teachers if

I could use one of the weekly periods set aside for literacy to get the children to write for me, and they all agreed. So the activity was undertaken in normal lesson time in the children's regular classroom space and was organised with the help of each class teacher. Therefore the temporal ordering of the school day had some bearing on the way the stories were written.

To begin I asked the children to write a story about friendship, telling them that it could be about anything they like, be it real events or something made-up. The story, I said, could be as long as they liked and could be about them or some fictional characters they invented. Some children asked if they could also draw pictures, which I encouraged, saying that if there was anyone who did not want to write then they could just draw. This was a compromise position. Given that I was taking class time from the structured day I reasoned that it would be considered unacceptable (by the teachers) for me to say that opting out was at the children's discretion. That being said, as far as was possible I attempted to trouble the character of the exercise; but this was not a safe strategy, as it risked making the children, who were used to receiving unambiguous instructions in this setting, confused and unable to write. I was therefore caught between an ethical rock and a structural hard place.

Despite my stressing that the writing was not 'school work' but part of my research (which I had discussed with them already), it is reasonable to think that the exercise was at least in some part taken to be an educational task by some children. In Hartnell and St. Pertwee's, the children provided 'story plans' at the beginning of each story, clearly following the conventions of class work as would usually be required when completing work for their teachers. At St. Troughton's, the class teachers provided separate planning sheets for the activity that were ordinarily used as part

of a formal assessment exercise where students were encouraged to demonstrate their planning. It is difficult to assess exactly what impact this may have had on the types of narrative written, but, as my ethnographic observations confirmed, there was certainly a common set of generic conventions that the children recognised as necessary for the composition of 'correct' schoolwork. A further point to consider then is: who comprises the audience for the stories in the eyes of the children and, taking this into account, what appears to be considered by the children to be worth telling? These questions and the content of the stories are fully addressed in Chapter 8.

Drama

During the first phase of the fieldwork when I was based at Hartnell primary I tried out a number of methods that were ultimately rejected and not used in either the second or third phases of data collection. The reason for my choosing not to incorporate these methods into the other phases of my research was practical and ethical, and not because they were in any sense 'bad.' Primarily I felt that because the children's days were heavily structured it was better not to impose further structure on them through the fieldwork. One method I explored in the first phase was drama. Drawing on Francis (1997) I was interested in seeing how sessions of drama and role-play could be viewed in terms of gendered power relations. Similarly I saw such sessions as enabling me to see how the children went about jointly constructing narratives for the improvised stories they would be telling through their play.

In the drama sessions I asked the children to act out scenarios from their lives inside and outside school, explaining that I would like them to tell me stories about their everyday lives. This invitation produced performances about sleepovers, going

shopping and to the cinema, building camps and dens, and going round to a friend's house for tea. These performances then, allowed me to see, partially and provisionally, how the children went about embodying different subject positions within their life worlds. Furthermore, the children all really enjoyed these sessions, explaining to me that they saw them as representing the best elements of being in school: being allowed to 'play' in lesson time, but still being provided with instruction and guidance. Yet the sessions were difficult to organise because of the space required and the level of noise produced, which on several occasions disrupted the work of other classes in the school. So while there was clear value in the drama sessions, I chose not to undertake them in the second and third phases as a matter of compromise brought about less by ethical considerations and more by practical pressures.

Friendship maps

Another exploratory method that I used during the first phase of fieldwork at Hartnell was 'friendship mapping.' I produced slips of card, each of which had the name of one of the children in Year 6 printed on it. Placing the pile of cards on a desk or the floor, I asked the children, who worked in twos, to show me who was friends with who in school, and then outside school, by arranging the cards in any way they wanted. The final arrangements are what I refer to as friendship 'maps' because they show the way that the two children understood the network of relationships between each other, their friends, and other children's friendship groups, within the spatial dimension of their school or their out-of-school life. The maps themselves were not really designed as the focal point of my analysis. Although some interesting combinations were constructed as the two friends spread the cards around, what I was interested in was watching the different

ways that they discussed and negotiated the orders of their own friendships and the friendships of their peers.

I decided not to use the friendship mapping task in the other primary schools because it was a structured activity that took an entire school day to complete with the whole class. It also took little account of friends who did not attend the same school as my participants, and so striped much of the complexity and nuance away from the children's relationship networks. At St Troughton's and St Pertwee's I found that it was much better to discuss in- and out-of-school friendships during the interviews, as this generated a wider discussion that was not constrained by the use of the name cards.

Improvisation and the ad hoc method

It may at first seem to go against any idea that research is rigorously designed that some methods should be made up on the spot during fieldwork. However, spontaneity and creativity are essential tools during ethnography (Denzin 1997). This was certainly the case during my fieldwork. What I am talking about here is more than just the ability to join in with unforeseen activities. More accurately I mean the actual organisation of activities when the opportunity arises, where the researcher reacts reflexively to the cultural activities that they find in the field. For me, a case of improvisation and ad hoc adaptation came with the use of my field notebooks. This is fully explored in Chapter 6 where I discuss the ways that the children started to use my notebooks in creative ways, drawing pictures and writing stories, often communally, so that the books became nodal points in their friendship cultures. As I will explain, I responded to this activity by providing further notebooks and began to use the pictures and stories as data in my analysis. So the application of method was

fluid and in response to the networks of communication present in the children's relationship cultures (Christensen 2004).

Methods for analysis and interpretation

Throughout the following chapters I use data from the various methods employed during the fieldwork to build a picture of the children's relationship cultures and to illustrate the ways in which children understood and invested in romance and romantic love. By using a variety of methods I was able to collect a large body of data³⁰, and as a consequence have selected examples that serve the purposes of my analysis, address my research questions, and provide exemplary instances of the types of conduct I am most interested in. As a result I have unavoidably created a 'hinterland:' a shadowy body of non-presented data that is hidden because of the untidiness it would bring to this text (Law 2004). I make no apologies for this as it is in the nature of qualitative research that such choices are made. Moreover, as I have already suggested, this does not detract from the 'scientific' nature of the research so long as analytic rigour and reflexivity are upheld. Therefore, in selecting data for analysis I have addressed several key points:

- I have necessarily made my political and theoretical positions clear, but have not allowed them to dominate my analysis, preferring to use them reflexively as guides, thereby allowing my preconceptions to be challenged and shifted.
- I have acknowledged that my research text undoubtedly constitutes an assemblage of claims about the truth of things, and the responsibility this brings.

³⁰ In total I gathered 57 interviews and other recordings, 104 stories, 63 diaries, and 3 detailed notebooks of observational data (including many stories and pictures drawn by the children).

- I have ensured that the data reflect recurrent and/or underlying themes and forms of conduct, making connections between the participants' and researcher's perspectives, *and* those provided by an existing body of knowledge.
- I have employed several tools to explain why this topic has been selected (see Chapter 2), why the particular ethnographic method assemblage I have used has been constructed (see above), and why certain extracts have been analysed rather than others.

Seven social strata

In Chapter 3 I unpacked the five forms of romance I had identified in Chapter 1 and showed how they are threaded through the forthcoming chapters. Moreover, while I identified these with five separate formations, it is clear that they all overlap and intersect with each other, as well as with a nebula of other social, cultural and economic factors. Here I want to recap how I envisage these factors:

Gendered sexuality – The heterogeneous assemblage of practices and meanings that govern conduct in terms of gender relations and objects of desire.

Social class – Defined principally in terms of cultural practices, but also factoring in the complex matrix of socio-economic and financial determinants.

Ethnicity/race – Conceptions of shared descent that affect the uptake of subject positions and classification of identities.

Age and the life course – The social ordering of the passing of time and of bodily changes in an individual’s life, and in the lives of a generational cohort

Media – From local news to global cinema and the Internet.

The state and government – The Government and legislature, political rationalities and neo-liberal technologies.

Economic markets – National, international and global commercial forces that shape subjectivities. Through products and services they manipulate the conditions of desire and create consumer subject positions.

These strata form a heuristic way of thinking about the world – they are not intended to present stand-alone classifications. For example, not only is sexuality gendered, it is also always already classed and raced (Mills 1997); the boundaries between each stratum are porous and overlapping with others. They do, however, represent the major distinctions and mechanisms by which late modern Western societies are structured and organised. In Foucauldian terms (see Foucault 1972), these strata are similar to an ‘episteme,’ that is, “the sets of discursive structures as a whole within which a culture thinks” (Mills 1997:56). That being said, I prefer to use the term ‘strata’ rather than ‘discourse’ in order to capture the idea that both discursive and non-discursive components are co-existent and are imbricated in social practices (Fairclough 1992:71). These strata have a great influence on how subject positions are constructed, made available, maintained or re-produced, contested, negotiated, and resisted. As I noted above when discussing my preferred model of ethnography, I believe that it is important to draw connections between forces of globalisation – markets, media,

politics – and what is happening in local sites (Burawoy et al 2000), and such a framework as this encourages the making of these connections.

The connections between contemporary discourses of childhood and romance exist, are sustained, challenged, shifting, broken and re-negotiated across all these diverse strata. A key connection lies with the *playground romance – popular romance – gendered sexuality – social class – age and the life course* assemblage. In this thesis it is the central focus – the backbone of my analysis – framed in terms of the children’s transitions between primary and secondary school, and between childhood and the teenage. Obviously it is a slice of reality that I am choosing to construct in this manner, but there is plenty of supporting evidence to suggest that it is an important nexus of power relations, and it is therefore a useful point of departure and return from which to explore all the romances detailed in Chapter 3 and social strata outlined above. Therefore this complex, multi-causal, inter-relational picture of social processes provides the ontological framework upon which I base my analysis of the data.

I have explained my theoretical position with regard to gendered sexuality throughout the previous chapters, and should therefore say something here regarding social class. Working from Savage (2000) I would argue that class identities can be found in practices and accounts of practices. Furthermore, as Reay (2005) notes, there is an emotional element to these practices, and it is important to take account of how people think and feel about them. Consequently, I suggest that class is both ‘cultural’ (Skeggs 2004) and psychosocial (Walkerdine et al 2001); that is to say, it is expressed and lived through cultural practices, which are “deeply etched into our psyches” (Reay 2005:912). Moreover, while I acknowledge that class categories – working, middle – are

problematic, complex and heterogeneous, I still deploy them as I believe they remain useful tools for discussing socio-economic structures, cultural understandings, and the unconscious dynamics of class. While this is a much shorter explanation (or story) than the one afforded to gendered sexuality in Chapters 1 and 2, it reflects the way that social class was not a central factor at the beginning of the research, but instead grew in importance and prominence through the analysis of the data, eventually taking a central position.

Four perspectives on the data

In this final section I explain the practical ways that I viewed, organised and understood the data. I do this under the headings: discourse, dialogue, intersubjectivity, and context. Although I have divided my analytic approaches under these headings, they are employed variously throughout the following chapters in accordance with the form of data being presented. Often I draw on a number of these approaches in building my understanding of a particular event or text.

Discourse

I began by looking at the children's narratives – their conversations, stories and drawings – in terms of the discursive elements of the social strata outlined above. In doing this, I am interested in analysing how these discourses are constructing and constituting forms of self, types of relationship and conceptual frameworks (Fairclough 1992; Foucault 1972). In conducting a Foucauldian analysis of discourse then, I investigate how heterogeneous formations of knowledge, crystallised by relations of power implicit in everyday social practices, created the various subject positions that the children could inhabit. Importantly then, I started my analysis with an understanding of the primacy of *multiple* discourses – or interdiscursivity – in the constitution of

subjectivities; so, for example, discourses of hetero-gender, childhood and social class combined produce layers of power/knowledge that comprise a particularly resilient regime of truth about young people in Western societies.

Dialogue

In order to enrich my analysis of discourse, I wanted to understand both “subjectification (the production of ‘the subject’ in discursive practices) and subjectivity (the lived experience of being a subject)” (Walkerdine et al 2001:176). This meant viewing subjectivity as something more than the culmination of all subject positions occupied since birth (Henriques et al 1998). As such I undertook two tasks, which I place under the heading ‘dialogue.’ The first involved exploring the children’s acts of negotiation and creativity, looking at how they resisted, manipulated, reproduced, rejected or supported their own subject positions or those occupied by others (Frosh et al 2003). This way I was able to view the children not simply as products of discourse, but as negotiators (see my discussion of agency in Chapter 3). The second task involved tracking the various ways that cultural and linguistic formations appeared in the children’s talk and texts. Drawing on Bakhtin (1986) I examined the various ‘voices’ present in their utterances, drawings and stories, including those of their parents and teachers, television adverts, pop song lyrics and so forth. Using the concept of dialogism then, I was able to understand how their texts were in conversation both with those that preceded and pre-existed them, and in anticipation of those which would follow (Fairclough 1992; Holquist 2002). In turn, I explored their speech and texts in terms of *genre*, that is, the manifest ways of articulating narratives that can be heard and understood by an audience, and as a result, work to locate the speaker in relation (of support or resistance) to a discourse. For example, the romantic narrative and the way it upholds certain

ways of speaking, which in turn maintain, endorse, normalise and naturalise particular heterosexual subject positions, is a recurrent theme in this work.

Intersubjectivity

From an ethnographic perspective I also looked at group dynamics and networks, which I term ‘intersubjectivity’ in order to emphasise three key levels of analysis, and the fact that, as Frosh (2002:7-8) notes, “subjectivity is constituted and reconstituted in interactions (and hence talk) because interactions construct subject positions and allow us to take up or resist them.” On one level I explored the relationships between the children – their friendships and solidarities, their negotiations over power and representation, their intimacies and arguments. Following this, on the second level, I examined the relationships between my child participants and myself as an adult male researcher (as discussed in Chapter 3). This led to a third level, where I utilised work on emotions and the psychosocial in an attempt to understand the “complete embeddedness of the social and the psychic” and move beyond the Foucauldian notion that subjects are fictions (Walkerdine et al 2001:98). I attempt this in two ways. Firstly, I draw on psychosocial theories in order to see my participants as the owners of unique biographies shaped by anxiety and desire provoking life events, which, having been internalised by unconscious processes, affect (and are affected by) the subject positions negotiated in their everyday lives (Hollway 2004). Secondly, I introduced myself into the analysis in much the same way: as a subject psychosocially constituted, with discursively moulded defences and anxieties that affected the conscious and unconscious dynamic between the children and myself. This meant paying attention to how I had felt during fieldwork events and interviews, and reflecting on my various (sometimes difficult)

emotions as I worked with the data in the writing stage (see Chapter 8 for further discussion).

Context

I also explored the various ways that conjoined dimensions of time and space affected social relationships. So where applicable, I discuss the children's interactions with reference to the contexts – the places, spaces, sites, areas and temporalities – within which they occurred. I am interested in the meanings these places (imagined and real) are imbued with by the participants and the meanings they contain that pre-exist them. As Fairclough (1992:66) suggests, "...the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people's heads but from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures." Moreover, it is vital to note that spaces that are local and contain localised meanings, are also connected to more globalised forms of temporal-spatiality. The classroom and the playground, for instance, are educational time-spaces that have certain common characteristics across the world; and these characteristics are, to an extent, discursively constituted.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the various methods for data gathering and analysis that I used during and following the fieldwork. At points throughout the following chapters I reflect on how these methods affected the kinds of data produced by different activities, bearing in mind the perspective of *context*, as outlined above, with particular reference to the contexts created by the fieldwork. The next 5 chapters take themes from the data and consider them in terms of the romances discussed in the previous chapter and the social strata detailed in this chapter. These themes are: the children's relationship economies, their cultures of hetero-gender, their investments in and understandings of best friendship and

true love, their romantic friendships, and their experiences of the educational and cultural transfer into their early- or pre-teens. Within these major themes I also draw on a number of data sources in order to present a wider ethnographic analysis of these children's everyday experiences of their own gendered and classed childhoods. At the end of each chapter I summarise how the analysis contained within relates to the methods of analysis and interpretation – the social strata, discourse, dialogue, intersubjectivity and context – outlined in this chapter. The first theme that I turn to concerns the ways that the children understood and organised their relationship cultures.

Chapter 5

Children's relationship practices

Some of the boys are pestering the girls... Tyron asks, 'Why don't you ask him out for her?' But Kerry says, 'No I can't do that, I fancies him myself.'

Field notes, St. Troughton's

Realize that you might not meet Mr. Right naturally and that you therefore must take social action immediately even if you don't want to.

Fein & Schneider, undated, www.therulebook.com/rule2
(A website providing dating advice)

Introduction

This chapter looks at the various ways that the children understood and organised their gendered relationship practices in heterosexualised ways. It is here that I begin to map out playground romance, as defined in Chapter 3, by exploring how the girls and boys went about negotiating the subject positions of girlfriend and boyfriend in terms of what I go on to call hetero-social practices. I begin by returning to the themes discussed in Chapter 4 by outlining the main points raised by previous studies with children, thereby situating the data that follows. The chapter then goes on to explore what I have termed 'the archaeology of love' in the primary school, which encapsulates both how the children talked about their own hetero-gendered relationships from the time they joined the school (aged 5), and how they talk about and perceive the relationship practices of previous Year 6 classes. This is followed by two sections that draw on interview data to construct a picture of how the girls and boys talked about their current heterosexual relationships, and how they went about organising them in gendered ways. The final section focuses on two data extracts – one from my field notes and the other a

detailed interview extract – to explore how some of the children’s heterosexualised relationship practices changed after they had made the move to high school.

‘Going out,’ ‘seeing’ and other everyday relationship practices

The main aim of this chapter is to examine notions of hetero-gender – the relational character of powerful ideas about masculine and feminine genders that are formed and supported by the discourse of heterosexuality – by looking at how the children at the schools I visited organised and understood their relationships. Therefore, this chapter is foremost about the children’s own perspectives on their everyday relationship practices, which are then blended with my own ethnographic and theoretical perspectives. Using the children’s own words and concepts, throughout the following sections I build a rich picture of their day-to-day lives by drawing on the theory that gendered sexuality profoundly structures children’s social interactions.

Such a position is expounded in several research key texts regarding children’s gender and sexual relations in educational settings in the UK (for example, Epstein & Johnson 1998; Epstein at al 2003; Holland at al 1998; Kehily 2002; Mac an Ghail 1994; Reay 2001; Renold 2005). One of the central arguments of these texts is that schools, both secondary and primary³¹, are key social areas for ‘doing’ or ‘practicing’ sexuality. Through exploring children and young people’s own understandings and interactions through the lens of critical sexualities scholarship (e.g. Weeks 1985, 1986), they have shown how sexuality – particularly gendered heterosexuality – shapes children’s peer relationships and friendships, thereby dispelling many of the myths about children’s supposed ‘innocence’ (see Chapter 3), and highlighting the connections between society and the politics of education, and

³¹ And indeed universities, see Epstein at al 2003.

sexuality in the school (Epstein & Johnson 1998). To be a 'proper' girl or boy depends on the sustained investment in a heterosexual identity, and participation in relationship practices like 'going out' and 'seeing', which involve the uptake or rejection of the heterosexual subject positions 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' (Renold 2005). Even where the girlfriend position might be rejected or resisted, this can depend on certain gendered and sexualised investments and identifications (see my discussion of the 'single crew' in Chapter 6); children also maintain gender and sexual norms through the use of gendered and often sexual insults (Epstein et al 2003; Lees 1986, 1993), drawing on the social power of heterosexuality to govern their relationships with each other and adults (Walkerdine 1990). This body of work then, has highlighted the multiple and pervasive ways that discourses of gendered heterosexuality influence the creation and maintenance of relationships and subject positions.

As noted in Chapter 1, the associations between gender and sexuality are complex. Gender is a relational concept, so, for example, girls and boys define what it means to be a girl or a boy in terms of what it is to *not* be a boy or a girl – a tendency I have drawn on to structure the presentation of my data below. This is understood in terms of the practices and values of girlhood or boyhood, which support a complementarity between masculinities and femininities, thus maintaining the cultural intelligibility of certain *hetero*-genders and their naturalised superiority over others (homosexualities, for example) (Wallis & VanEvery 2000).

When analysing romance in children's friendship practices I begin from the basis that there are kinds of norms or rules – both spoken and unspoken – that govern the sorts of relationships that can exist and how these can be undertaken. Such rules are

obviously not written³²; neither are they solidified (they can be resisted). Rather, they present a useful metaphor for understanding the hegemonic character of the social strata of gendered heterosexuality, and ‘straight thinking’ (Ingraham 2005) provided by the discourse of heterosexuality. The metaphor of the relationship ‘rule’ is prevalent in contemporary Western culture when considering the ‘right’ way to go about relationships (see Fein & Schneider 2000 for example; also Ingraham 1999), and it was also a notion deployed by the children themselves as a way of determining the right and wrong ways of doing girl or boy and girlfriend-boyfriend (see below).

In the sections that follow I draw a semi-imaginary timeline of the children’s relationship cultures, using the analytical tools from the texts outlined above to unpack their narratives. This timeline begins with various discussions where the children excavated the heterosexual relationships of their past.

The archaeology of love in the primary school

I invoke the metaphor of archaeology as a way of understanding two different kinds of historical narrative told by the children. Firstly, their stories and memories of their relationships in the reception and infant classes; and secondly, the ways that they romanced the idea of Year 6 by imaginatively remembering previous Year 6 classes and constructing notions of how Year 6 *should* be a time of increased heterosexual practices.

Relationships in the early years

In the following interview extract, some of the girls at St. Troughton’s are discussing the differences between relationships knowledge in Year 6 compared to their early years.

³² I am referring to social rules here. Certainly, as noted in Chapter 4, there are rules set down in law concerning heterosexual and non-heterosexual relationships.

Vanessa: We know things now that we never knew before. You like, when you're in younger years then you don't really know about relationships and stuff, you think you do.

Lilly: You do.

Vanessa: You *think* you do.

Jessica: I think you do.

Vanessa: But it's a different kind though, you know different stuff when you're smaller.

Beth: We know a lot more now though when you think about it.

Vanessa: It's like, you did have boyfriends but never did anything with them. You hear them talking now in year 3 and they're like 'I've got a boyfriend' and you're like 'what do you do then?' and they say, like, they don't understand.

Beth: They don't even talk on the playground!

Interview, St. Troughton's

Here there is disagreement about whether or not children in the early years – including their younger selves – have knowledge about relationships, and whether this knowledge can be considered 'genuine'. Vanessa suggests that while younger children think they know about relationships, in actuality they do not *really* know, so their knowledge is rendered problematic. By negotiating and debating the idea that relationship practices in earlier years are somehow non-real or mimicking, the girls are able to say something about their own practices. Using notions of age and the life course, they use their perceived differences between themselves and the younger children to assert the validity of their own relationship practices – they *do* have boyfriends and they *do* do things with them, like 'going out'. Similarly, their knowledge of relationships is granted a hierarchical superiority, which may help them to partially overcome the many anxieties and questions they have regarding their futures (and indeed their present situation).

In many of the interviews the groups began to discuss the girlfriend-boyfriend relationships they used to have in previous

primary school classes. The following extract from an interview with some of the boys at St. Pertwee's is a typical example.

Moz: Do you remember you went out with Donna when we was in reception?

Danny: Yeah sort of we did.

Moz: Who was John going out with then?

John: No I never!

Danny: It was Katie...

John: Oh no I never!

Moz: You did, you know you did.

John: She was going out with Isaac, I know, I do remember.

DJM: Did lots of you go out when you were in reception?

Moz: Yeah and in other years too, we did.

Kenzie: Year 6 is where it all happens though.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

It was common that both boys and girls would use the past to make sense of the present, and that they would do this with strong reference to heterosexual practices. Their previous selves were viewed as heterosexual selves. Moz confirms that 'going out' was a common practice in reception and indeed all the other years of the primary school. The relationships that they describe here were, to a certain extent, considered to be real relationships; it was just that they were not *as* real as those in Year 6. Kenzie's comments illustrate this because, as he notes, it is in Year 6 'where it all happens'. In explaining this, Kenzie is framing a widespread conception of Year 6 as the year when 'going out' and other relationship practices take on a greater or more genuine significance. Kenzie went on to suggest that the organisation of relationships will change when they get to high school, something that Emily and the other Hartnell girls in the following extract agree with.

Emily: My sister, who is in the lower class, in the infants, she's always chasing boys around the playground. That's how it is when you're in primary school. But I've heard that when you go to secondary school it changes and it's then the boys who chase the girls.

Sarah: In year 3 it's worst. Yeah they're nutty in year 3. All the girls chase the boys.

Becky: It's different though, when you're younger, I think you have a boyfriend but I don't think it's real, you like them and they're one of your best friends, but I don't think it really counts when you're younger.

Emma: When my sister was younger she used to have boyfriends but they were just her friends and they, and when we were younger we used to play games and they always used to want to play kiss chase. What would happen was, one of us was the person who catches the boys and the other one would be the one who kisses them. We stopped playing in year 3.

Becky: People who don't want to kiss can still play the game. It doesn't mean anything, it's not really serious, it's just a laugh really.

Interview, Hartnell

The girls explain how the ways that heterosexual relations are organised are different between the two phases of schooling. The younger children's activities are read as not counting as real in a similar manner to the girls from St. Troughton's memory work on the same topic. Kiss chase – which they stopped playing in the form they describe in Year 3 – depends on the active chasing of boys by girls, often involving teamwork if the boys are to be successfully caught. Emma and her friends claim not to play this anymore, although I did observe them running and catching boys occasionally on the playground. The distance they construct between themselves and the year 3 children appears to involve an investment in a more 'mature' (in their terms) version of femininity, one which they believe will be more suitable after the move to secondary school. The metaphor of the game is drawn on to explain what is expected in secondary school, where the genders of the roles are reversed but the 'chasing' remains.

Moreover, although the chase need not end in a kiss, it does depend on the hetero-gendering of the chaser and the prey.

How Year 6 should be

At Hartnell there was a prevailing sense among the children in Year 6 that they were somehow not a 'proper' Year 6. This was commonly explained as being a result of the lack of boyfriend-girlfriend relationships in the class. This perception of non-conformity with expectations was not shared in either St. Troughton's or St. Pertwee's, where there was a practicing boyfriend-girlfriend culture that was constantly discussed between the children. At Hartnell though, the boyfriend-girlfriend culture was talked about in more distant terms, and the word 'fancying' was commonly deployed as a way of understanding and arranging gendered relations.

DJM: So is there a lot of fancying that goes on in the class then?

All: Yes

[Laughter]

Ollie: In Year 6, definitely always in Year 6.

George: Probably it starts in the upper juniors, yeah 5 and 6.

Ollie: But in our class not very many people are into it... yeah, having a relationship.

DJM: Are there any people who are going out now?

Ollie: James and Cerri they were going out last year but they got split up. Then there was Philip and Anna, Lucy was with Lewis.

George: Stephen and Gemma.

Ollie: Stephen and Gemma. And he's [Henry] going out with Maxine, but people aren't supposed to know cos it's mysterious ooooh!

DJM: Sounds like you're not an exception after all.

George: Compared to last year's class and the year before we are. Probably we'll get more into it, at secondary school, but it probably won't change here.

Henry: To get a relationship with someone you have to like them, yeah a lot, and have things in common, like I started having a girlfriend in year 2, you know just playing together and stuff, and that's when I started liking girls.

DJM: How do you know when it stops just being friends that you play with?

Henry: Well with girlfriends it's like gooey, gooey, gooey, gooey, but with friends it's like raaaaarh!

DJM: Can you explain what that means?

Henry: [Spends about 20 seconds trying to find words]. Eh, well it's like, um, I don't know how to say it, when you're with a girlfriend you kind of feel something, feel something that makes it sort of better.

George: Some people tend to think that a girlfriend is a girl who's like, a really good friend with you. It's like Anna and Ollie, Anna's a girl and Ollie's a boy and they really like each other, but they don't really, *really* like each other.

Interview, Hartnell

Similarly to the boys from St. Pertwee's, Ollie and his friends are able to provide detailed lists of those who have been in girlfriend-boyfriend relationships, even though they contend that 'not very many people are into it'. The examples of last year's class and classes from previous years (where there was apparently a profusion of relationships) are given as a way of explaining how this year's class is different and not within the norm. Just like Kenzie at St. Pertwee's suggests, the Hartnell boys think that it is in Year 6 where girlfriend-boyfriend relationships *should* happen. Because of the apparent lack of such relationships, there was, as George notes, constant negotiation among Year 6 of the semantics of the term 'girlfriend.' In this class, as opposed to at the other schools, girlfriend was a term with negotiable capital, which could *sometimes* be used to denote a girl who was a friend. However, as will be explained in Chapter 7, the ability to do this naming depended on power within the peer group.

Henry notes that he had a girlfriend in Year 2, who he used to play with, and then tries to explain the difference between a girlfriend and a girl who is a friend. Unable to find suitable words to do this (at least when asked directly to do so by me) he mimes 'gooey, gooey', clapping his hands to his chest and gazing to the

sky, as a way of signifying romantic emotions. This, as George explains, is what it is like to 'really, *really*' like someone. Through this performance Henry illustrates a key distinction for the boys. It is possible to be friends with a girl, but it must be embodied differently; the girl must be rough and physical in her play, which marks her as 'boy-like' and therefore a safe female friend to have (see Chapter 7). Girls were therefore positioned within a heterosexist, gendered discourse as either 'tomboys' or 'girly girls' (Renold 2005).

Gender and relationship talk

Although they inhabited the same spaces, the girls and boys at each of the schools considered their same-gender friendship groups in very different ways to those of the other gender (Swain 2005).

DJM: Do boys and girls do that [being friends] differently or is it similar?

Anna: I think, well I don't really know, but I think that the girls kind of stick together more than the boys.

Katherine: Yeah they do.

Aaron: In Year 6 it's the girls who stick together and spend more time together than the boys do.

Anna: And the girls argue more, they have arguments a lot more than the boys.

Katherine: If someone like disagrees with your answer then they'll like go off and be all upset, but boys will...

Aaron: They'll just come over and say about it then. [Stomps feet like walking]. Why did you call me an idiot? I don't know, let's just play football.

Anna: But for girls that would take ages you know because they're not going to forget it.

Interview, Hartnell

The differences highlighted during this interview were key to the way that the joint relationship cultures of girls and boys were understood and organised. What Anna, Aaron and Katherine

illustrate here are some of the subject positions of friendship that are available to the boys and girls at Hartnell, and how these are maintained through different ways of doing closeness, conflict and resolution. In the following subsections I focus on how the girls and boys talked about each other, how they understood their differences, and the various ways this affected the hetero-gendered organisation of their relationships.

Girls' talk

Understanding boys and girls

In many of the interviews, girls spoke of their feelings of superiority with regard to their friendships when compared to the friendships of boys, which they saw as simple and lacking in depth.

DJM: Are boys different?

Demi: Different!

Stevie: They don't seem to be friends like the girls are.

Demi: They're annoying.

Kelsea: They don't seem to be able to keep each other's secrets.

Demi: They don't seem to have them.

Stevie: Boy's won't hold hands or walk around.

Kelsea: No they think it's like a gay thing and they don't want to be seen like a girl.

Demi: Unless they fancy them, then they might want to like hang around with them or something.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

According to Demi, boys don't seem to have secrets to keep for each other, a key signifier of true friendship between girls (see Chapter 7). Kelsea and Stevie's comments illustrate the ways that the girls were aware of the ways that boys were anxious about their physical proximity to each other; a further signifier of closeness and trust between girls. Certainly the boys would never think or would refuse to hold hands in case it was read as a

homosexual act, something I was assured would result in homophobic teasing or abuse. It was also the case that 'being gay', as in Kelsea's remark, was conflated with 'being a girl' (Mac an Ghail 1994; Nayak & Kehilly 1997; Renold 2005). Both were assumed to be signs of weakness and a lack of masculinity. Similar themes can be found in another extract from St. Pertwee's.

Shanice: Boys don't change their best friends.

Charlene: Yeah but girls do. They can like fall out and have different best friends but boys don't do that.

Shanice: Boys don't really have best friends.

Nat: They play football and just do things together. Someone might tackle them and they might be hurt and angry but the next day they'll just be friends with them again.

Sami: They never stay fallen out for long.

Shanice: They don't go round giving each other cuddles like girls do.

DJM: What type of friends do girls make?

Charlene: We just hug and stuff and we don't really care about what people thinks.

DJM: Why don't the boys do that?

Shanice: They think it's girly and they think it's gay.

Nat: If like a boy and a girl are friends together and they hug each other then everyone thinks that it's like, that they fancies each other.

Shanice: Cos like there's Sammy, a boy in year 3 and Danielle, and they're a boy and a girl and they're best friends and everyone thinks they fancy each other. And people tease them all the time.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

Again being 'girly' and being 'gay' are fused into a common insult. Girls, as Shanice and Charlene note, can perform physical acts of friendship without having to care what people think, as there is no equivalent hetero-gendered form of bodily discipline at work within their girl peer culture. Indeed, there was never any observable teasing of girls' closeness at any of the primary schools; Shanice and Charlene, for example, could be found hugging on the playground most lunch breaks. Problems for girls only appeared to arise when they become best friends with a boy,

which could result in sexual teasing, and their symbolic placement together as a heterosexual couple (Renold 2000, 2005). Distance also played a role in the embodiment of 'girl' and 'boy.' Girls, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, often 'fell out' for extended periods of time, usually because, as this extract suggests, girls' companionship depended on the cultural capital of trust and (ironically) the constant circulation of secrets. Being 'fallen out', as Sami calls it, involves the *removal* of closeness and physicality from the relationship, which illustrates the importance of intense proximity for the maintenance of girls' friendship groups. Therefore, the conviviality of girlhood and boyhood involved very different forms of corporeality, as the next extract also suggests.

Beth: Boys and girls can't be friends cos that's not the way it works. But boys' friendships are very, very, very different to the girls.

Vanessa: Yeah cos they don't ever do hugging or want to touch each other. They think that if you hugs then you're being gay.

Jodi: But I don't understand cos they all do hugging when they play football.

Vanessa: But it's like when they, when we are at the parties with the music on and the boys don't want to do dancing cos they're worried about being made fun of.

Beth: We do laugh at them though, like when they go slipping over playing football and fighting and stuff.

...

Beth: I hate the way that we gets teased about the way we look by boys. They also try and say nasty things like about us being fat and stupid. It doesn't happen to my sister.

Jodi: All the men go for her cos she's blonde.

Vanessa: It's like all they're interested in is a mini skirt, lipstick and big boobs.

Interview, St. Troughton's

The girls from St. Troughton's highlight how the girls from all the schools were aware of boys' awkwardness with their physicality.

Being physical is central to being a 'proper' boy – running on the playground, kicking the football, kicking each other – but physicality must be in the appropriate context and then closely disciplined (Swain 2003). For example, as Jodi notes, hugs following goals can be ok, but at other times this appears to be totally wrong. Jodi's confusion perhaps arises from the fact that she could hug her friends with impunity, although the girls, including Jodi, also played a role in the disciplining of the boys bodies. For instance, it was actually Vanessa and the others who made fun of the boys dancing (certainly in school), despite feeling some sympathy for the boys' experiences of anxiety. The girls were aware of the pressures of what Connell (2005) calls 'hegemonic masculinity' on the boys, yet they were very likely to laugh at or tease the boys who experienced problems with performing boy, particularly those who fell while undertaking key 'boy activities' like football or fighting. The girls then, with their laughter and teasing, were complicit in the disciplining of boys gendered performances in terms of dominant masculinity as it was defined in the schools (Frosh et al 2002).

Tellingly, the girls juxtapose these comments on boys with concerns about being objectified by the male gaze, with reference to culturally dominant signifiers of heterosexual desirability – blond hair, short skirt, makeup and large breasts. Such concerns were common, particularly at St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's, where gendered and sexual insults and teasing were regular aspects of many exchanges between boys and girls. Certainly some of the boys at St. Pertwee's would use highly sexualised and objectifying comments to silence or humiliate girls in arguments. However, some of girls also commented on how they would dress to impress the boys and gain their attention and gaze (Holland et al 1998). Both girls and boys then, would deploy dominant notions of masculinity and femininity to explain and comprehend

and support and govern the differences between their gendered peer cultures.

In sum then, by explaining the differences between boys and themselves, the girls indicate the practices of girl peer group friendship that are central to a successful performance of feminine friendship. Moreover, as these extracts show, physical proximity was key to doing girl or boy properly, and was organised and disciplined between the children in both gendered and sexual ways.

Understanding and organising relationships

Although actual instances of the practice of 'going out' varied between the different schools, all the children, particularly the girls, understood how the practice should be organised and by whom.

Lucy: Some people might say they're in love and tell someone that and then go up to them, like the next day and say you're dumped I don't want to go out with you anymore. Going out is like a game.

Interview, Hartnell

Lucy's analogy of 'going out' as a game is a useful one, although it is not to be taken to mean that the children did not take 'going out' seriously; they most certainly did. 'Going out' was the term most commonly used to refer to a boy and a girl taking the subject positions boyfriend and girlfriend. As previous studies have shown (e.g. Kehily 2002; Renold 2005; Swain 2005), 'going out' is usually less about actually going somewhere on a date, and more about the arrangement of girl-boy relationships in terms of institutional, compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1990; Rich 1983; also see Epstein & Johnson 1998). At Hartnell, St. Troughton's and St.

Pertwee's such organisation involved certain assumed rules for conduct, concerning who should do the asking out, for example.

Jackie: I've been going out with Danny for a week.

Deb: He's fancied you for ages hasn't he?

Jackie: But he wouldn't ask me out.

DJM: Who should do the asking out?

Deb: Boys.

Jackie: Yeah the boy.

Deb: But they don't always.

Jackie: No.

Deb: Sometimes we has to ask them out. I don't mind.

Jackie: No I don't.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

It was the girls who most often explained how relationships should begin and then be organised; it was they who defined the rules of courtship. However, while both Jackie and Deb agree that it should be the boys who do the asking out and who instigate the relationship, it appears that this is not always what happened in practice. In fact, the girls explain that often it is they who must take control of the process. Here then, a particular type of hetero-gendered romantic narrative is recognised and normalised, but overruled for practical reasons. Although it is possible for the girls to ask the boys out and begin the formal, recognised 'going out' relationship, for the girls it is still the boys who *should* be doing the asking out. In the next extract, a group of girls defines the difference between 'going out' and 'seeing'.

Gemma: 'Going out' means, like, doing things at the weekends.

DJM: So what's 'seeing' mean then?

Lucy: That's different.

Gemma: It's like, being together at, um, break, sort of thing.

DJM: What do you do when you're 'seeing' someone?

Lucy: Eh, nothing! [laughs] Hang around?
Gemma: Nothing! Just, yeah, on the playground

Interview, Hartnell

At Hartnell then, 'going out' meant something different to 'seeing'. The school's rural setting meant that the children had few opportunities to meet up for leisure activities without their parents help, and they rarely met friends by chance. By contrast, the urban setting of both St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's, coupled with more relaxed parental supervision, meant that these children would often meet socially with diverse groups of peers. Consequently, the 'seeing' sub-categorisation of boyfriend-girlfriend relationships does not appear to have cultural capital at the urban schools because romantic practices that could be understood as genuinely girlfriend-boyfriend (like 'dating') were more accessible, even though they might only involve activities like 'hanging around'. Furthermore, the girlfriend-boyfriend culture at Hartnell provided its girl participants with particular anxieties, as the following extract demonstrates.

DJM: Are there boyfriends and girlfriends in the class now?

Nadine: Yes, some.

DJM: But you're not going to tell me who?

[Laughter]

DJM: Is it a secret?

Nadine: Well sometimes people just laugh and make a joke about it, they use it to tease you and make fun of you.

Lucy: The boys do usually.

Cerri: It might be because they're not mature enough to have one themselves.

Lucy: Or they could be jealous.

Cerri: Yeah probably they're just jealous and not mature enough.

Lucy: Or they just don't like you. Or they fancy that boy themselves.

DJM: So is it the girls or the boys who do that?

Nadine: The girls will say spiteful things and the boys will just laugh. The boys used to laugh a lot but now they don't so much.

Lucy: Do you think it might be because they want to get girlfriends themselves?

Nadine: It could be.

Cerri: I think so, yes that's it, that's why.

Interview, Hartnell

Taking the subject position of girlfriend, as Nadine and her friends explain, is not without its risks. As noted, Year 6 at Hartnell viewed themselves as lacking an appropriate girlfriend-boyfriend culture, and this led to a feeling among the girls that relationships should be guarded. Here they explain that this must be done because being in a relationship in this class – where relationships were not the norm – could lead to being teased and taken as ‘a joke’. It was typical, as this extract illustrates, for the girls to explain this reaction as a lack of maturity, particularly when it was the boys acting in this way. The discourse of maturity was often deployed by the girls as a way of demarking themselves from the boys – here, the negative reactions of the girls are categorised as ‘spiteful’, and indeed other girls were seen as calculated when mocking or interfering in girlfriend-boyfriend relationships. Boys, however, at least up until recently, had to be treated with caution because of their propensity to laugh about ‘seeing’ or ‘going out’; now, as Lucy and her friends suspect, they are becoming more likely to follow the relationship rules and act more maturely. Problems with boys were also a concern for the girls at St. Pertwee’s.

DJM: What about boyfriends and girlfriends?

Lois: Usually it's like people are going out with someone for looks or cos they were feeling sorry for them.

Lilly: You shouldn't be like that, that's not a good reason for going out, but it did happen.

DJM: Who did it happen to?

Lilly: It happens to some of the boys. They keep asking girls out and sometimes the girls will have to give in cos otherwise you feel so sorry for them.

Lois: But Eheda did that and then Ryan was showing off and being really stupid about it.

DJM: He was being stupid about going out?

Lois: Sort of, he was going all like 'I'm only going out with her cos I feel sorry for her'. That's *well* wrong.

Lilly: But I think age makes a difference, cos you wouldn't do that when you're older cos you'd be having properer relationships. Well, not properer, but the boys would be more mature.

Interview, St. Troughton's

As this extract illustrates, there were right and wrong reasons for 'going out'. According to Lois and Lilly, the boys would often want to go out with someone for the wrong reason, that being, to make themselves look popular by being with the good looking girls. Moreover, the girls seem affronted by the idea that boys could go out with girls because they 'feel sorry for them': that was clearly set as a girls' role. As discussed above, it was boys who were expected to do the asking out, but as this exchange shows, it was girls who considered themselves to be ultimately in control of the relationship economy in each Year 6 class. Therefore, boys were positioned as problematic because they were not properly fulfilling the traditional male role as the instigator of heterosexual couplings. Indeed, once again the boys are determined to be lacking in maturity, and it is this, rather than age, that is stopping them from having 'properer' relationships. However, while the girls, particularly those at the urban schools, did have a great deal of control over the formation of relationships, they continuously positioned themselves as the participant who *should* have the passive role. Thus, the relationship economy was symbolically, if not practically, founded on a form of compulsory gendered heterosexuality (Renold 2005). Furthermore, a final and very important relationship rule for all the girls was that of monogamy.

Emily: You know you said we could talk about anything and that we're allowed?

DJM: Yeah

Emily: Well I wanted to say that, Lewis and Danielle are going out with each other, but Lewis is also going out with Chelsea, and Lewis doesn't want to tell Danielle. And I love Gareth. Sometimes there are fights, but me and Maxine are best friends.

Sarah: Only cos you're cousins.

Emily: Well, maybe. I like to play with them because they're nice and I like them.

Sarah: Well I just wanted to say that the thing between Danielle and Chelsea, with, like, Lewis, is a bit odd because that means that Lewis is going out with two people at once.

DJM: Is that wrong?

Emily: It should be one at a time!

Sarah: Because Chelsea and Danielle didn't know that he had been two timing because you see that Lewis didn't tell them, and they didn't know. When I found I out I said, I went up and said, 'do you know that Lewis is going out with you and Danielle?' I said to Chelsea. And they didn't know and I told them, and that's it.

Recording, Hartnell

This recording was made at the request of Emily and Danielle. When they heard from Lewis that I had spoken to a group of the boys about their relationships, they asked me to talk with them during the break time. Despite the fact that 'going out' at Hartnell was situated in the symbolic rather than the practical domain, this did nothing to diminish the girls' investments in heterosexual monogamy. The practice of 'two timing' – taking the subject position of boyfriend with relation to two girls (or vice versa) – was known to be entirely wrong. (Although as previous studies have shown this may be favoured by the teaching staff as it diffuses the 'seriousness' of the children's relationships. See Epstein et al 2001a for example). Moreover, it was clearly within the girls' remit as guardians of the relationship economy to police other people's relationships when the rule of monogamy had been transgressed, even informing on wrong doers. As this and the other extracts demonstrate, girls at all the primary schools

maintained and regulated the relationship economy, often drawing on traditionally gendered discourses of heterosexual romantic love.

Boys' talk

Understanding girls and boys

In general, the boys at all the schools viewed girls' relationships as very different from their own. Similarly to the girls, for the boys a key difference lay with the resolution of conflict in their friendship groups.

Tyron: Kerry and Lois, they argued for ages and then they didn't talk for like 5 months.

Yoris: Boys have fights and then as soon as it's over you're friends again.

Tyron: Girls fall out over nothing and they takes ages just to be friends again.

Interview, St. Troughton's

As this extract suggests, it was common for the boys to view the reasons for girls' longstanding acrimony to be the result of some inconsequential dispute, or, as Tyron puts it, 'nothing'. Indeed, a complete miscomprehension as to the nature of girls peer groups, and girls more generally, was often expressed. While the girls believed that they had a good grasp of what constituted boyhood, the boys often saw girls as difficultly mysterious or wilfully misleading. At St. Pertwee's I asked the boys about their ideas concerning future relationships, which led to the following question and exchange.

DJM: When do you think you'll fall in love with someone?

John: Maybe never.

Danny: About 14.

John: Yeah, maybe.

Moz: Yeah, maybe about when your 13, 14.

Danny: When ya go out with someone you just take it as it goes, but when ya get older ya feel feelings and stuff isn't it. Like when ya gets married and stuff.

DJM: But you don't feel feelings now?

All: No.

Kenzie: Well, girls do.

DJM: You think girls feel feelings?

Kenzie: Yeah, I think so, maybe, we can't know.

Simon: They say they do.

Kenzie: Yeah, yeah.

Danny: They say they do but only so they can get you, embarrass you, go out with you and dump you.

Kenzie: Yeah, they just laugh and walk off.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

Here, girls are trouble from the boys' perspective. Girls are positioned as quite possibly more emotionally mature than the boys (the girls would agree), but because of this claimed emotionality they cannot be trusted. The boys expect to become emotional – they anticipate that quite soon they will 'feel feelings' – but only when they become teenagers. The possibility that girls have the ability to 'feel feelings', or at least their claims, gives them a certain power over the boys; but this power can always be negotiated or negated, because the boys were able to draw on discourses of femininity that positioned the girls as being devious and manipulative by nature. In the following exchange from the same interview, girls are openly defined as troublesome by Moz.

DJM: Are there differences between boys' friendships and girls' friendships?

John: They go off and play skipping and stuff.

Kenzie: It's different because girls do girl things.

John: Girls like groovy chick and boys like football.

DJM: They like groovy chick? What's that?

John: They like all pink stuff and that.

Moz: Make up.

[Noise]

John: If they play football they can't, cos they just kick the ball over the fence.

Kenzie: And they can't play cos they bruise easier, so they can't play.

John: That's why you're not supposed to hit them.
Danny: And they kick it up and they try and boot it.
John: One of the girls, she just picked it up when I went to kick it.
Danny: And they kick you.
John: They kick you in the ankles [simulates girls kicking].
Kenzie: And basketball if you knocks the ball out of the hands of one of the girls she starts hitting you.
Moz: That's Ellis that is.
Kenzie: Yeah it's her.
John: And you has to run away otherwise they starts kicking you and all that.
DJM: Any other differences?
John: I wonder why girls were even ever invented.
DJM: Do you?
Moz: Yeah well it's all about humans.
John: What humans?
Danny: Ah, they just cause trouble.
Kenzie: Why we always talking about girls, I don't wanna talk about girls.
Moz: I'm on about *men*, keeping on this planet.
John: We'd all be gay if there was no women. We'd have to build robots and dance with them instead.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

For the boys then, the subject position 'girl' is identified as being 'groovy chick'³³. Gendered cultural distinctions like wearing makeup and the division of colours (blue for boys, pink for girls) are used to symbolise differences between boys and girls' agency. Boys can be identified as those who play football; the sport, especially at St. Pertwee's, was a practice integral to the production of a hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell 2005; Frosh et al 2002). Girls, by comparison, are positioned as unable to play sport by the rules, which is a key signifier of a properly accomplished boyhood. Moreover, because they are culturally determined to be physically weaker than boys, they cannot join in fighting or football because they are seen as easily bruised and

³³ I discovered recently that 'groovy chick' is the name of a consumer brand of stationary targeted at girls. If the boys were using this to position the girls (and if the girls themselves were doing this), then this would support my forthcoming analysis in Chapter 6 regarding popular culture.

therefore unable to play physical games. Paradoxically however, one of the ways the girls do not play sport by the rules involves being *physically* aggressive, with their hitting and kicking of the boys (which I observed during a physical education lesson). The boys then, just like the girls, used notions of physical performance to understand gender and the gendered constitution of their peer groups. Yet, powerful, symbolic notions of gender often held currency in their relationship cultures, even when they stood at odds with the realities of their everyday experiences. Similarly, with the remark that 'it's all about humans', Moz articulates a narrative about sex differences that involves the naturalisation of gender under the auspices of biological reproduction.

At the end, Kenzie rejects talk about girls and wants to discuss something different. As his comment suggests, there was quite a lot of 'girl talk' that took place in their friendship group. Moz then defines what he was saying about humans in misogynistic terms – 'men, keeping on this planet' – highlighting an ambiguous balance between masculinity as under threat and masculinity as strong. But John then criticises Moz's statement by pointing out that their own hetero-gendered identities depend on women and girls. He then offers a *Stepford Wives* style fantasy. Girls are pacified in this narrative of the semi-robotic school disco, revealing again the difficulty that girls' agency causes boys as they negotiate the transition between different forms of gendered and hetero-gendered relationship cultures.

Understanding and organising relationships

For the boys at Hartnell, their understandings of the girls' control over the relationship economy (see above) were somewhat different to the opinions expressed by their female classmates.

Henry comes over to talk to me and starts to explain about how the relationships are organised in the class. 'It's always be like this' he says, 'the girls, they always say they won't go out with you or anybody.' George joins us and confirms that the girls will always refuse to be anyone's girlfriends. 'But,' says Henry, 'they always know about fancying, they always tell you who fancies who, they always work it out.'

Field notes, Hartnell

Henry and George's interpretation of the boyfriend-girlfriend culture centres on the notion that the girls actually refuse to go out with anyone by never taking the girlfriend subject position, but still control and confirm who fancies who. The discourse of 'fancying' – for them, an ambiguous state of attraction, desire and risk – was no less powerful than the girlfriend-boyfriend discourse, as it still amounted to the construction and negotiation of heterosexual subjectivities. For the boys at St. Pertwee's, the idea of having a girlfriend was initially rejected, although they were keen to tell me about other people in the class who were 'going out'.

DJM: What about going out?

All: Eeerh! [laughter]

Moz: No.

John: Eh, no.

Kenzie: [To Simon] You've got one [a girlfriend].

Danny: [Singing] You go out with Ellis, you go out with Ellis.

Simon: No I never!

Interview, St. Pertwee's

The initial reaction of the boys is to tease. This is similar to the practices of many of the younger children in school, and Danny's singing is a good example of this. However, soon the teasing changes and the discussion about relationships becomes more serious and very detailed, containing many accounts of break-ups and make-ups; part of which includes the extract discussed in the

section above about the 'archaeology of love.' Their initial reaction however, was not uncommon, and represented a different way of doing boy, by rejecting any association with girls and their 'groovy chick' character, thereby guarding the boundaries of one's own boyhood masculinity.

The St. Pertwee's boys ended their discussion about the history and politics of going out at their school with this exchange.

John: Say, like girls, if they think you're not that popular they won't wanna sit next to you.

DJM: What does being popular mean?

Danny: If they fancies you.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

To be popular, it seems, was to be heterosexually attractive. Moreover, the index of attraction was related to physical positioning within the classroom. This is somewhat different from the initial reaction to the question about who went out with whom. At first there was the rejection of the idea of relationships with girls, where, it appears, gendered identities are bolstered by and constructed around the rejection. Then, over the course of the discussion and through the process of negotiation, girls are included and their inter-gendered relationships become a matter of *hetero-gender*. So the boys can be seen as jointly negotiating their way between a younger and an older form of hegemonic masculinity, which they achieve with reference to their own localised understandings of appropriate identities and relationship practices.

For the boys at all the schools, how popular and 'cool' they were considered to be was to a significant extent affected by a mixture of their sporting ability, their ability to 'have a laugh' (Kehily & Nayak 1997; Willis 1977), and the amount of positive attention they received from girls: which was often determined by how cool

the girls thought the boys were in the opinion of the other boys. So popularity was determined by both masculinity and heterosexual practices. At Hartnell there was a group of 'other boys' (Renold 2005), who rejected the dominant notion of 'coolness'. However, their ability to do this centred on their access to subject positions as 'high academic achievers,' therefore rather than truly subvert the local configuration of hegemonic boyhood, they aligned themselves with a different form of dominant masculinity (Frosh et al 2002).

Although popularity in terms of being heterosexually attractive was very important for many of the boys, it was difficult for them to feel secure of their status in this regard. While their 'homo-social' practices – that is, those within their gendered peer groups – like football, confirmed their status as 'proper' boys among their friends, 'hetero-social' practices were less reliable, because they were mostly under the control of the girls. I use the term 'hetero-social' to mean practices involving interactions between girls and boys, through which they can position themselves as hetero-gendered. Aaron for example, was very concerned with how hetero-socially popular he was.

DJM: So where do you go when you go out?

Aaron: It's like when a boy's in love with a girl and a girl's in love with a boy.

DJM: They love each other?

Aaron: Yeah I know that Danielle loves me.

DJM: How do you know?

Aaron: Because there was a time, just like some weeks ago and I found this note all scrunched up in the bin and it said 'Danielle loves Aaron' and I asked her if it was true and she said 'yeah, that's right', so I knew. But now she doesn't admit it.

DJM: So what do you do when you go out?

Aaron: Sometimes you go bowling or to the cinema.

Interview, Hartnell

In saying that 'going out' involves going to the cinema or bowling ally, Aaron is not talking about the practices that Year 6 in Hartnell actually undertook; rather he is expressing an ideal type of consumption activity associated with the heterosexual practice of dating (Illouz 1997). 'Going out', as discussed above, was really about the taking up of the heterosexual subject position of girlfriend or boyfriend; and this is confirmed by Aaron's initial statement about love. Aaron must piece together his hetero-social popularity by investing in the message on a crumpled note, as it opens up the opportunity for him to take a desirable heterosexual position. Moreover, the Year 6 relationship economy was often materialised in the form of notes and graffiti, in addition to whispers and rumours; and this was an area that boys had some participation in. At St. Pertwee's this was far more overtly sexualised than at Hartnell. For example, during a period when Mr. Jones was out of the classroom, Moz wrote 'Danny wants to suck Demi's tits' on Danny's class work. This resulted in several days of playground discussion about whether Demi should go out with Danny, an idea that the girls eventually rejected due to the sexual imagery Moz had used. Boys then, had some access to this part of the relationship economy, but they often participated by objectifying and sexualising the girls via a heterosexist and misogynistic discourse (Clark 1990; Kehily & Nayak 1997; Lees 1986, 1993; Mac an Ghail 1994). The effect, however, was the same: the relationship economy existed as a regime of symbolic practices that drew on culturally dominant discourses of heterosexuality and narratives of romantic love. Boys often found participation in this problematic and, as the examples from St. Pertwee's shows, this often resulted in a conflict between 'boyhood' and 'teenage' constructions of masculinities, or the objectification of girls. As the next section illustrates, the

constitution of relationship practices changed as children from St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's made the move to high school³⁴.

Asking someone out in High School: etiquette and embarrassment

During my time at the three primary schools I never witnessed any of the children actually asking someone out, although I was told it did sometimes happen. Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships were formed, maintained and broken, but rarely did this involve the actual practice of 'asking out'. Instead it was situated in the symbolic realm of the relationship economy, where relationships were fashioned through imaginary processes (e.g. group negotiations over who fancied who) with real effects (girlfriend-boyfriend subject positions became available). At St. Baker's, things seemed to change.

Today the rain is lashing down even more than yesterday, so it's another wet lunch inside. After winding and weaving our way in and out of the lunch hall, through the corridors, the computer room and past several barricades of teachers (I seem to offer an irresistible amount of licensed free movement!) we wandered out onto the covered walkway between the main building and the sports hall (not sure we're supposed to be here...). Vanessa pulls Steven to one side and talks to him insistently but quietly. Kelly has carried on walking with Ellen, and similarly, they have started to talk seriously but excitedly. I struggle to hear what is going on. "Do you?" Vanessa is saying, "Do you though?" Steven is hesitant. "Eh, yeah, yeah I guess so". "She does, she will!" calls Kelly, skipping back with Ellen in tow. I think that Steven and Ellen have just been 'set up' or

³⁴ At the end of the second phase of the fieldwork I had intended to continue working with some of the children from Hartnell as they made the move to their various secondary schools. Specifically, I was interested in working with several of the boys who were going to selective boys' schools, and seeing how the transition affected their investments in their own masculinity. They boys – Ollie, Henry and George among them – invested greatly in an 'alternative' boyhood while at Hartnell and I hoped to gain a sense of how the move to an institution that was grounded in many of the central elements of hegemonic masculinity affected their sense of self. Most of this work would have been undertaken with the boys at their family homes, and I also planned 'walking interviews' with them around their villages and the local town. However, problems with organisation, including my travel and the boys' numerous weekend activities, meant the idea had to be abandoned.

put together as boyfriend and girlfriend. They both look at each other, apparently embarrassed, before Kelly leads Ellen off back to the computer room... Back in the lunch hall, sitting with Vanessa and Shanice, I ask what happened on the walkway. "They're going out", says Vanessa, "we asked them and they said yes". "Why didn't they just ask each other?" I say. This brings about a fit of giggles. "It's just better this way", says Shanice.

Field notes, St. Baker's

While the communal organisation and the use of intermediaries remained, following the transfer to high school the practice of 'asking out' became far more prevalent. Relationships were still organised by members of the peer group and, as Shanice points out, this was certainly the children's preference. Moreover, the embarrassment of this episode suggests that the communal organisation acted to insulate the potential girlfriend or boyfriend from the possibility of rejection. The new context of the high school appears to have made more teenage or adult ways of instigating relationships available, and these were adapted by the children, who blended them with the hetero-social practices they were already familiar with.

In Chapter 9 I explore the affects of the children's cultural and education transitions in greater detail, but to conclude this chapter I will illustrate the main changes that occurred following the transfer with regard to their relationship practices by focusing on the following extract. It is presented at length and mostly unedited so that the power relations of the children's relationships and the interview setting, and their affects on the production of data, can be seen. It also highlights the complexity of the children's cultures, particularly the intersections of multiple voices (some present, others dialogic) and concerns, as discussed in Chapter 3. We join the discussion following a question about what it was like meeting people from different schools, and

whether there had been lots of people going out and having girlfriends and boyfriends.

Shanice: Yeah, Amy and Glynn have been out like four times. Tyron tried to go out with Kelly, but she didn't want to. She's [Charlene] been out with Kyle.

Vanessa: You've [Charlene] been out with Kyle.

Charlene: No I didn't!

Steven: You've been out with Joel, with Joel, but Joel was using her.

DJM: What does that mean?

Shanice: Using means, just going out with someone for fun.

DJM: For fun?

Vanessa: It's like when you don't really want to go out with them, but you want like a girlfriend, so you go out with them just to have a girlfriend.

Shanice: My mum said it's like when you've got lots of money and they goes out with you for that.

Vanessa: I reckon that Christian, you know Christian, he only wants a girlfriend for money cos he's always coming up to you and saying 'got any money?'

Shanice: Or he's like 'give me some chewing gum, please give me some chewing gum'.

DJM: You know when you were saying that there were some rules for being friends, and then some rules for going out, what would you say they are, the rules for going out with someone?

Vanessa: Don't talk to other boys if you're going...

Shanice: What? No!

Vanessa: No!

[Noise]

Shanice: Well if you're going out with someone then your boyfriend don't really want you chatting to other boys. Like when you [Steven] was going out with Sara, you...

Steven: I didn't!

Vanessa: You wouldn't want her like chatting to all the cute boys, would you?

Steven: No.

Vanessa: And she wouldn't like it if she found out that you'd be like talking to all the girls like.

[Noise]

Vanessa: My mum says you should only go out with a boy if you really loves him, because he could try and practice on you.

DJM: He could try and practice?

Luke: He wouldn't? What do you mean?

Charlene: Kissing and stuff.

Vanessa: No, not [makes kissing noises] practicing but [makes thrusting motions with hips and groans] practicing.

[Laughter]

[Noise]

[All in the group begin to discuss characters from Little Britain].

DJM: We'll talk about Little Britain in a bit.

[Cheers]

DJM: I wanted to know if there were any other rules for going out. So what... there're problems with jealousy you were saying?

Girls: Yeah, yeah.

DJM: And that's similar to when you're friends with people?

Vanessa: Yeah, cos they'd be like 'oh why you going off with her for?'

[Noise]

Vanessa: That's what Lea said to me before, she was like, 'why you bumming off?'

DJM: You're what? Bumming off?

[Noise]

DJM: So bumming off means...?

Charlene: It means like you going [stands and strides away from group].

DJM: So it kind of means going off with other people?

All: Yeah.

Shanice: With people who aren't your proper friends.

[Noise]

Shanice: Just cos we're cousins doesn't mean we can't be friends.

Luke: I know!

[Noise – some comments about older children and clothes]

Shanice: Primark is like Asda only cheaper.

Vanessa: Yeah, you goes to Primark and gets ya jeans and they all makes fun of you.

Charlene: It's like shitty and that.

Shanice: I know.

DJM: What other rules are there?

Vanessa: You can't go flirting with other people.

Luke: There was this one boy and he was going out with this girl and when over and like smiled at another girl and it all kicked off.

[Noise]

Charlene: Someone might go out with you to get back at someone.

Luke: Especially if they're a friend.

DJM: You go out with people so that you can get back at someone? What does that mean?

Vanessa: Well it's like if your best friend goes out with your ex, who you want to go back out with.

Charlene: She [Vanessa] did that.

Vanessa: Yeah I did that. I went out with a boy called Alexander and then she [Charlene] went out with him and I went back out with him.

[Noise]

Steven: No I didn't you liar!

[Noise]

Steven: Ashley fancied the girl Amy right? And he asked her out and then she said no, to him. And so Amy goes, do you want to annoy Ashley? So I pretended to go out with Amy, like in the classroom and sit by her and everything, so then in the hall she sat by me again and he went all mad, but we said stop being stupid Ashley cos we're just using, we're just doing this to annoy you.

DJM: People do that a lot?

All: Yeah they do, yeah, yeah.

[Noise]

Vanessa: Yeah it was well funny with Sasha, when she went up to Paul and said 'will you go out with me?' And he goes 'yeah', and she goes 'I was only joking,' and he goes 'oh' [disappointed sound].

[Laughter]

Vanessa: And he went to me 'did you put her up to it?'

Shanice: Yeah and then you drew love hearts on his books didn't you?

[Laughter]

Steven: Well my girlfriend before in Year 6...

[Noise]

Steven: Oh shut up. I gave her a card with...

[Noise]

Steven: What really annoys me right... Is this boy asked this girl out cos everyone was kissing, and everyone said oh, he just wants to go out with you just so you'll kiss him.

Luke: I went out with this girl called Jamie and she used to dance with me at parties, but even when we split up she still wanted to dance with me in' it.

Vanessa: I know this girl who was like in Year 6 and she had really big boobs and she went to look around St. John's, she went to look around...

Charlene: Yeah, yeah St. John's, whatever.

Vanessa: And yeah she was looking around to see if she liked it and that, and this boy asked her out cos she had big boobs.

Shanice: Really!?

Vanessa: Just cos of that, it's the only reason.

[Noise]

Shanice: She's [a girl in Year 8] ugly man!

Vanessa: She looks like a fish.

Charlene: Yeah she is quite ugly.

Shanice: That's the only... that's why she, she gets attention though.

Vanessa: The only thing that gets the girls the attention is if they've got big tits. Shanice: Cos they wears the tiniest little tops.

Luke: Woo hoo!

Vanessa: Oh shut up you shit!

Luke: You shut up.

Vanessa: Anyway like I was saying. And she wouldn't wear a bra or nothing so she'd walked around and you could see all her tits and that.

...

Vanessa: They [boys in higher years] only go out with them [girls in Year 8] because they've got big boobs.

Shanice: They wear like all the shirts like this [mimes opening top of shirt] just so that they can see them and get them to go out with them.

Vanessa: My sister has massive boobs and they all want to go out with her.

Interview, St. Baker's

The notion of rules was raised by the children at the beginning of the interview and we negotiated what that might mean. They suggested it was 'about the right and wrong ways of doing stuff', and in this context – from my ethnographic perspective – it can be seen as a complex understanding of the possible transgressions from the normative organisation of hetero-social practices and girlfriend-boyfriend relationships. Thematically, the rules that were negotiated in this exchange concerned: 'using', 'chatting', 'flirting', 'bumming off', 'getting back', and 'practice'.

'Using' represents the growing symbolic importance of having a girl or boyfriend. At St. Baker's it was more the norm to be 'going out' with someone, so the subject positions of boyfriend and girlfriend were more available *and* more desirable. However, this led to the practice of 'using', which meant entering into a girlfriend-boyfriend relationship purely as a means to secure a heterosexual subject position, not because of an attraction to or

like of the other person. 'Using' therefore highlights how claims to be 'going out' with someone carried increasing hetero-gendered capital within the children's relationship culture. In trying to understand 'using', Shanice draws on her mother's connection between this and the motivation for securing money in adult relationships (commonly referred to by misogynistic epithet 'gold digging'). This is then reframed in the context of the children's everyday lives and 'using' is conceptualised within the economy of lunch money and chewing gum. It appears that 'using' had also become the term for the playful (but sometimes spiteful) form of 'going out' from the primary school - 'using' could be for 'fun', although the enjoyment was that of the user, at the expense of the used. Given this context it is perhaps no wonder they preferred the safe route of communal practice outlined in the extract at the beginning of this section. Direct 'asking out' had become a key power relation between children, used to attain recognition in the peer group through exercising hetero-gendered power.

'Chatting' was the first explicit rule mentioned. This involved a block on all conversations with girls or boys considered to be attractive or 'cute' when holding the status of someone's boyfriend or girlfriend. 'Chatting', it seems, could lead to suspicions being raised about the truthfulness of one's investment in the boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. This is differentiated from 'flirting', which involves more positively attempting to garner attention from the opposite sex. There was no doubt that 'flirting' would lead to serious trouble (it would 'all kick off') and the likely dissolution of the girlfriend-boyfriend relationship. Both 'chatting' and 'flirting' involved forms of jealousy and insecurity about the status of the boyfriend-girlfriend relationship in a setting where, due to the general problems raised by common instances of 'using', the children's investments in girlfriend-boyfriend subject positions were cautiously defended.

'Bumming off' was a peer group form of 'chatting', as it involved being disloyal to friends by spending time with people not recognised as being within established friendship groups. The children drew close similarities between the maintenance of boyfriend-girlfriend relationships and the boundary safeguarding of their same-gender friendships. Friendships, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, were the most important relationships for the children; so while being disloyal to a boy- or girlfriend was bad, being disloyal to one's friends was far worse. This sometimes resulted in instances of 'getting back', a specific and almost legitimised form of 'using', which involved 'going out' with someone for revenge so you could annoy a friend for something they did. As Charlene and Vanessa's exchange illustrates, 'going out' with Alexander was (in part) a *friendship* practice, where the two girls disciplined each other with regard to the proper way to be a friend. Therefore, rather than simply being ends in themselves, boyfriend-girlfriend relationships were: a) an important part of the positioning process whereby children could present themselves as (in their terms) appropriately heterogendered, and, b) a way of exercising power in their friendship groups.

Something that concerned only girls was the idea of 'practice'. This led them to worry that boys' reasons for wanting them as girlfriends were, despite what they might say, sexually driven and non-emotional. This centred on a discourse of risk engendered by parents, particularly mothers. In this extract the girls discuss 'practice' as taking two forms: the child-like form of 'kissing and stuff', and the more teenage version of hetero-sex. Here then, the children are shown as negotiating the juncture between different forms of physical heterosexual practice – the move from kisses to the (unspoken but mimed in this case) act of intercourse. In

actuality, as Steven notes, everyone was still only kissing (which as his comments illustrate, can be another reason for 'using' to occur), but for the girls the symbolic power of sexually driven masculinity had already created an area of risk, which they are using to position themselves in a discourse of risk-averse teenage femininity (Epstein & Johnson 1998; Hollway 1984).

This was connected to a heightened sense of the male gaze and the objectification of girls, which is illustrated most prominently in Shanice, Vanessa and Charlene's exchange about girls' bodies. Here they display a distrust of girls in Year 8, who they see as using their sexuality in the wrong way to gain the attention of older boys. Year 8 girls, according to Vanessa and Shanice, use their physicality, especially their 'boobs' in 'the tiniest tops' in inappropriate ways to gain boyfriends. It was unclear whether the girls would ever consider using their own bodies in similar ways; perhaps they wished they could. But it may have been the case that they were displeased with the loss of the power they were used to exercising over relationships – that being a *social* power – and its replacement with another, *physical* power, which they realised involved a great concession to a form of masculinity they disliked. Moreover, both girls and boys had ambiguous and often troublesome relationships with puberty and the character of their changing bodies. These final points also illustrate a widespread resentment of Year 8 that was felt by my Year 7 participants; and both of these issues will be discussed more fully in Chapter 9. What this discussion about the rules of relationships at high school illustrates is the way that all social rules are organised and disciplined by and within friendship groups. It also demonstrates how heterosexuality – as playground romance – resides to a great extent in practices and performances, which are socially constructed.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have mapped the relationship practices of the children and shown how they were shaped by gendered sexuality. Such discourses strongly affected the structuring of their gendered peer groups and the ways these were understood and practiced. I have shown that the children involved in the study talked about heterosexual relationships as central in their current and past experiences of their everyday lives. I have also shown how relations between boys and girls were dependent on a set of hetero-social practices, where gender and sexuality were deeply interwoven in the maintenance of ideas or rules about appropriate conduct within and between gendered peer groups. As the data from the primary schools illustrates, there were two levels at which this system operated. On one level there was a prevailing sense that it was the boys role to instigate relationships; it was they who *should* do the asking out. In practical terms however, it was the girls who were most invested in the continuous operation of the hetero-social relationship economy, so they made sure it did by acting as custodians. What is notable in this is the dominant influence of masculine heterosexuality. The boys were concerned about not appearing 'girly' or 'gay', and in performing 'proper' boyhood (a notion that was shaped by social class and age). The girls were invested in the idea that the boys could be active partners within the relationship economy – even though they seldom were. Furthermore, the children at all the schools used the term 'going out' in order to take up the heterosexual subject positions of girlfriend and boyfriend; and with this positioning they actively re-produced sets of hetero-social relationship rules among and between their peer groups. Moreover, after the move to high school the hetero-social rules by which the relationship economy operated apparently became more sharply defined, but also more complex. The rules for being a good friend were governed by notions of right and

wrong that were strongly hetero-social. In the next chapter I continue to examine similar themes by focusing on other examples of how hetero-gender shaped the children's cultures.

Chapter 6

Cultures of hetero-gender

The playground is a tarmacked L shape... The noise is shrill and deafening, like an alarm. An enormous knowledge hangs in the air: that anything can happen now; that rules will be made and broken, reputations won and lost, friendships begun and ended and begun again across the long, long, minutes of the lunch hour.

Brooks 2006:25

...There are, essentially, no 'ordinary' activities, if by ordinary we mean the absence of creative interpretation and effort. Art is ratified, in the end, by the fact of creativity in all our living.

Williams 1961:37

Introduction

The last chapter mapped out the relationship practices of the children at the four schools involved in my fieldwork, focusing specifically on heterosexualised and romanticised ways of constructing and negotiating boyfriend and girlfriend subject positions. In this chapter I analyse some specific fieldwork encounters and events in various research contexts in an attempt to build an understanding of the complex processes involved in the children's negotiated construction and up-take of hetero-gendered subject positions. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the children's dialogue with sexuality knowledge originating in mass media. This is expanded in a section that looks at one group of girls who divided themselves into the 'single crew' and the 'lover losers,' where I argue for a particular way of analysing the situated and intersubjective negotiations of subject positions. This is followed by a discussion about how the children drew on, rejected, modified and understood the official sexuality education curriculum, with particular reference to a conversation

about plastic babies and the timeliness of education about parenthood. The chapter concludes with a section that looks at how the children used the research context to explore sexuality knowledge, showing how they sometimes attempted to draw on my biography, while at other times use my identity to playfully tease and explore such knowledge.

Sexuality knowledge and popular culture

Out on the playground at lunchtime I sat on the bench in the furthest corner. Behind me a group of girls from Year 6 are singing songs from the charts. I hear one of them say 'what about this one?' and she starts to sing a rap song. 'I like big butts and I can not lie, you other brothers can't deny, that when a girl walks in with an itty bitty waist, and a round thing in your face.'

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

Something that I noticed clearly throughout my fieldwork was that the children used the mass media, popular culture and consumption to make sense of their identities. At Hartnell, St. Troughton's, St. Pertwee's, and St. Baker's, the children's friendship cultures were saturated with symbols, catchphrases, icons, slogans and narratives drawn from chart music, adult television, film, sport, magazines, books and fashion. In many, if not most instances, these media carried a dominant discourse of gendered heterosexuality. This meant that the children's own relationship cultures, themselves organised in hetero-gendered ways, existed in a complex dialogue with mass media and economic markets. The above extract from my field notes shows how a popular song can be drawn into the traditional activity of playground singing, bringing with it a strong discourse of masculine heterosexuality and the male gaze. It is unclear just how aware the girls were of the content of this song, but on other occasions they displayed some awareness of the meanings they

were rearticulating from similar media, and, as detailed in the previous chapter and throughout this one, they were able to negotiate and produce knowledge about sexuality. In other words, they acted creatively within and across the media and economic markets strata.

The perspective of children and young people as a creative and active audience is well established in cultural studies (for example, see Buckingham 1993; Willis 1990). As discussed in Chapter 3, in such work the symbolic creativity of everyday life is emphasised, and the concept of cultures extended to include a vast range of social processes (Buckingham 1993:203). This has had a great influence not only on how children and young people are seen as consumers of the media (for example, see Buckingham 2000) but also on the wider conception and valuing of the social processes that constitute children's everyday lives and peer relationships (Epstein et al 2001b). That being said, it is vital to retain a sense of the power of the media, the markets and indeed the state in shaping children's day-to-day experiences. This is particularly evident when considering children's informal learning about sexuality. Buckingham & Bragg (2004) for example have shown that children's uses of television involve a complex mixture of learning and the social use of knowledge in the negotiation and comprehension of sexual subject positions (also see Allen 2005).

It was apparent from my observations of and conversations with the children that their relationships with popular culture were always mediated through their friendship cultures. As McRobbie (2000) has argued, reading is a complex social process and should be viewed as embedded in a network of social relations. In a similar study of relationship cultures, Ali (2002, 2003) shows how girls use popular culture in order to find 'gendered acceptability' in a process that is mediated by discourses of class and ethnicity.

Similarly, the participants in my fieldwork used symbols, images, and sounds from popular culture to help them negotiate and invest in gendered and very often hetero-gendered subject positions. I now turn to a particular event that occurred on the playground at St. Pertwee's one lunchtime to explore this process in some depth.

The single crew and the lover losers

Playground cultures

The playground was a central focus for my fieldwork. It was in these spaces that the children's friendship cultures were most vividly and noisily displayed; where they were allowed freedom for expression within the institutional confines of the school. A great number of researchers have looked at the dynamics of playground interaction in detail. Thorne (1993) for example, shows how children's playground games are organised in terms of gender, while Epstein et al (2001a,b) have looked at how children's playground cultures are similarly shaped by masculinities and femininities. Moreover, several researchers have commented on how boys' football can dominate the space and time of the playground (e.g. Skelton 2000; Swain 2000). While others have looked at girls activities (see, for example, Ali 2002, 2003; Kehily et al 2002). What all these studies show is that the playground is a place where gendered power relations are prevalent. Many of my own observations of children's interactions on the playgrounds at Hartnell, St. Troughton's, St. Pertwee's and St. Baker's mirrored the findings of these studies. Spatially, the playground was divided by activities. At St. Pertwee's for example, Year 6 boys' football occupied the greatest amount of central space, while the edges, benches and corners were occupied by younger children and girls (see the maps drawn by me and one of the boys below in Picture 6.1 and Picture 6.2). In contrast, at Hartnell, where football was banned, there was a freer flow of all age groups, with



Picture 6.2 – A pupil’s map of their playground

As with all points of analysis, I do not separate the data from the context of their production. This section then not only presents the data gathered, but also explains and explores the methodology and ethics involved in their generation. These drawings are analysed as symbolic texts created in specific social contexts, so that there is an important and necessary connection established between their content and the processes of their creation within children’s friendship cultures (and the boundaries of research). I argue that the drawings demonstrate the complex ways that children articulate, understand and invest in various elements of popular and local cultures in their everyday constructions of personal and group identities. In looking at these processes, particular emphasis is placed on the way that dominant notions of gendered sexuality are re-articulated in symbolic representations of relationships within certain kinds of social interaction. In addition, by looking at these drawings, I ask some questions about the kinds of things that are treated as data in ethnographic research with children. One suggestion arising from this is that

often these systems of communication and representation are overlooked, and that this is to the detriment of the social studies of childhood because, as the data here shows, children invest a great deal in communicating and representing in this way.

Creativity and ethics

Observation and note taking are key practices within ethnography and the notebook is an important, if not vital tool in this kind of research. Research participants' perspectives on a researcher's note taking activities can be crucial and may have a critical affect on the quality of field relations. The notebook itself is an undeniable symbol of the power of the researcher. From my first days with the children at all the schools I visited I was aware of their varying understandings and acknowledgements of the notebooks. For some the notebooks were considered as tools of surveillance and treated with caution, while for others they were either not noticed or ignored (perhaps accepted as yet another form of growing adult surveillance and auditing in the primary school classroom). It was my policy from the outset to let the children know exactly what I was writing in the books and what kind of things I was writing about. Aside from being part of a wider aim of promoting openness about and accessibility to data between myself and the children, I also considered it to be a useful way of subtly showing the children the kinds of things I was interested in recording and writing about, thereby giving them an informal prompt about what they might like to discuss with me. This policy meant that I allowed the children to see, handle and read the notebooks whenever requested and at a suitable time (not, for example, when they would get into trouble for reading when they should be doing schoolwork or when I was actively trying to take notes). Their interest in what I was writing was relatively short lived, but I felt satisfied with having been able to

open up this act of surveillance to scrutiny by those who were being watched.

Within a short time some children began to use the notebooks creatively and started to produce stories and pictures in them. This raised a number of complex ethical questions. For instance, while not wanting to guide or solicit the production of drawings, I also wanted to ensure that as many children as possible had an opportunity to take part in something they clearly enjoyed, and ensure that arguments and fights did not result. As I will highlight below, it soon became clear that using notebooks in this way not only illustrated important issues of group identity, but also raised significant concerns about the communal nature of the notebooks when utilised in this manner. Another issue involved who could use the books and when. As already noted, I was aware that the notebooks were symbolic of the power relationship between researcher and researched, and part of the reason I was open with them was in an attempt to disrupt this relationship. What I also wanted to avoid was the accentuation of power relationships between the children: between, for example, popular and marginalized or older and younger children. Both of these issues were only partially resolved, as initially I had to draw on my position as an adult to deal with such concerns by encouraging the children to develop a fair way of using the notebooks, and it was the older children who decided what this system should be and how it should be regulated (which included asking me to marshal the process because, as one of the girls noted, 'you *are* the adult' – see my discussion about doing research with children in Chapter 3). In order to further disrupt this system I introduced supplementary notebooks, so that within a couple of weeks there were three in circulation each break period. This appeared to be enough to stop the majority of conflict over turn taking.

It quickly became clear that while I might not necessarily wish to encourage the drawing of pictures (thereby creating another organised research activity), I could facilitate the practice of playground drawing by simply arriving with and handing out notebooks and pens on request. This way the activity remained part of the research process, with the drawings undeniably being 'products' of the fieldwork, but these drawings were products that mirrored the children's pre-existing leisure activities. This was important because as Christensen (2004) suggests the researcher working with children should ask: "Are the practices employed in the research process in line with and reflective of children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines; and what are the ways in which children routinely express and represent these in their everyday life?" What Christensen argues then is that it is vital that we work within children's own cultures of communication, forms of expression, literacies and competencies. By adopting this position the tension between research activity and the everyday practice of the children's cultures could be openly recognised as inevitable and turned into something productive, as opposed to something problematic.

From the outset of the fieldwork I decided to situate the central questions about romantic love within wider discussions about children's friendship groups because, as previous research has illustrated, there are complex relationships between narratives of friendship and romance in children's relationship cultures that are influenced by a wide range of factors, such as social class, ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality and dis/ability. Furthermore, I was aware that romantic love is a narrative that is saturated throughout popular culture (Illouz 1997). This notion of saturation had methodological consequences. Taking this into account, as far as possible I wanted to avoid instigating too much of what might be called 'scripted dialogue' with the children. This

position was justified at a later phase of the project when I talked directly with groups of children about romance. Many of their initial responses were generic, clichéd and even uninterested, due to an over-familiarity with the popular romantic narrative. This is not to say that they did not invest in such a narrative – many did so heavily – rather that it is so deeply entrenched within popular culture that they could call on it as an act of recital. It was during these moments that the ventriloquism of romance became starkly apparent. The point then, given the dominance and pervasiveness of the narrative, was to avoid creating too many situations that facilitated scripted dialogue and find a way of exploring how romance was inscribed in multiple ways throughout the children's relationship cultures.

The drawings analysed in this section originate from an early stage of fieldwork at St. Pertwee's. They were created before interviews about romance had taken place and they show children's investments in certain kinds of relationship that are hetero-gendered. The drawings included here are examples from one of two common categories. The first are examples of pictures showing their relationships with each other, and I use two pages of drawings from one girls' friendship group to explore the hetero-gendered processes of group identity at work in this kind of aesthetic practice. A second set of pictures, which are included in Chapter 7, illustrate how some of the children drew me, their researcher, and created narratives about the relationship(s) of the researcher, which involved drawing the heterosexual romantic utopia.

The pictures I will look at were drawn by a group of Year 6 girls (aged 10-11). This group of girls were some of the most popular in the year and were spread across two Year 6 classes. They spent most of their time together during lunchtime breaks and often told

stories of how they would play and shop together at the weekends and after school. The pictures that were drawn by members of this group were some of the first that I collected, and were drawn in my original notebook across two opposite pages. Here I will focus on the very first pictures that were drawn by one of the girls, Tyler, which showed two different categories within their friendship group – the single crew and the lover losers.

Grouping hetero-gender

Because of the way I had introduced myself to both classes, the girls were aware of my interest in friendship and sitting with me on a bench in the playground at lunchtime discussed the dynamics of the friendships, which mostly entailed what they did together outside school. My field notes, written in the classroom after the lunch break, detail what occurred.

The conversation then turned from friends to who was going out with boys in the school. Deb is teased because she goes out with John. Having seen one of the year five girls drawing in the book, Tyler, asked if she could draw pictures of herself and the other girls in her friendship group. As she began to do this, a year five boy was dragged over by a younger girl. There was a lot of laughter because the boy seemed to asking Katie if she would be his girlfriend. The boy was sent away by the other girls and Katie explained that he was cute but she was far too old for him – he was too young to be a boyfriend. I see that during this exchange Tyler has altered her drawings slightly by adding the title 'single crew' about the pictures of herself and her friends. Katie wanders off to speak to some younger girls, including her sister. While she is away, Stepheni tells Tyler to draw another group of girls on a separate page and call them the 'lover losers', and that Deb and Katie should be drawn on this page. Deb says she doesn't care but seems to be upset at being put on a different page. Stepheni takes the pen

from Tyler and scribbles over the picture of Katie in the 'single crew'. Then Katie returns to see she's been drawn in the 'lover losers' category. Angrily she snatches the notebook from Tyler and scribbles over this second picture of herself.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

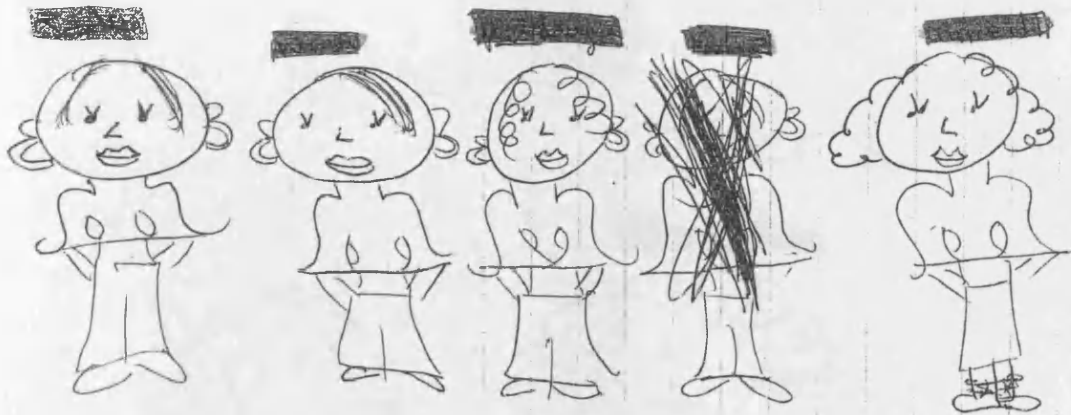
This exchange was typical of the negotiated process of identity that occurred through many of the children's drawings and within their friendship groups more widely. As the process of drawing in the notebooks demonstrates, the girls primarily defined themselves and each other in terms of their relationships with boys. The 'single crew' was clearly the subgroup that the girls wanted to be associated with. To be under this category was to be without a boyfriend, but still distinctively feminine and heterosexually attractive. The emphasis here was on friendship between girls; friendship that was defined in hetero-gendered ways, like being single. To be a 'lover loser' was to be a girl with a boyfriend. Having a boyfriend was, to a certain extent, a less desirable status because it led to separation from the majority of the group, something that clearly upset Deb and outraged Katie. The most desirable identity that was negotiated within the group was that of the 'single' girl. This is not a nonsexual identity, but rather one that is deeply inscribed with gendered sexuality. This is clearly shown by Tyler's drawings (see Picture 6.3 and Picture 6.4). In their stylisation the drawings show distinctly hetero-feminine characteristics that are particularly prominent, such as long eyelashes, full lips, revealed mid-riffs, and earrings. There is also a standardisation across both sets of drawings where all the girls are shown wearing near-identical clothes, thus displaying the notion of strength and uniformity across the group. Some individualisation does occur however, as the ethnicity of each individual girl is also partially identifiable in the way that each hairstyle is drawn. This is a stylised ethnicity that illustrates one

of the ways that identities within localised relationship cultures are influenced by global commercial forces.

In this instance the influence appears to come from a popular brand of dolls called *Bratz*.³⁵ The girls disassociated themselves from the dolls by saying that they were too old to play with them, but it was clear that they had adopted the style of the dolls and incorporated it into the ways they symbolize their individual and group identities. *Bratz* dolls have been criticised for encouraging 'early sexualisation' of children due to their inscription with hetero-gendered imagery and associated narratives of relationship practices such as dating (Gold 2004), and it seems to be some of these features that Tyler utilises in her drawings. The name 'single crew' appears to be drawn from the girls' investments in hip-hop culture, especially American music and style, which were daily reference points in their conversations. Hip-hop culture itself is dominated by and built upon the normative narratives of hetero-gender and is highly commercialised. Both the style of the *Bratz* dolls and the references to hip-hop culture show the dialogues that are occurring between the girls' situated friendship practices and popular, commercial culture. Predominantly this dialogue revolves around and informs the heterosexualisation of their gendered identities.

³⁵ *Bratz* are so popular that they have been outselling Barbie in the UK in recent years (Gold 2004).

Single Crew



Picture 6.3: The Single Crew. (L-R) Tyler, Mia, Stepheni, Katie (scribbled out), Alisha.

Field notebook, St. Pertwee's

In showing a heart symbol on the 'lover losers' drawing, one kind of romantic imagery is positioned negatively, or at least placed at a distance. The practice of drawing hearts was associated with being a younger girl and many of the girls in years 4 and 5 drew hearts in the notebooks. For the lover losers, Tyler positions the romantic externally, while for the single crew it has been incorporated in a different form of practice. The romantic is no longer external to the individuals because it has been incorporated into their identities through the process of heterosexualisation. Seen together then, it seems that through this kind of symbolic practice and its accompanying negotiated interactions, the girls are exploring the possible forms of gendered identity available to them as they approach the transfer to high school and the transition into their teenage identities. They may be attracted to the 'single crew' because it appears to offer a safe, bold group identity that is, in

their own terms, mature, and provides a symbolic space where their transition can occur and emotional investments can be made.



**Picture 6.4: The Lover Losers. (L-R) Katie (scribbled out), Deb
Field notebook, St. Pertwee's**

Both drawings give an indication of the multiple ways that normative heterosexuality influences the intersubjective negotiation of gendered identity. The performance of sexuality surrounding these drawings is therefore complex and overdetermined, but takes the form of a compulsory or hegemonic stylistic element in the way the girls' images are standardised.

Tyler's caricatures illustrate just how important friendship *groups* are to these girls, and how friendship involves important acts of categorisation that depend on heterosexualised relationship categories. They are also a good example of the communal negotiation of drawings. By looking at the example of the 'single crew' and the 'lover losers' it becomes clear that these drawings are open texts of group identity work with multiple authors, their creation being a performance of hetero-gendered relationships that is embedded in localised relationship cultures.

Developing analysis

What I want to argue, as a way of drawing the data and analyses in this section together, is that there are two interconnected processes through which these pictures can be explored. Firstly in terms of practice, the drawings can be viewed as junctures in ongoing processes of friendship. They are acts of individual and group identity expression and negotiation that occur through several channels of communication. There seems to be a certain attraction to using the drawings to say certain things about relationships – things that might otherwise be difficult to articulate – because of the displacement and playfulness made available by this medium. The drawings show how the children had to constantly re-claim and re-negotiate subject positions within their friendship group, often in terms that are not defined by them. This was the case in terms of the social interactions that they were part of, and in terms of the cultural repertoire that was available to them to express things about relationships that were understandable – within the accepted genre of relationships.

Secondly, I want to claim that the drawings should be simultaneously explored in terms of textuality (or perhaps more accurately intertextuality). They contain many overlapping and interacting symbolic references that are open to narrative and

discursive analysis. This analysis is no simple process and the one contained within this section is necessarily partial, incomplete and open-ended. It is important to recognise the way each drawing is over-determined: how it is affected by multiple social, cultural, commercial and discursive factors, rather than the simple ideological cause and effect (something it might be tempting to suggest considering the dominance of the romantic narrative). Thus the hegemony of heterosexuality is sustained through a range of interacting pre-existing factors, which converge at every level of social interaction. This means that Tyler and the other girls (see Chapter 7) must draw on resources and take subject positions that are already saturated with meanings and emotional investments. It is in this sense that the drawings, to work from Bakhtin (1981) are 'dialogic'. In isolation they provide an indication of the linguistic and symbolic geography of culture they were created in: they are in dialogue with the rest of everyday world they come from and as such, contain the voices and desires of many others. They are also spoken to an audience – whether that is the other children or myself (or my girlfriend, as the pictures in the following chapter illustrate) – and are therefore in anticipation of a range of possible responses, and must not only predict what is intelligible but also what is contextually appropriate. This dialogism is the vital point that connects the symbolism of drawings to their social context of creation via the investments and understandings of their creator. Overall then, I argue that through the drawings it is possible to glimpse into the ever-unfinished processes of subjectivity: the experiences of living-through the psychosocial negotiation of identity.

The provisional analysis in this section has shown that children's fleeting and communal drawings are important expressions of their everyday lives. They are a cultural space of great investment that should not be ignored. By appreciating and focusing on the

fleeting sketches produced by children in field notebooks a valuable and under-explored supply of ethnographic data can be illuminated and utilised. Even if momentarily, many children invest greatly in these drawings, meaning that they represent an important expression of what they value in their everyday lives. Furthermore, and as a result of this, to under-value or overlook these sketches is also to adopt an adult-centred view on childhood, which is, of course, anathema within the new social studies of childhood. The drawings also show important ways in which the social world of the researcher, by entering their cultural spaces, becomes imbricated with the social world of their participants. The issues of inter-identity and intersubjectivity that this raises are examples of the fluxional processes by which lives are constantly rearticulated in the everyday and, as such, remain ever incomplete.

Negotiating sexuality knowledge and education

In the foregoing example of the single crew and the lover losers, a certain kind of sexuality knowledge is being negotiated: the organisation of hetero-gendered relationships. But there were other kinds of sexuality knowledge that the fieldwork uncovered. In this section I provide two examples of what might be called the 'unofficial' and 'official' sexuality curriculum. I use these terms broadly because I do not wish to suggest that the unofficial sexuality curriculum is 'hidden.' On the contrary, these aspects of school culture are very clearly visible and very loud (Kehily 2002). Similarly, the term official is used to denote where the delivery has comprised part of timetabled lessons, but where the children still negotiate this knowledge through the relationships and meanings of their own peer cultures. Indeed, what I am interested in is how both these and other kinds of sexuality knowledge converge and are explored within the context of children's everyday lives.

He wants to be a pornist!

The following extract concerns unofficial sexuality knowledge and is taken from an interview involving Moz, John, Kenzie and Simon, who were introduced in Chapter 5. In a part of the interview where the boys started to talk about future jobs (a theme discussed in Chapter 9), Kenzie whispered something into Moz's ear, leading to this exchange.

Moz: Eeerh! He said he wants to be a pornist, like eh, pornography.

John: That's dirty.

Kenzie: Ah, shut up.

Simon: Yeah that's bad, you cant's go looking at that!

DJM: Why?

Simon: Cos women they shows their Jenny [laughter from all boys].

DJM: What? [laughter continues].

Simon: Their Jenny, ya know [points between legs, all boys making similar gestures and laughing almost uncontrollably].

[Some discussion undefined behind laughter].

DJM: Would it, is it only women, or would it be different for a man to do that?

Simon: Eeerh!

Kenzie: Only women does pornography.

Simon: Men don't has Jennies.

Moz: I saw this book [with] body piercing and it was well funny, they had like bars and stuff through their thingies [points between legs].

John: And women wears thongs and that.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

In this extract, looking at pornography is initially positioned as dirty, inappropriate and prohibited. Although this may well be a display of 'mock' innocence, perhaps even a performance given specifically because of my presence and the group interview context, the discourse of innocence is readily available. The boys then explain that pornography is 'bad' because it depicts naked women, displaying, specifically, their 'jennies.' In this configuration, pornography is women's bodies and consequently only women can be in it – men don't have 'jennies' so they cannot

be in (or be) pornography. The presence and strength of the boys laughter suggests that it is a reaction to discussing such things with an adult in school and my being a man may well have facilitated the candid nature of the discussion. However, it is possible that because I am a male adult, they find it so funny not because it breaks a taboo, but because it *almost* breaks a taboo. The laughter provides them with a way to smuggle something into the school context that they are aware would certainly be deemed unacceptable. It also shows how the boys are caught between talking about sexuality in two different ways – Moz, for example, first displays a form of disgust, followed by knowledge and experience. This exchange then, provides a good example of how these boys negotiated unofficial sexuality knowledge in the context of the school and within their peer group.

Plastic babies

My first morning at St Baker's was chaotic and unstructured. On arriving at the reception desk I was mistaken for a supply teacher and almost allocated a class. This minor confusion averted, the head of lower school Mrs Williams arrived and we walked to the staff room discussing how I would like to do the fieldwork and which class it may be best for me to work with during the first few days. I explained that I would like to work with as many of the children I had met in the primary schools as possible, and Mrs Williams suggested that 7A would be suitable as they were 'likely to cause the least trouble' (see Chapter 2). Unfortunately, while this may have been true of the children, it was not true of their science teacher, Mr Smith. Following a brief discussion with Mr Smith in an adjacent corridor, Mrs Williams returned to the classroom to inform me that there was a problem and I would have to join 7A after the first double period of lessons. The explanation was that they were just about to start viewing a series of videos on 'the reproductive system' and that Mr Smith thought

that the children might not be comfortable if I was in the lesson watching these videos with them. Given the focus of my research, I was disappointed to find myself not being allowed into the sex education lesson. However, I took it as some consolation that this was a good example of the way that various silences are constructed around sex and sexuality in the school context (Epstein et al 2003). Indeed, during the same month as my work at St. Baker's, a head teacher in another secondary school made headlines in the UK newspapers for attempting to ban students 'canoodling' at his secondary school. The incident was represented in the press as follows:

Eight school pupils have been suspended following a protest against their headmaster's decision to ban 'canoodling.' The protest began last Friday when around 200 pupils... refused to return to afternoon classes after being told they were not allowed to kiss, hold hands or hug. The headmaster...said today that the ban was aimed at instilling 'appropriate behaviour'...³⁶

Guardian, Oct 6th 2004

During one of the interviews at St. Troughton's, Vanessa and Ellis explained that a few weeks previously they had been playing the game 'spin the bottle' on the far corner of the school field. One of the teachers had seen this and came over to reprimand them, taking away their bottle so the game would be forced to stop. This irritated the girls because they did not think the game was that serious, and as Ellis explained, it only involved 'a bit of kissing and hugging and that.'

Placed together, these incidents illustrate prevailing cultural notions about the supposed dangers surrounding children's exposure to sexuality knowledge and practice (Mellor & Epstein 2006). What is interesting is that the children at St. Baker's *also*

³⁶ See Mellor & Epstein 2006 for further discussion.

had a sense of how this knowledge could be dangerous, albeit a sense that was constructed quite differently. During an interview on the day following my exclusion from the science lesson, one group from 7A were, contrary to Mr Smith's concerns, comfortable with discussing the videos they had watched during their science lesson.

DJM: Did you do something about relationships in science yesterday?

Vanessa: Er, no?

Charlene: Yeah those videos.

Vanessa: The first one was ok though, where you didn't actually see him having a stiffy but the next one was minging wasn't it, when he was having an orgasm and all the sperms and stuff?

[Noise]

Charlene: I didn't like watching them cos it was disgusting.

[Noise]

Vanessa: It was telling us all about how to do it and stuff by showing us at a young age like.

Steven: Yeah but it's stupid telling us now because we can't do it now.

Vanessa: We can't do it now can we?

Charlene: Yes, well, it's stupid cos we might go out and try it now.

Steven: At this age you might go and do it.

Charlene: People have babies cos they get child things and they get more money don't they?

Steven: And it's bad because the man just goes out and the woman is left there on her own.

Charlene: And if they did, they had a baby, well they don't teach us stuff about how to have a baby and how to look after a baby, they just teach us how to do it.

Steven: There's girls in like year 9 who had babies and they...

Vanessa: They give them those plastic babies so that they learn don't they, so they know what it's like and that.

[Noise]

Steven: My sister, right, my sister [noise]. Yeah but she had to look after it and it cried all night long.

DJM: Do you think it's a good idea?

Vanessa: Yeah.

All: Yes

Steven: Do they just do it for girls? Cos that's not right.

Charlene: Well maybe it's because they know that girls mature faster so they need to know.

Vanessa: I think it's a good idea, cos you gets to practice on a dummy first before you get the real thing.

Steven: It's like a practice.

Charlene: Yeah it's a bad thing.

DJM: Why is it bad?

Charlene: Well it's bad because it teaches you how to have a baby again.

[Noise]

DJM: So what do you think the connections were between the stuff you learned and the kind of relationships you're going to have?

Charlene: It teaches you how to have a baby cos if you didn't do it [the lesson] then you'd go out and you'd have a baby and you wouldn't know how to look after it.

Interview, St Baker's

During this exchange, Charlene initially displays disgust at the content of the videos. The knowledge appears awkward to process, and just as the laughter of the boys in the previous extract allowed them to discuss something taboo, so this expression of disgust allows Charlene to talk about the video from a 'safe' position. Vanessa then introduces the idea that the videos were unsuitable, and Steven agrees, as they contain knowledge that cannot and should not be used at their stage of life. In doing this, sex education is positioned as encouraging participation, and there is a link made between knowledge and practice. Given the knowledge, some children may go out and try what they have seen. But it seems that Charlene, Vanessa and Steven are talking about some other children, as they position themselves as different, and more sensible, by drawing on a discourse about the dangers of sexual knowledge and the young. Here there appears to be the strong dialogical presence of adult, parental opinion.

Similarly, Charlene tries to make sense of why young people would want to engage in sexual activity with reference to Child Benefits provided by the state, questioning the motives for and morality of having a baby. In doing this, she echoes the negative

beliefs about young, teenage (and unmarried) mothers promoted by the Conservative government of the 1980s and the stories of 'benefit scrounger' families found in the present day on the covers of many daily tabloid newspapers (McRobbie 2000). This is then linked to a complaint about the provision of the correct knowledge. Charlene argues that it is wrong for the school to tell them how it 'do it' without also telling them how to deal with the consequences of having to look after a baby. It is likely that this kind of expertise seems especially pertinent to Charlene and her peers, as there were girls two years above them that had had babies. And as Steven's comment about the likely division of labour in family home regarding childcare – the man goes out – this knowledge is indeed important.

It seems however that some practice is provided for children in the upper classes, who are provided with 'plastic babies' to take home and experience what parenting might be like. And as Vanessa suggests, plastic babies provide important practice before you have a real one. This rationale then, stands at odds with the official one, which is certainly more concerned with promoting sexual abstinence than parental practice. This is different from the practice noted in Chapter 5 in an extract from the same interview. There, the practice related to acts of sex, whereas here it refers to practices of parenting. Of course, their most recent memories may be of plastic babies as toy dolls from their infancy and early years. In this context of play the babies *do* represent artefacts of practice, as they are central components in young children's fantasy games. For the girls then, this may provide a crucial conceptual framing for the use of the babies, as they are positioned on a continuum of practice throughout their youth, toward a future of domesticity. But the girls do not accept this uncritically. It might be a bad thing because, as Charlene

suggests, it teaches you how to have a baby, which is wrong at their age.

There is a great deal going on in this episode. Although it is far from clear why Charlene takes the position she does, it is likely that it is as a result of the complex overlapping of discursive, psychic and biographical factors. Nonetheless, the extract does show how the children actively negotiate the sex education curriculum and use the sexuality knowledge within the contexts of their own relationship cultures and their everyday lives to create new, hybrid forms of sexuality knowledge.

Sexual/gendered knowledge in the research context

As I note above, I believe it is important to analyse data with reference to the context and circumstances of their production so that the resulting analysis is always as 'situated' in as much ethnographic detail as appropriate and possible. Moreover, in Chapter 4 I explained how I used my ethnographic self as a tool during the research process (this is explored further in the following chapters). There were times during my fieldwork, however, that data about sexual/gendered knowledge were produced as a *direct* result of my presence in the schools. In these moments the children drew directly on my hetero-gendered, embodied subjectivity to explore their own sense of self within their everyday cultures. Therefore, they remain important indicators of their emotional investments in certain subject positions. The following extracts provide some salient examples.

How hairy are your legs?

Towards the end of the interview with Moz, Kenzie, Danny, Simon and John, the discussion of pornography deviated and evolved and the boys began discussing their experiences of hair and shaving.

Moz: Ya got hairy hands.
Kenzie: Yeah, sort of.
Moz: What 'bout ya legs? [Kenzie rolls up trouser leg, Moz laughs] Aaah, ya shaves ya legs!
Kenzie: No I never.
Danny: Did ya have a shave yet?
Kenzie: No.
Simon: I did.
Kenzie: Ya never.
John: How hairy are YOUR legs?
Simon: Yeah, a bit.
[The boys start rolling up their trousers and comparing leg hair].
John: [To Simon] That's not much.
Simon: Yeah, well I've got blond hair, ain't I.
Danny: [To DJM] Let's see yours then?
DJM: Why do you want to see mine?
Moz: Come on!
All: Yeah, yeah!
[DJM rolls up jeans].
All: Eeerh! [All laugh].
Simon: You looks like Robin Williams!

Interview, St Pertwee's

In this extract, the boys negotiate their own embodied masculinities. This is an interesting example as it shows how gender is an embodied experience and the boys' gendered generational relations to me within the research setting. In this account, hair becomes an index of transitional masculinity, with uncertain status. In talking about shaving, the boys appear to attempt an articulation of mature masculinity, but the variety of their experiences and bodies troubles any conclusion and leaves the debate open and ambiguous. There is no conclusive definition reached as to what amount of hair is correct, better, or normal for them to have, nor whether they should or should not have experienced shaving.

The boys then perform an act of group identity formation by drawing on my presence, where I am brought into the exchange and used to symbolise adult masculinity. In doing this, the boys are actively producing their own definitions of age related masculinity. I represent something similar, but other – to them, I *am* as hairy as the comedian Robin Williams – and through this act, some sense of commonality is restored and their boyhood identities are reformulated and reaffirmed. This episode is similar to a number of my experiences at the schools. Boys would often draw on my adult masculinity and use it to negotiate their relationships with me (by talking about football, for example) thereby focusing on the similarities between our gender identities. While in other contexts they would position me as similarly masculine, but differently aged, thereby using my adult status to actively create their own generational sense of self.

The orgasm badge

Girls could not position me in the same way as Moz and the rest of the boys, although, as will become clear in Chapter 7, they did use my sexuality to explore their own hetero-gendered romantic fantasies and subject positions. In the following interview extract the girls use my presence in a different way: to explore and exercise sexuality knowledge.

Ellis: My aunt went to this party and she had on this, she had an orgasm badge.

[Loud laughter]

Vanessa: Do you know what it is?

Jodi: I don't know what it is.

Ellis: I asked her and she said 'oh, I'm not sure'

Vanessa: [To DJM] What does it mean?

DJM: I really don't know what that means.

Vanessa: [To DJM] What's an orgasm then?

Ellis: An orgasm means...

Vanessa: [To DJM] Can you tell us?

DJM: Tell you what?

Vanessa: What it means.

DJM: I don't know what an orgasm badge is. You'll have to go and ask her aunt.

Ellis: My little cousin came round our house the other day and when we were playing he said 'where do babies come from?'

[Laughter]

Vanessa: You should have said 'from a seed, love!'

[Laughter]

Interview, St. Troughton's

Later the same day Vanessa told me that they knew what an orgasm was and that they were teasing me in the interview. This admission sheds an interesting light on the extract. During the interview the girls are simultaneously playing with the notion of their own innocence and with the dangerous deployment of sexual knowledge in the school context. They are aware of the prohibitions placed on such topics in the school and, just as the boys did when talking about pornography, the girls find pleasure in flirting with the breaking of the sexuality taboo.

The end of the extract is especially revealing. Here, Ellis and Vanessa begin to talk about the sexuality knowledge of younger children, specifically Ellis' cousin who is reported as having asked where babies come from. Vanessa's suggestion that he should have been told 'from a seed, love' gives an interesting perspective on their earlier questioning about the orgasm badge. They have a working knowledge about the euphemisms and metaphors deployed to conceal and disguise sexual knowledge. Ellis and Vanessa are at a liminal stage. They can play with the idea of their own sexual innocence, while at the same time they can display a knowing and a policing of the knowledge of younger children. In this they are partially aware of the constructed nature of their own childhood, and they can put this knowledge to both practical and pleasurable use.

The story of the orgasm badge also indicates the ways that I avoided confronting certain forms of sexuality knowledge in the research context. Unable to answer the question about orgasms, I answer a different one, about the badge, and pass on the responsibility of the knowledge. I too was aware of the prohibitions and silences surrounding such knowledge. Consequently there were moments like this where I found myself governing my speech and enacting the discourse of the non-sexual school. So sexuality knowledge is negotiated on several levels here: between Ellis and her aunt, between the girls and me, between the girls and younger children. All the levels show how sexuality knowledge has an 'unspoken presence' between people of different ages and statuses. It retains a presence because of the euphemisms that are deployed, which are in turn, heterosexualised in form.

Older? Older? 16? Older?

Enacting the kind of sexuality censorship detailed above was increasingly difficult when the object of questioning became myself. As I discuss at length through Chapters 7 and 8, the children used my biography in various ways, talking about my future and my past in terms of gendered friendships and romantic relationships. To do this they would often draw out biographical details about my life and use them to tell stories about themselves. For example, during an interview at St. Baker's some of the children raised the topic of virginity in a side conversation.

Vanessa: I wanna be 16.

Shanice: I wanna be 17.

DJM: What are you talking about?

Vanessa: When do you want to lose your virginity?

DJM: You're talking about what age you want to be and you say 16?

Vanessa: Yeah 16.

[Noise]

Charlene: Luke had a little dummy run in the playground when he asked Vanessa to marry him.

[Noise and laughter]

Steven: If there's a man and a woman and they do it then...

Charlene: [Talking about virginity] You starts with a V [makes sign with fingers] and then it turns to an A [adds another finger]

[Laughter]

Vanessa: Hey you know what? When I lose my virginity I want to lose it to someone who's really special and who I love and I don't want it to be wrong.

Interview, St Baker's

The theme of virginity was then picked up again at the end of the session when I tried to round things up.

DJM: Just before we finish, are there any things that we talked about that you had something else say, or you can ask me some questions if you like?

Vanessa: When did you lose your virginity?

DJM: Not that question again!

[Laughter]

Vanessa: Tell us.

All: Yeah go on tell us.

DJM: I was younger than I am now, but older than you are now.

Vanessa: 16?

Charlene: 14?

Steven: Older? Older? 16? Older?

Interview, St Baker's

Here I was a useful source of information about a topic they were preoccupied with. The children were doing research of their own, to their own agenda, which was set by increased discussion about virginity in Year 7. Now the children were seeing themselves as sexual in different ways, brought about by their interaction with pupils in the upper years, whose own sexual culture was openly displayed during break times. Moreover, the extracts in this last section illustrate the changes in the children's demonstration of (hetero)sexual knowledge between primary and secondary schools. The confidence to 'speak' sexuality, and to do so knowingly,

appeared to be greater after the transition to high school, especially in the interview context.

The loss of virginity appears as an important rite-of-passage into teen-heterosexuality (Allen 2005). It is also linked to popular romance and institutional heterosexuality with the story of Luke asking Vanessa to marry him on the playground and with Vanessa's proclamation that her first time will be with someone she really loves. She also notes that she does not want it to be 'wrong.' There was clearly a great deal of pressure being felt about the right time and the right way to lose one's virginity, and this group were searching for as much information as possible. The story of the 'dummy run' also indicates how many of the group involved in the research were starting to frame the hetero-gendered games played by their former selves and younger children as rehearsals for teen and adult life.

At several points they link the appropriate time to lose one's virginity to the heterosexual age of consent. Just as the boys from St. Pertwee's could not see the point in having a girlfriend before the age of 16 (see Chapter 5), here the state defined 'appropriate age' from sexual activity is used to build meanings about their relationships and sense of sexual self. Moreover, the virginity they are talking about can only be lost through penetrative hetero-sex – when a V turns to an A.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked in further detail at how hetero-gender shaped the children's relationship cultures, focusing on three particular spaces within the fieldwork: the playground, 'official' and 'unofficial' educational contexts, and the research interviews. It explored the playground as a specific space for the negotiation of hetero-gendered subject positions and group identities by

focusing on the interactions and drawings of a group of Year 6 girls. Here I looked at some of the intersections between popular culture – consisting of certain media and economic markets – and local culture in the girls’ negotiations of their group identities. In doing this I also discussed the argument that researchers working with children should pay attention to their participants own cultures of communication, and outlined how I achieved this through my analysis of the girls’ playground drawings. The chapter also considered how hetero-gender shaped interactions and subject positions within the context of what I called ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ sexuality education. In these contexts – and in episodes during the interviews – the children positioned themselves, each other and me, as particular kinds of subjects by drawing on discourses of gender and sexuality. In the next chapter I continue to focus on how gendered sexuality and social class shaped the children’s lives, by looking at extracts from their research diaries about their lives outside school, and their understandings and experiences of friendship and romance.

Chapter 7

True loves and best friends

Stories are not just practical and symbolic actions: they are also part of the political process. Sexual stories ooze through the political stream. Power is not so much an all or nothing phenomenon, which people either have or don't have, and which resides either here or there. Rather it is best viewed as a flow, a process, a pulsate... *The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process.*

Plummer 1995:26, emphasis in original

After Church we went to B & Q (you can do it if you B & Q it!) to buy a present for a friend, when we bumped into Sarah once again, we kept hiding and running from Mr. Marriott who started to get quite cross, but of course, we enjoyed ourselves. I am all astonishment, I met Mrs. Webster aaaaaaaahhhhhh, was she trying to buy a present for a friend? Then home sweet home for to eat my delicious meal, yummy.

Katherine, diary entry, Hartnell

Went in swimming pool, played football, bike ride, golf, rugby.

Ryan, diary entry, St. Pertwee's

Introduction

This chapter looks at the children's emotional investments and subject positionings from three perspectives, building a rich picture of how these were affected by gender and social class. It begins with an exploration of the children's research diaries, highlighting the everyday experiences of different kinds of childhood and the ways these are represented in the narrative space of the diary text. By examining the diaries I am able to say something about how the children made investments in their

'selves,' as they negotiated the diary activity and their own subjectivity. I then move on to consider how similar social factors affected their investments in romance, love and forms of intimate heterosexual relationships, especially marriage. A key aspect of this analysis is the way that my own romantic relationship was negotiated and explored by the children, particularly the girls. Finally, I shift the focus to explore how romance influenced the children's same sex friendships. I do this by mapping out the ways the children defined what constituted a 'friend' and a 'best friend,' moving on to look at how this was affected by the social strata that shaped the children's own sense of their biographies and explore the notion of romantic friendships as 'friendship escapes.'

Dear Diary... social class, gender and culture

Despite the ethical issues raised in Chapter 4 regarding the diary activity, the writing of the diaries did allow the children to write about the things that concerned them and tell a number of stories about their lives outside of school and at home. In this section therefore, I will explore some of the main features of the diaries written by the children at Hartnell and St. Pertwee's, as these provide a partial but significant view of the character of their childhoods, told from their own perspectives. The diaries illustrate the intersections of global and local narratives, the impact of technologies, and the things that the children found significant or important in their everyday lives. They also highlight the day-to-day routines, activities, events and types of relationships that the children thought it was worth recording. In this sense, I suggest the diaries are documents that demonstrate the different kinds of investments the children made in these things as they went about constructing a narrative about themselves, through a particular research exercise.

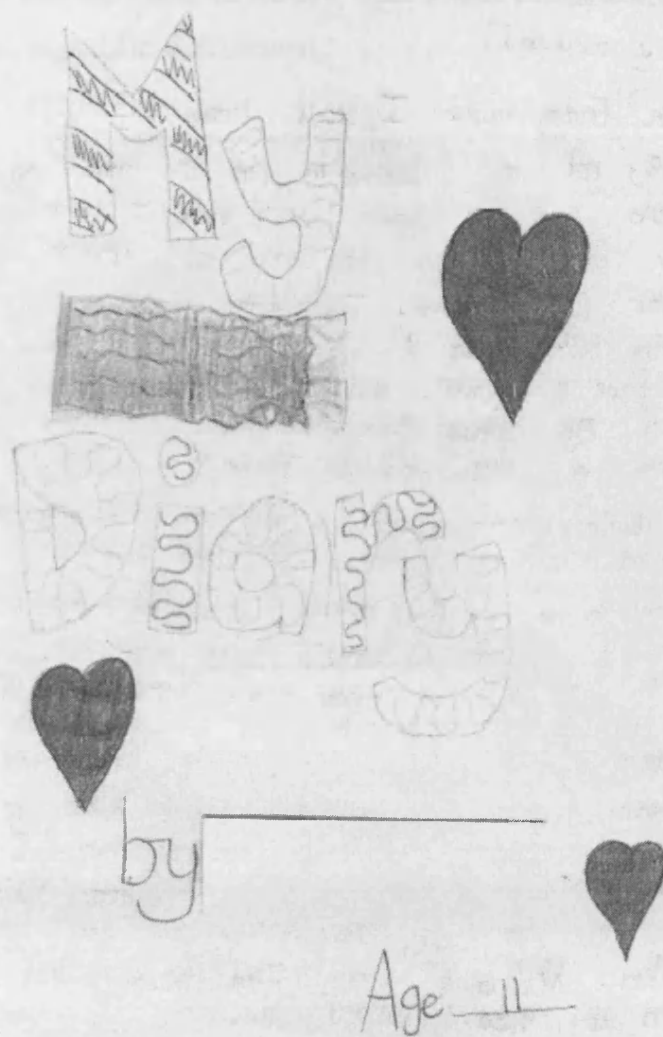
The diaries also provide some evidence of the different kinds of gendered childhoods experienced by the children at a middle class rural school, and a working class urban school. Such differences can be seen through the stories that are told, the ways the task was approached, and the ways the diary documents were organised and personalised. For example, a large number of the diaries from St. Pertwee's have decorated covers, but many have limited details inside. In contrast, the Hartnell diaries contain greater details in the daily entries and less cover décor. Below are some examples of the decorated covers from St. Hartnell.

Cover stories



Picture 7.1: Cover of Kelsea's diary, St. Pertwee's

As Kelsea (Picture 7.1) and Demi's (Picture 7.2) covers show, the St. Pertwee's girls' made common use of what they described as 'love hearts'. This iconography was repeated across all aspects of their drawing culture, particularly the way they symbolised their friendships on each other's workbooks and in my research notebooks (see below).

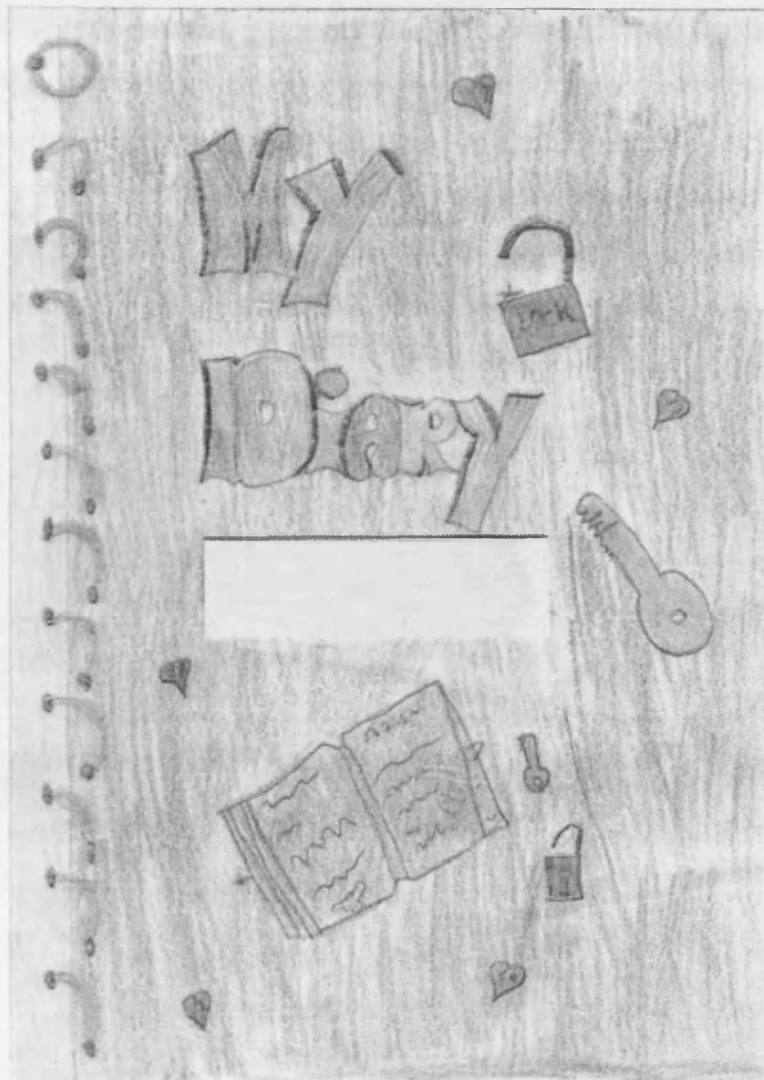


Picture 7.2: Cover of Demi's diary, St. Pertwee's

Kelsea's cover also illustrates how many of the girls used bright colours across the whole of the cover, taking a great deal of time to colour in the blank space using a wide range of available pens and pencils. Attention to this kind of detail and the pride in the decorative creation of the covers appears to have represented an important aspect of being a girl at St. Pertwee's.

Similarly, Stevie (Picture 7.3) places seven hearts on her cover, but she also uses keys and locks to invoke notions of secrecy and

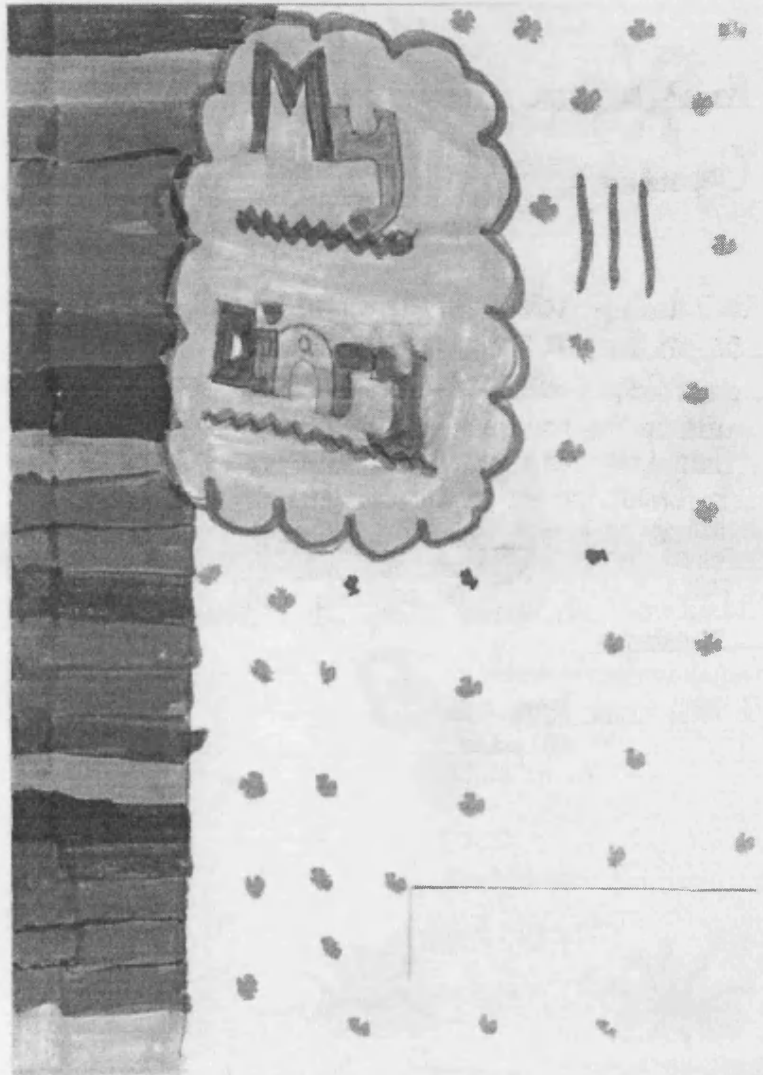
privacy, even though she is aware that I will read the diary – it is, in that sense, a public document.



Picture 7.3: Cover of Stevie's diary, St. Pertwee's

By including these symbols she is drawing on the narrative of 'the diary' as secretive and personal, despite the fact that she discloses no secrets in her pages (see extract below). Therefore, the notion that the diary was a specific confessional space was well recognised, even though the entries within tended to contain information that was ordinarily openly shared.

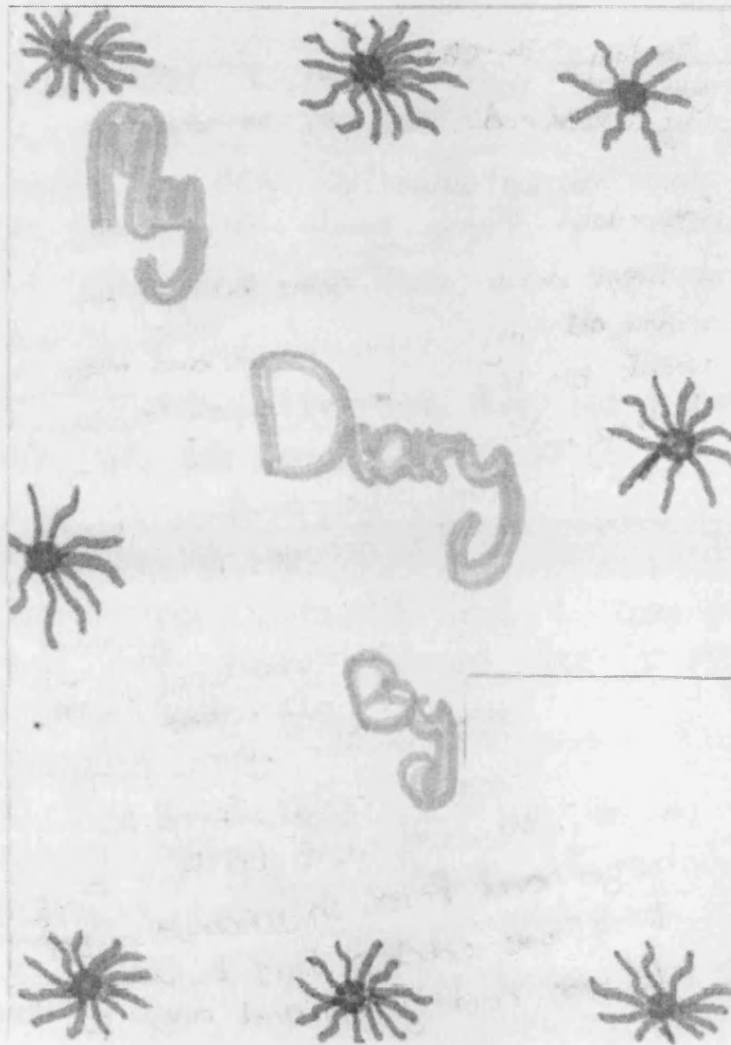
Some boys also invested time in decorating the covers of their diaries, including Luke (Picture 7.4) and Kyle (Picture 7.5). While they too have also used a vibrant palette, the patterns and shapes drawn on these covers, as with the notebook drawings in Chapter 6, show the gendered differences in the children's expressivity and creativity.



Picture 7.4: Cover of Luke's diary, St. Pertwee's

As noted, the Hartnell diaries were not decorated in this way. One possible reason for this could have been the different educational cultures in each of the schools. Year 6 at St. Pertwee's were

encouraged to decorate the covers of their workbooks and folders and were often set drawing and colouring tasks as class work. But the children at Hartnell were not encouraged to decorate their books; therefore the impetus to decorate was embedded in classroom culture, although the style of decoration was shaped by the children's own gendered friendship cultures.

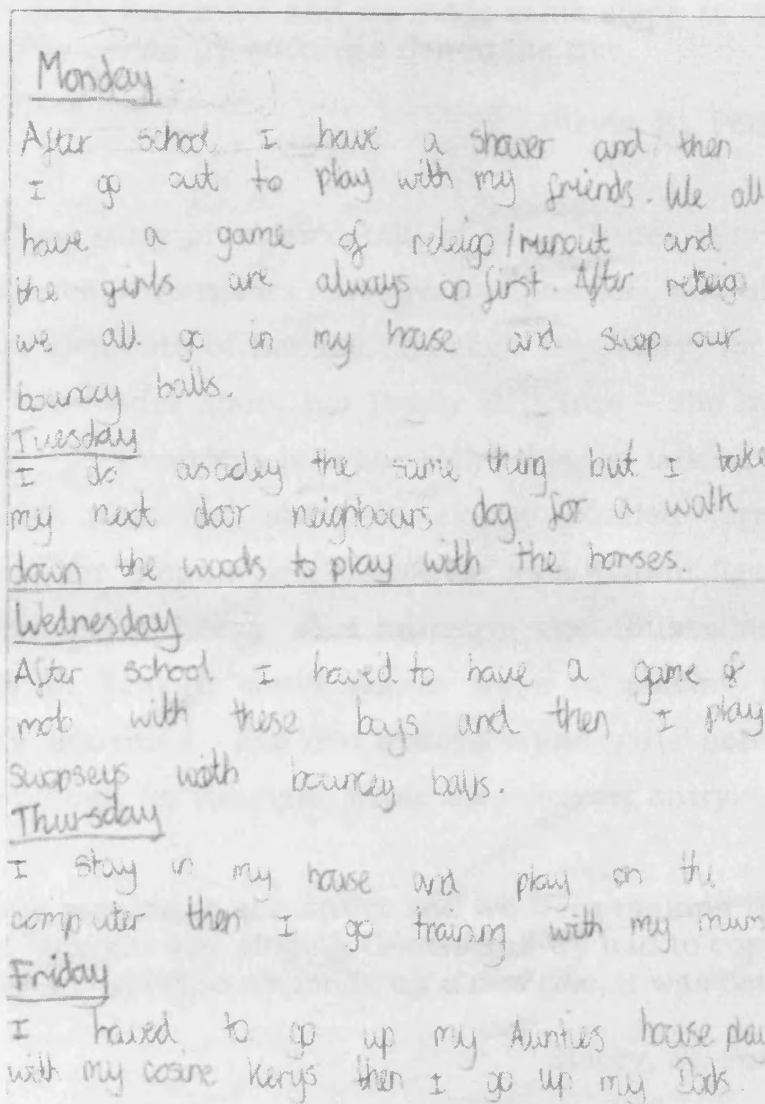


Picture 7.5: Cover of Kyle's diary, St. Pertwee's

Extracts from St. Pertwee's diaries

In addition to these general tendencies between the two schools regarding the covers, there were also marked social class and gender differences in the way the diary entries were composed.

The diary entries provide a view of how the children spent time outside school, how their activities were organised, and which people participated in these activities. At St. Pertwee's the entries for each day were often quite brief, as the following page from Stevie's diary illustrates.



Picture 7.6: Page from Stevie's diary, St. Pertwee's

In contrast to Stevie's cover (see above) this page (Picture 7.6) illustrates the difference between the investment in detailed decoration and the length of the entry for most days. However, the

entries still contained informative narratives about life outside of school. For example, in another entry, Stevie explains that,

On the weekend I go down to my dad's house and play outside with my sister Danika. We go out the front and we play in the tree and Danika's mum (Collette) tells us to make a swing on it so we do. We found some nails and got my dad's hammers and we made some steps so we can get up. We ended up making a den in the tree.

Stevie, St. Pertwee's

Stevie's short story provides details of her activities outside school and illustrates, through its narrative composition, how she invests in various elements of her life. Through this story, for example, she tells the reader about her family structure – she is part of a stepfamily – and conveys how she views this, by talking about her relationship with her sister in closely bonded terms, while positioning her 'stepmother,'³⁷ Collette, as a distant figure named only within parentheses. This narrative also illustrates the way that girls in Year 6 could access ways of playing that were 'children's' activities – like den making – and 'girls' activities, like dancing. Stacey, for example, wrote the following entry.

I was playing in the street and we were making up dances, but this girl was singing *Grease* and we had to copy her, but it wasn't good so we made up a new one, it was better.

Stacey, St. Pertwee's

Typically the children living in the urban context wrote about their free use of public space like streets and parks. They recorded their use of such spaces in ways that suggested a great deal of autonomy of movement and access that was seldom restricted by parental supervision (Valentine 1997; Valentine & McKendrick

³⁷ Although I use the term stepmother here I place it in scare quotes because it was not sure whether Stevie's father was married to Collette, although they did co-habit.

1997). In this sense, public space, like the street, was treated as, in some senses, *children's* space (see Chapter 9). This stood in contrast to the practices of the home, and many of the girls and boys wrote about their everyday routines of getting dressed and eating. For instance, Kelsea explains that,

On Sunday I woke up and went down stairs and Steven was doing cooked dinner. I went upstairs and got dressed had my cooked dinner. Then Steven take us to the park and pub and I played with these kids we played touch.

Kelsea, St. Pertwee's

As with Stevie's entry, within this explanation of common events lays significant detail about family structure and the activities undertaken on days away from school. Similarly, Renae provides a snapshot of the activities of a typical summer evening after school.

I walked home from the bus stop, then I went on my computer to sell things on eBay. I put my bikini on and went and dived into the little pool but got out soon cos it was boring. The my mum asked me to help tidy the kitchen so I did... then we all watched a set of three films called *Rambo* on DVD.

Renae, St. Pertwee's

Renae's entry demonstrates how certain technologies, like the internet and online auction sites, were part of the children's everyday lives along with and equal in significance to more 'traditional' activities, like playing in the pool and helping in the kitchen. When she writes about watching the adult certificated *Rambo* films, Renae provides some indication as to how her childhood is constructed and governed within her family.

Tuesday

went home and went out for a hour and then went on the internet and printed world war two stuff off then I had my tea then went to bed.

Wednesday

Stay in all day then went to the kitchen then went home cleaned my dishes and went to bed

Picture 7.7: Page from David's diary, St. Pertwee's

While the girls at St. Pertwee's tended to provide relatively short entries compared with those at Hartnell (see below), the boys would very often write single sentences of description. As David's diary (Picture 7.7) shows, the boys at St. Pertwee's tended to include very little for each day, but these short narratives still provide significant information about their pastimes and interests. For example, in the following entry, Luke writes one line but still manages to explain his activities and convey his feelings about them.

Went to pictures, then went in swimming pool with my friend Owen, we had great fun, then MacDonald's, then to home.

Luke, St. Pertwee's

Boys also wrote about their indoor and outdoor activities, as Jordan's weekend entry shows:

On Saturday I woke up had my breakfast and played on the new computer game my mother bought on Friday. On Sunday I woke up had my breakfast went on my computer for a couple of hours and then went outside and played mob with my big brother and his friends.

Jordan, St. Pertwee's

Where boys' entries were more detailed then, they tended to involve the mapping out of who had played mass games like 'mob', the fortunes of a particular street football team during a kick-about, the playing of computer games, or, as Dafydd's entry illustrates, video game results:

Me and my dad was playing football over the park and when we finished we went home and played on the playstation 2. We played football, he beat me 2 - 1 I was Liverpool and he was Manchester United. We played again, I beat him 1 - 0 I was Chelsea and he was Manchester City. We played a different game. We play National hockey league. Then I went home and on my playstation.

Dafydd, St. Pertwee's

Dafydd's investment in the pastime of video gaming was very common. According to the diaries it was an activity that preoccupied the boys' leisure time, if not in terms of actual time, then certainly in terms of interest.

Extracts from Hartnell diaries

Friday 16th January

Today after school, I got into my clothes and walked across the lane to my neighbour's house. There are three children who live there. Their names are Richard, Lucy and Claudia. Richard is nine, nearly ten, Lucy is seven and Claudia is only just one. My brother Jack, who is 13 normally plays with Richard. I go and play with Lucy.

I went into Lucy's room and we did some drawing and played some games. He got a bit tired after a bit so we went down stairs and did a special type of painting. The painting can be stuck on glass and wood.

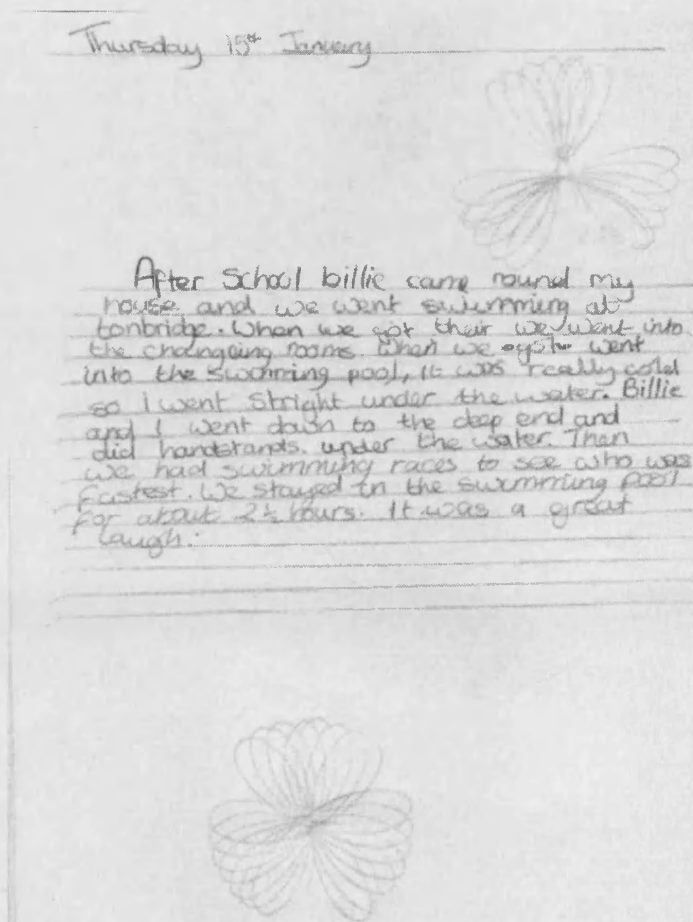
Claudia finished her dinner so Lucy and I played some games with her. I played Claudia on Lucy's back, like a horse. I held Claudia and Lucy laughed a lot but not so much as Claudia. After a while my brother came over and had supper.



Picture 7.8: Page from Emma's diary, Hartnell

Where an educational discourse had arguably affected the decoration of the diary covers at St. Pertwee's, a similar contextual technique of presentation affected the writing of the diaries at Hartnell. Many of the girls, for example, included their own writing lines to the blank pages, just as they were instructed to do for class work. In addition, where pictures were drawn, as in Emma's dairy above (Picture 7.8), they often served to illustrate an event from the narrative of the entry, mirroring the use of pictures

in children's storybooks. Moreover, the narrative structure of many of the entries drew on the conventional story telling genre that was taught during creative writing lessons. Some of the girls, like Cerri (Picture 7.9), decorated their entries by making patters with spirographs – a type of educational toy.



Picture 7.9: Page from Cerri's diary, Hartnell

The narratives within the entries demonstrate various ways in which the childhoods experienced by Year 6 at Hartnell were different to those experienced by the girls and boys at St. Pertwee's. The following extract from Lucy's diary provides some significant examples.

First we went for a walk with Gemma's dog, 'Lady.' There were lots of iced-over puddles and we smashed them, collected the ice, made a huge pile and jumped on them. At about twelve o'clock we went to the cinema to see *Freaky Friday*, which started at 12.40pm. I thought it was a really good film and would give it 10 out of 10. I had a wonderful time. I said thank you for having me and then went inside to greet my pets and family.

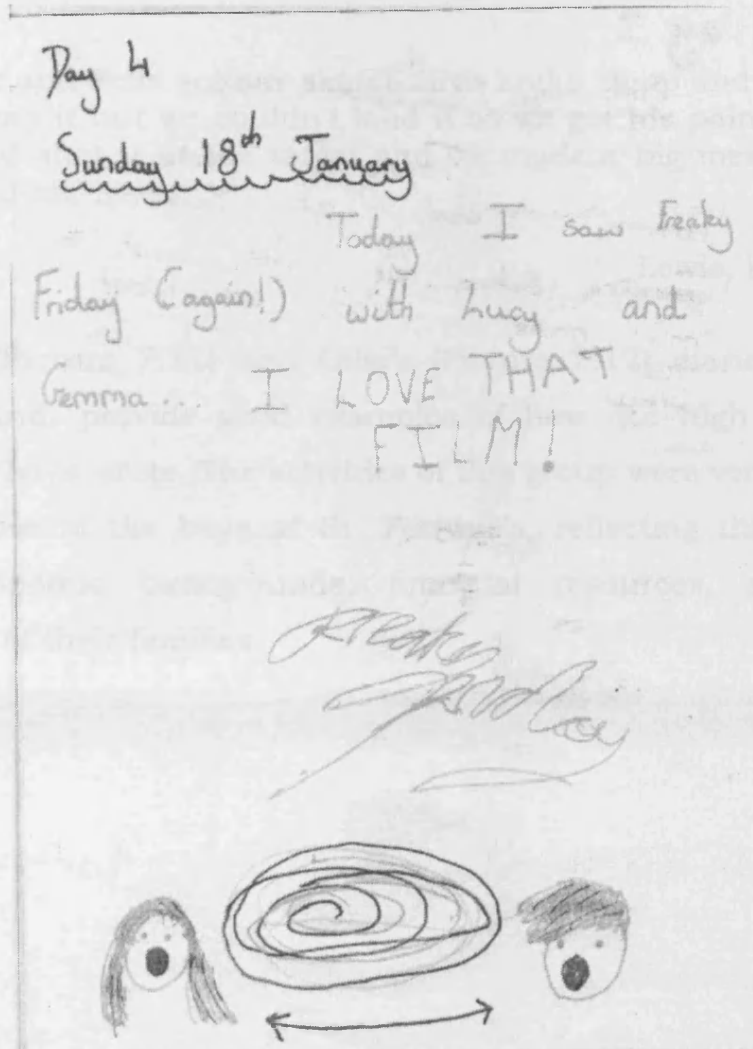
Lucy, Hartnell

Many of the children at Hartnell had pets – especially dogs – and often invested in writing about them, but pets were never mentioned in the St. Pertwee's diaries. There was also, as Lucy's narrative shows, a heightened focus on time within the stories of daily events gathered at Hartnell. This suggests that the children experienced, and had a keen sense of, a regimented structure to their days, something that perhaps reflected the manner in which their leisure time was frequently organised around extra-curricula activities, like sports clubs. Moreover, they often relied on parental transport in order to meet with friends, which was organised to particular times (also see Chapter 9). Lucy is also keen to emphasise how polite she was when leaving Gemma's house – she reports a performance of courteous middle class girlhood – a point that I discuss fully in Chapter 8 when looking at a story by Anna.

Performances of femininity are also highlighted in Lucy and Anna's (see Picture 7.10) references to the film *Freaky Friday*³⁸. Several of the girls at Hartnell invested a great deal in this film, which had recently been released on DVD. The film has a narrative that plays with forms of femininity, where a young girl swaps bodies and lives with her middle-aged mother. This gender swap between girlhood and womanhood may have provided the girls with a narrative by which they could explore future feminine

³⁸ This version of the film was a remake starring Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan. The original film was released in 1976, featuring Jody Foster.

subject positions – that of the teenager and the mother. The sustained exploration of this narrative bore repeat viewings, playground conversations and colourful, excited diary entries.



Picture 7.10: Page from Anna's diary, Hartnell

The boys at Hartnell produced diary entries that varied in length from a few sentences to several pages. In general their diaries were all longer than those produced by the St. Pertwee's boys, and the majority wrote detailed descriptions of their out-of-school activities. At Hartnell, the boys divided themselves roughly into two distinct groups, defined by academic achievement, especially who was and was not taking the '11 plus' exam. The first group

often produced entries similar in content to those seen from St. Pertwee's, although the rural spaces they occupied along with localised cultural interests, particularly skateboarding, shaped their activities. Lewis, for example, wrote this entry:

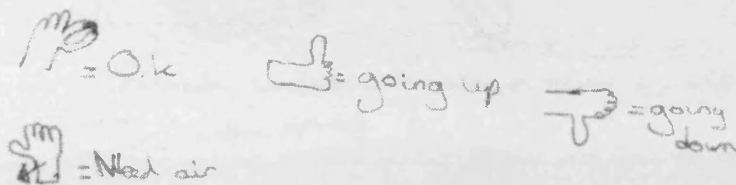
Me and Felix got our skateboards and a ramp and started to jump it but we couldn't land it so we got his paint ball gun and shot it at the target and we made a big mess and got told off.

Lewis, Hartnell

George (Picture 7.11) and Ollie's (Picture 7.12) diaries, on the other hand, provide good examples of how the high achieving group of boys wrote. The activities of this group were very different from those of the boys at St. Pertwee's, reflecting the different socio-economic backgrounds, financial resources, and class cultures of their families.

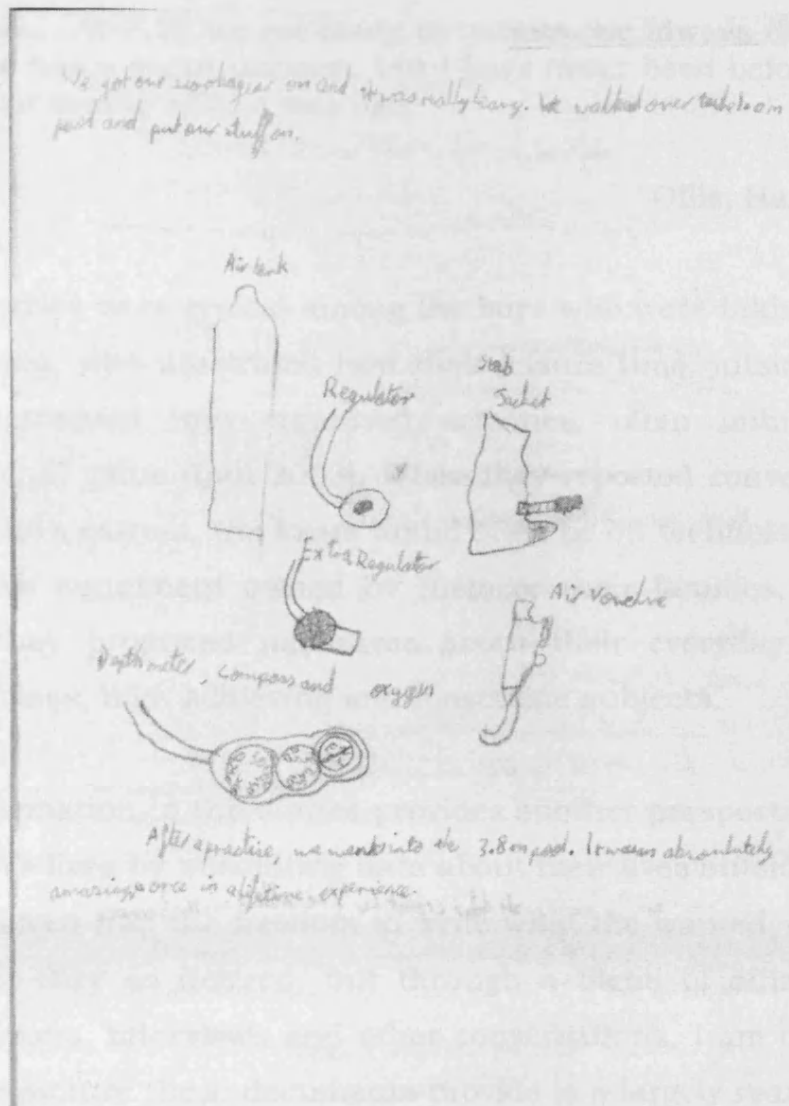
Sunday 18th

At 3pm I went for my party
to Scubadiving, with 4 of my
Mate. It was great fun and
we all enjoyed it. You learn
about all kind of things
like, the oxygen tank, the pressure
systems, how to breath and how to
inflate and deflate your jacket
which is really, really heavy.
Here are some signals



Picture 7.11: Page from George's diary, Hartnell

Both George and Ollie wrote about George's birthday party, where they went scuba diving with an instructor. Their entries reflect the educational discourse of the lessons and, in their presentation of the scuba diving signals and equipment, show how their subject positions as academic high achievers given them a way of reproducing this discourse, and to do this in a similar way to the project work they undertook in school.



Picture 7.12: Page from Ollie's diary, Hartnell

As the following extract from another of Ollie's entries shows, the boys also displayed an awareness of the importance of time in their everyday lives.

Today I go round to my friend James' house for a sleep over. First, we go home and get changed into our tennis gear, we then talk about mobile phones and cars for about an hour. By this time, it is 10 to 5. We get our rackets and get in the

car... At 7.15 we get ready for scouts. He always does it, so he has a scout uniform, but I have never been before, I was just seeing what it was like.

Ollie, Hartnell

Such entries were typical among the boys who were taking the 11 plus exam, who illustrated how their leisure time outside school was segmented into organised activities, often imbued with educational value (Ball 2003). When they reported conversations, as in Ollie's extract, the focus would often be on technological and expensive equipment owned by them or their families. In these ways, they produced narratives about their everyday lives as middle class, high achieving and masculine subjects.

The information in the diaries provides another perspective on the children's lives by presenting data about their lives outside school. The children had the freedom to write what they wanted, including fiction if they so desired, but through a blend of ethnographic observations, interviews and other conversations, I am convinced that the picture these documents provide is a largely realistic one; accepting, of course, that they are research generated narratives, which reflect the interests of the research, and the processes by which they were produced (as discussed in Chapter 4). Furthermore, the picture they provide shows significant gendered and classed differences in the childhood experiences of two cohorts of children.

'I'll find my true love...' Social class and speaking romance

The themes of social class and different childhoods reflected in the diaries demonstrate how conceptions and experiences of the life course are socially constructed. Furthermore, through several of the research activities it became clear that class culture also affected the children's understandings of and investments in

discourses of popular romantic love. One recurring topic that arose when discussing different kinds of relationships during the group interviews was 'true love'. In the following extract, one group at Hartnell talk with me about finding their true love.

Sarah: They're [friends] important, but so is your true love.
DJM: So, how do you know when someone is your true love?
Sarah: There's somebody out there for you and when you find them you just know.
DJM: Do you all think that?
Gareth: Yeah.
Becky: Yeah.
DJM: When do you think you'll meet your true love?
Becky: In the future.
Sarah: At University?
Gareth: Don't know, later on?
DJM: And everyone has one?
Sarah: Yeah, I think so.

Interview, Hartnell

The idea of 'true love' had a great deal of influence on how the children thought about heterosexual relationships. 'True love' was defined both as a unique set of emotions, and as the specific, predestined person with whom those emotions would be uncovered and shared. But, for the children at Hartnell, true love was not something that was likely to happen to them; rather it would happen to their future selves at some imagined point. For the high achieving girls and boys particularly, true love was conceived as something that would occur at university, probably reflecting the fact that many had siblings applying for undergraduate courses, and their parents were already positioning them as future university applicants³⁹.

³⁹ I discovered this through a discussion with Mrs. Webster and some of the other staff.

These themes of age and true emotions are also reflected in one of the interview extracts from the boys at St. Pertwee's already discussed in Chapter 5, which I want to return to in part here.

DJM: When do you think you'll fall in love with someone?

John: Maybe never.

Danny: About 14.

John: Yeah, maybe.

Moz: Yeah, maybe about when your 13, 14.

Danny: When ya go out with someone you just take it as it goes, but when ya get older ya feel feelings and stuff isn't it. Like when ya gets married and stuff.

DJM: But you don't feel feelings now?

All: No

Kenzie: Well, girls do.

Interview, St Pertwee's

True love in this context is defined as the ability to 'feel feelings' (see Chapter 5 for my earlier discussion about gender discourses in this extract). The boys anticipated that true love would occur in their early teens, and this belief reflects the structuring of relationships in their community. It was not uncommon, for example, for the children to have mothers and fathers who had been teenage parents; some also had teenage siblings who were pregnant and/or co-habiting with partners. As a consequence, predictions about their own future relationships were made within this familial framework of reference.

Holding these two extracts in comparison it also becomes clear how influential class culture can be on the articulation of romantic narratives of true love. While the middle class children at the rural school saw true love as possibly a decade away, children in the urban, working class schools were more likely to consider themselves quite close to the experience of 'feeling feelings'. The children negotiated the meanings of emotions, reproducing them in terms of what they understood to be the

normal temporality of emotions within the life course. Moreover, all the children invested in the notion of 'true love', in one way or another, but the forecast for its arrival was shaped by cultural capital and anticipated life experience.

Romance, kinship and marriage

It's just after lunch and Charlene has brought in the pictures from her mother and stepfather's recent wedding – the ceremony had taken place during the Easter holiday. The pictures are in a bound ivory white photo album, embossed with roses and edged with lace, which sits in a slim box of the same colour. Showing me the photographs at her desk, she turns the pages carefully; they are separated by thin sheets of what looks like tissue paper. A small group of girls gathers around to look at them with us (boys don't seem too interested); some of them get quite excited. "Aaah, she looks so beautiful", says one, pointing at Charlene's mum in her wedding dress. A few of them start talking about the dresses they plan to wear when they get married, and some comparison is made between bridesmaids dresses they have worn previously and their imagined wedding dresses. One of the girls asks if I'm married again and I tell her that I've got a girlfriend, but no, we're not married. Mrs. Lewis leans over the table smiling and says, "that's because she's not caught him yet!" The girls laugh and agree, saying that it will happen soon.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

As discussed in Chapter 3, marriage – and weddings in particular – are key aspects of compulsory, institutional heterosexuality. The narrative of the wedding was especially prominent at St. Pertwee's, and as the extract from my field notes illustrates, it was a significant discourse for the girls. Prominent signifiers like the white wedding dress had a powerful influence on how the girls' talked about their future weddings; often the narrative of 'the dress' would represent the entire fantasy of the occasion. Mrs. Lewis' comment about my not 'being caught yet' mirrored the localised understanding that it was girls and women who were interested in romantic relationships, and that boys and men must

be managed. But there was a paradox here. The girls expected romance, but they also expected the boys to be the agents of that romance. As their discussions in Chapter 5 illustrate, the girls thought that it was the boys who should do the 'asking out'.

During my time in the field, themes of popular romance were predominantly and nearly always spoken of and articulated by the girls in all the schools: boys did not discuss themselves as grooms or husbands, for example. For this reason, the data I gathered regarding popular romance, which is explored below, is dominated by girls' discussions. Furthermore, while the narrative of the wedding was a powerful element in discussions about future relationships, it was not simply dominant over or imported into the girls' friendship cultures without modification. In the following extract for example, Nat and Sami talk with me about the relationships they are reading about in the celebrity magazine *Heat*.

DJM: You like the Beckhams then?

Nat: Oh they're like the perfect couple

DJM: Really, you think so?

Nat: Yeah, they had a beautiful wedding. I want to be in a relationship like that when I'm like 19.

DJM: You want to get married?

Both: Yeah, yeah.

Sami: But I think my aunt has the perfect relationship really.

Nat: Which one?

Sami: Sally and Mick.

Nat: Oh yeah yeah, they really are so aaaah! (hugs herself)

Sami: Mick's my new uncle, they aren't married.

DJM: Do you think they will get married?

Sami: No, they says ya don't need to. And I think they're right. Ya don't need to be married.

Nat: No, I wanna be that happy and in love.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

This extract shows how marriage was naturalised by these girls and seen as a central part of their imagined futures. In fact, when discussing their future lives, the majority of the children, both girls and boys, assumed that they would be married at some point. The normative and idealised model of marriage is epitomised here by Nat and Sami in terms of the marriage of the footballer David Beckham and pop star Victoria Beckham. However, as the discussion develops, marriage is displaced slightly when the Beckham's marriage is placed in conversation with localised relationship practices within the girls' families. Rather than the idealised, archetypal romantic marriage of the Beckham's, the girls actually aspire to a future relationship that is far more familiar and local. The kind of kinship they articulate remains heterosexual and in many respects romantic, but it is a contingent romance, rather than a straightforwardly popular one. In this extract then, a relationship within the global media is reworked and blended in terms of local frameworks of understanding.

The situation at Hartnell was very different – none of the children spoke of themselves openly as potential spouses. On one occasion I did hear a group of girls discussing wedding dresses, but they appeared more inclined to discuss the dresses in fashion terms, rather than narrate themselves into the wedding story. It was also significant, I would suggest, that the wedding narrative was a recurring theme in the playground games of children in the lower years; therefore, Year 6 may have distanced themselves from exploring the wedding narratives because, locally, it was defined as an aspect of 'childish play', which they were under self-imposed pressure to distance themselves from.

Defining romance

Popular concepts of romance arose in the group interviews in two ways: sometimes the children started talking in romantic terms, while at others I asked them directly to define what romance was. In Chapter 3 I noted that the cultural scripts for romance are widely available because they are embedded across diverse forms of culture, and in Chapter 4 I explained that this should be taken into account as a type of 'structuring' within the interview context. The scripts of popular romance were spoken in two different ways during the interviews. For instance, when the idea of romance was raised at Hartnell, the romantic script was rehearsed in such a way as to suggest no committal by the children; the words were spoken, but there was a lack of investment in them that was apparent in the children's tone of voice and the amount of time spent discussing the topic. This is what I described in Chapter 6 as 'scripted dialogue.'

DJM: What does romance mean then?

Gareth: It's sort of true love stuff, what you do with your true love.

Sarah: It's like special meals and honeymoons.

DJM: Do you think the same?

Becky: Yeah.

DJM: Are other things romantic, do you think?

Gareth: I don't know.

Sarah: Maybe. I don't think we really know yet.

Interview, Hartnell

Although, as discussed above, there was a belief in 'true love' among the children at Hartnell, it seems that the distance placed by the children between their current selves and their future 'romantic selves' had some effect on how they drew on the romantic script. Their investments in the script may have been tempered by their negotiation of their own positions on the life course, where they placed themselves as too young for what they

defined as 'real' relationships. The situation was different at the other schools, as the following extract from St. Troughton's shows.

Ella: Love is like when you have so many emotions and true love is when they take you over so they're everything.

Kerry: It's like, you find the one you're meant to be with always, and you're soul mates, like magnets.

Ella: When you're young though, you don't really feel it.

DJM: You don't have the magnet feeling?

Ella: No, I don't think so it's not the same.

Eheda: There is something though, they're, soul mates are like family, and I think you can have a soul mate in your family.

Ella: That could be right.

DJM: When do you think you'll meet your true love?

Ella: When I'm 25.

Eheda: No that's too late.

Ella: Probably earlier then, at high school maybe?

Eheda: My true love is 50 cent.

[Laughter]

Kerry: By the time you're old enough for him he'll be 84!

Ella: You're so silly!

Eheda: How old is he now then?

Kerry: My mum was younger than that when they had me as a baby, so was my dad.

DJM: Do you want to say anything else?

Ella: I just want to say that I think everyone will meet their soul mate.

[All nod]

DJM: Do you all think that?

All: Yeah.

Interview, St. Troughton's

Here the investment in the romantic script appears to be much greater. This is apparent through the way the children negotiate its terms, making connections between popular romance and other aspects of their lives important to them, particularly their extended families and popular culture. Once again, age is used to define when emotions and relationships should occur. The magnetic experience of true love is placed in the future, but the intimacy of the 'soul mate' connection is understood as possible within family relationships. Moreover, Eheda corrects Ella when

she suggests that she will be 25 when she meets her 'true love'; she will be older, but not too old, and as Ella concedes, high school is perhaps a more likely context.

Eheda's claim that the rapper 50 cent is her true love illustrates how popular culture provided significant elements within the children's frameworks of understanding about relationships. At both St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's, for example, there were occasions when the girls would idolise male pop stars and position them as fantasy boyfriends, thereby allowing themselves to access and explore the subject position of potential girlfriend (Ali 2002, 2003; Renold 2005). But as Kerry's comment about her parents shows, the localised experiences of their families also had a substantial influence of how they understood when and how romance should be experienced. In an interview at St. Baker's I asked the children some probing questions about romance following on from what they have been saying about marriage.

DJM: Do you think you have to be in love to marry someone?

All: Yeah.

DJM: So is romance important then?

All: Yeeees!

Shanice: And not just getting drunk and going with someone.

Charlene: My sister said you have to lose your virginity before you get married.

DJM: What's romance then?

Steven: When you take someone for a meal.

Vanessa: You take them for a romantic meal out and then after that you have a bottle of wine or something, and you take them to a club or something and have some more drinks, and then you go home.

Charlene: Together.

[Noise]

DJM: What else does romance mean?

Shanice: It's like going for a meal and the popping the champagne bottle and saying 'will you marry me?'

Charlene: That'll be nice.

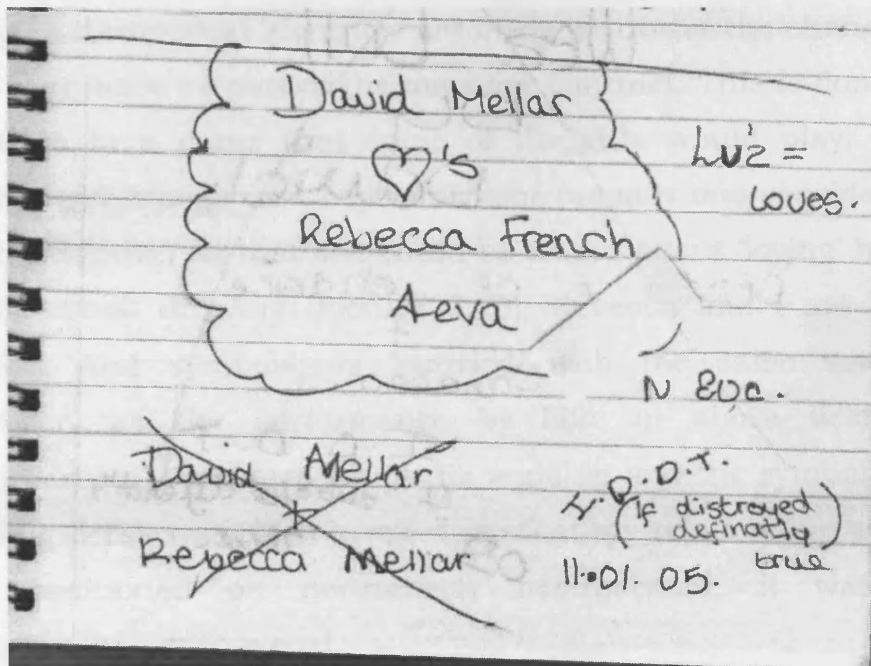
Interview, St. Baker's

In this discussion, the script of popular romance is drawn on once again and negotiated with reference to localised frameworks of understanding. As argued in Chapter 3, popular romance is characterized by certain consumption practices (Illouz 1997), and in this extract the children talk about romance in terms of an imagined practice of dating and the consumption of food and alcohol. Contained within this imagined romantic practice is an exploration of how dating might involve sex, but this is spoken about at a distance, through the discussion of the consumption of alcohol. As such, the children identify three different types of alcohol use. The unromantic state of getting drunk, which can lead to casual sex or 'just going with someone'; the dating practice of alcohol consumption, when a bottle of wine signifies an important element of the romantic meal (romance is not *over*-consumption); and the 'popping' of the bottle of champagne as the conspicuous sign of the marriage proposal. Thus, the cultural 'quality' of the alcohol and its form of consumption provided a metaphor for the discussion of types of sexual relations, which had become a growing interest for the children after the transfer to high school. As these extracts show then, the romantic script was sometimes drawn on by the children to explain what romance was, but in doing this, they negotiated the script with reference to localised frameworks of understanding.

Rebecca Mellor 'goes': Their researcher's romance

[Sitting in an art class with Ellis and Renae]. Renae asks, 'what's your girlfriend's name again?' So I tell them, "it's Rebecca". "Rebecca Mellor, Rebecca Mellor," they say to each other several times, emphasising the surname and exploring the sound that it makes when following her first name. "Yes", says Renae, "that works, Rebecca Mellor goes".

Field notes, St. Baker's



Picture 7.13: David Mellor + Rebecca Mellor I.D.D.T.

Field notebook, St. Baker's

"Are you getting married, they [the other girls] were saying you're getting married?" asks Lilly. "No" I say. "But you'll have to get married if you want to have children", she says. "Why is that?" I ask, but rather than answer me directly she stares intently at me. "Look into my eyes," she says, mocking the performance of a fortune-teller or perhaps a hypnotist, "Look into my eyes, I see a big white dress in your future".

Field notes, St. Troughton's

There was one romantic relationship that received a great deal of attention from the children: my own relationship with my girlfriend, Rebecca. The girls in particular asked a great number of questions about Rebecca and my relationship with her, building an imaginary version of our relationship within the research context and using a number of heterosexual and romantic narratives to achieve this. In the field note extract above, for example, Renae and Ellis are working through the idea that adult, female, heterosexual identities are likely to involve the changing of their surnames as part of the marriage contract. This is done with reference to a game that some of the girls would play, where another girl was given a boy's surname (usually one considered to be unattractive) so that she could be teased about 'loving' him. In the notebook drawing (Picture 7.13), Rebecca and I are drawn together and symbolically 'married' with the same surname. Moreover, as the performance by Lilly in above field note demonstrates, the narrative of the wedding and the symbol of the wedding dress was often invoked, so that my relationship was not only positioned as normatively heterosexual, it was also *romantically* heterosexual.

Just as the girls maintained the relationship economy of their classmates, in the school context my own relationship fell into this symbolic regime. In the following extract, Joanna and Vikki actively position me in terms of the definitive heterosexual romantic script.

Joanna: Are you married?

DJM: No.

Joanna: Are you engaged then?

DJM: No, I'm not engaged.

Vikki: Has you got girlfriend?

DJM: Yes.

Joanna: When are you gonna get engaged then?

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

This was a common experience during the fieldwork, where I would be worked down, then up, the hierarchy of heterosexual relationships – once my current heterosexual identity had been determined, I was projected back ‘upwards’ towards the ideal of the marriage. This narrative was articulated in all the activities of the fieldwork. For example, in an exercise where I asked some of the children to interview me about my own friendships and relationships (see Chapter 8 for further details), one of the questions they asked was: ‘When are you planning to take your relationship to the next level?’ Although the marriage narrative was mostly articulated by girls, boys too used it to position me, as the following extract shows.

Kenzie: Are you recording this?

DJM: Yup, is that OK?

Kenzie: Well, you’re gonna tell your girlfriend.

DJM: No I won’t, not if you ask me not to.

Moz: If you’re married why do you call her your girlfriend?

DJM: We’re not married.

Moz: Well why do you wear a ring then?

DJM: We do wear rings but we’re not married.

Moz: Engagement rings?

DJM: No, not really, it’s a commitment ring.

Moz: If you do get married can we come to your wedding?

DJM: I’m not sure if we will.

Kenzie: Besides, he’s got more specialer people then us, like his family.

DJM: It might not be for a while, so we might not know each other then.

Interview, St. Pertwee’s

There was, in fact, a great deal of discussion about my relationship during group interviews and in general conversation, so much so that Rebecca was adopted by a group of girls at St. Troughton’s, who would record messages on my Dictaphone for

her to listen to everyday. This practice was mirrored by a number of the girls at St. Pertwee's, who recorded the following message.

Paige: Hello Rebecca, you have to have a baby and if it's a girl I like the name Allya, and if it's a boy call it McKenzie.
Kelsea: McKenzie!
Donna: Thank you very much.
Paige: Yay, I hope you like to hear this!
Kelsea: So don't forget to have a baby.
[Laughter]
Kelsea: And don't forget to have it with David and no one else, alright?!
Paige: Make sure you call them McKenzie and Allya.
Donna: Go on and have two babies.
[Laughter]
Kelsea: Go honey!
Paige: Go on, go on!
[Laughter]
Kelsea: Don't be too rude now!
Paige: Sexy sexy!
Donna: And don't wait too long mind.
Paige: All say our names, look.
Kelsea: My name is Kelsea.
Donna: And my name is Donna.
Paige: My name is Paige, and we ALL want you to have a baby OK?!
Donna: Two!
Paige: A boy and one girl.
Kelsea: My name is Kelsea and I live near David.
[Laughter]

Recording made by the girls, St. Pertwee's

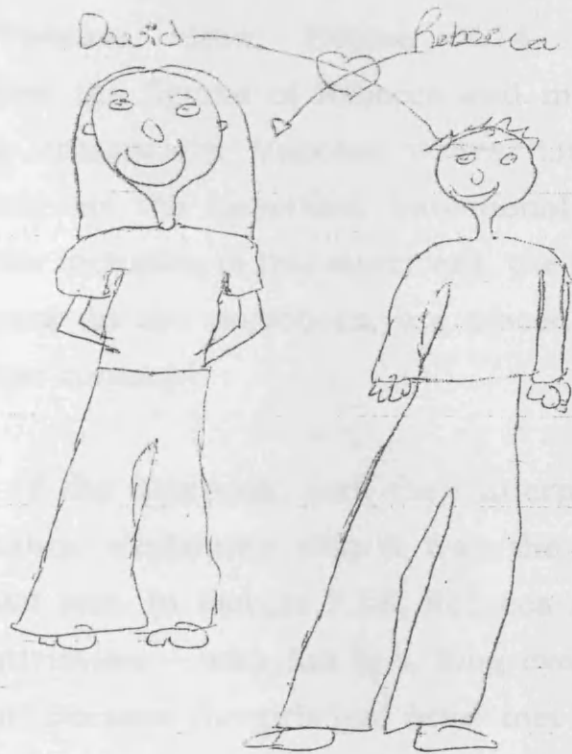
Two of the girls from St. Pertwee's who live on the same street as me actually took it upon themselves to knock on my door so that they could meet Rebecca (see Chapter 2). Once she had said hello they left, apparently contented. In terms of the first group of girls, my own relationship played a symbolic role, which they reconstructed in the absence of my partner as a way of positioning me within their everyday frameworks of understanding – they actually 'called' Rebecca into existence by using my recording equipment, and as such constructed my personal relationship

within their cultural environment. The girls who called at my house were swiftly able to position my relationship within their own frameworks of understanding; because once they had met Rebecca (or at least seen that she did exist) they were able to slot me into a readily available relationship profile. Overall, these reflexive experiences illustrate how my identity was 'profiled' by the children. I was situated in a variety of circumstances within normative heterosexuality, where all the positioning that took place located me within a popularly romantic heterosexual relationship. Therefore, by exploring these positionings, the children's own investments in romance can be seen with reference to a specific relationship, rather than just through discussion of the romantic ideal, which was revealed through the group interviews discussed above. In the following section then, I focus in more detail on one particular occasion when my relationship was negotiated and represented in romantic terms.

The researcher on honeymoon

In the previous chapter I discussed how the children drew pictures on the playground and used the example of the single crew and the lover losers at St. Pertwee's to explore the social processes involved in the production of these pictures. However, many of the children not only draw pictures of themselves and their friends; they also produced numerous images of me, their researcher, and it is some of these pictures that I now turn to. When I was drawn, the images were strongly and symbolically gendered. In some pictures I was depicted with a shirt and tie, even though I wore neither during the fieldwork, while in others I was shown with what appeared to be a full beard, despite my being (relatively) clean shaven (although apparently not in the children's eyes). These pictures then, not only show how the children saw me, but also the ways available to them for representing their researcher as an adult male. Drawings of the

researcher were also gendered in terms of the artist. Boys produced pictures of me as a single figure, and these images predominantly depicted me as obviously adult and masculine. Girls mostly drew me as a member of their existing friendship groups and emphasised my gender through the inclusion of my name, but they were less inclined to depict me as specifically 'adult'. Other drawings produced by the girls depicted my own personal relationship and heterosexual subject positioning. In drawing these pictures, the girls deployed images that were heavily invested with hetero-gendered representations of relationships; representations, which I argue amount to a group fantasy of the normative heterosexual relationship. Pictures 7.14, 7.15, and 7.16 were produced by a group of girls at St. Troughton's, and they are presented here in the order that they were drawn and as they appear across two opposite pages in a notebook.



Picture 7.14: Just about to marry!

Field notebook, St. Troughton's

Vanessa, Jodi, Beth and I had been discussing my personal relationship during a morning break on the playing field. Many of the children asked questions about my relationships, including my family, my friends and my partner, which I always answered as a matter of courtesy and symmetry. It would have been unfair, I reasoned, to ask them personal questions without being prepared to share similar information about my own life. Often such questions regarded the status of my relationship and the identity and personality of my partner, Rebecca. When the girls at St. Troughton's discovered that Rebecca and I were not married they took it upon themselves to encourage me to propose, get

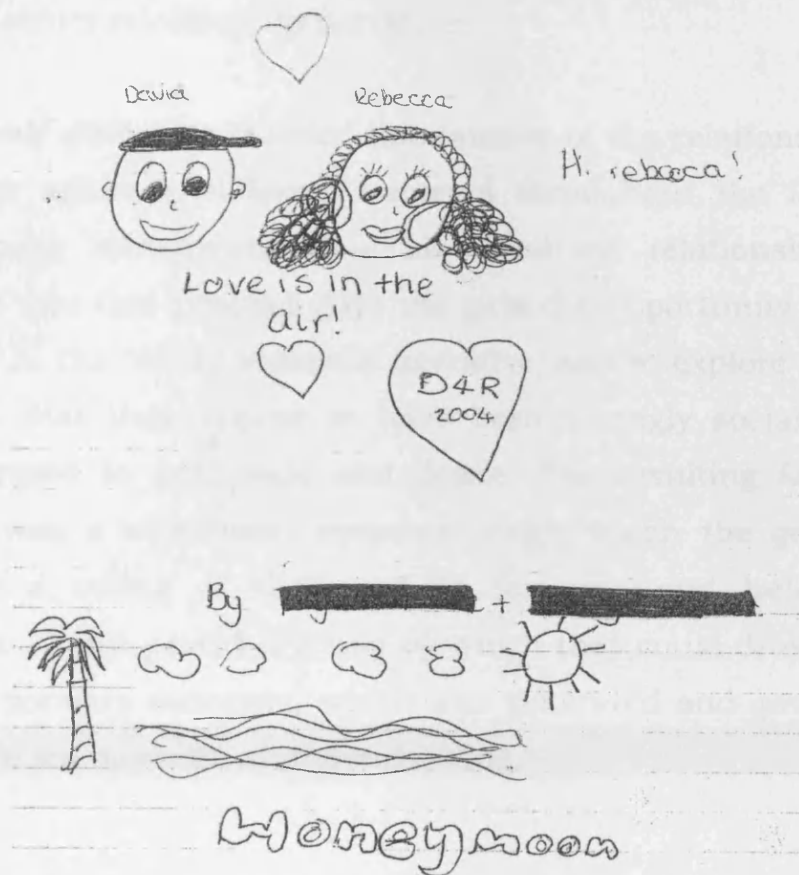
engaged, married and go somewhere hot and sunny for honeymoon.⁴⁰ Vanessa drew Picture 7.14 during this conversation. Below the figures of Rebecca and myself, both of who are smiling ecstatically, Vanessa writes ‘Just about to marry!’ to demonstrate the important transitional stage of the relationship. By the inclusion of this statement, the figures, which are similar to many in the notebooks, are placed in a specific social and narrative context.

Across the page of the notebook, Jodi then interpreted another stage of relationship, explaining that it was the story of how Rebecca and I had met. In Picture 7.15, Rebecca is drawn with hyper-feminine attributes – with full lips, long eyelashes, and a mass of curly hair. Because the girls had never met Rebecca, their interpretations of her were founded in their own fantasies, rather than on how she actually looked. In some instances, such as Picture 7.15, they would symbolise her by drawing on aspects of hyper-femininity, while in others they would communicate with her directly either by leaving messages for her on my recording equipment or writing in the notebooks (see to the right of Picture 7.15 for example).

Both Vanessa and Jodi, with some direction from Beth, then compiled the final drawing, Picture 7.16. Situated on the same page as Picture 7.15, Picture 7.16 completes the linear, tripartite relationship narrative. Having situated Rebecca and I at the beginning and middle of the ‘falling/being in love’ story, the girls brought the narrative to a close by illustrating the ‘happy ever after’ of the honeymoon. Present here are many of the normative images of the honeymoon, like the sandy beach, the sunny sky

⁴⁰ As this fantasy grew over the space of a few days, Jodi and Beth even asked if they could come to the wedding. Vanessa reprimanded them for this, saying that I would probably only want my friends and family to attend, and not ‘some kids’ I had only just met.

and palm tree, all of which indicate the consumption of an exotic experience and location, which are central elements in the construction of the romantic utopia (Illouz 1997).



Picture 7.15 (top): Love is in the air!

Picture 7.16 (bottom): Honeymoon

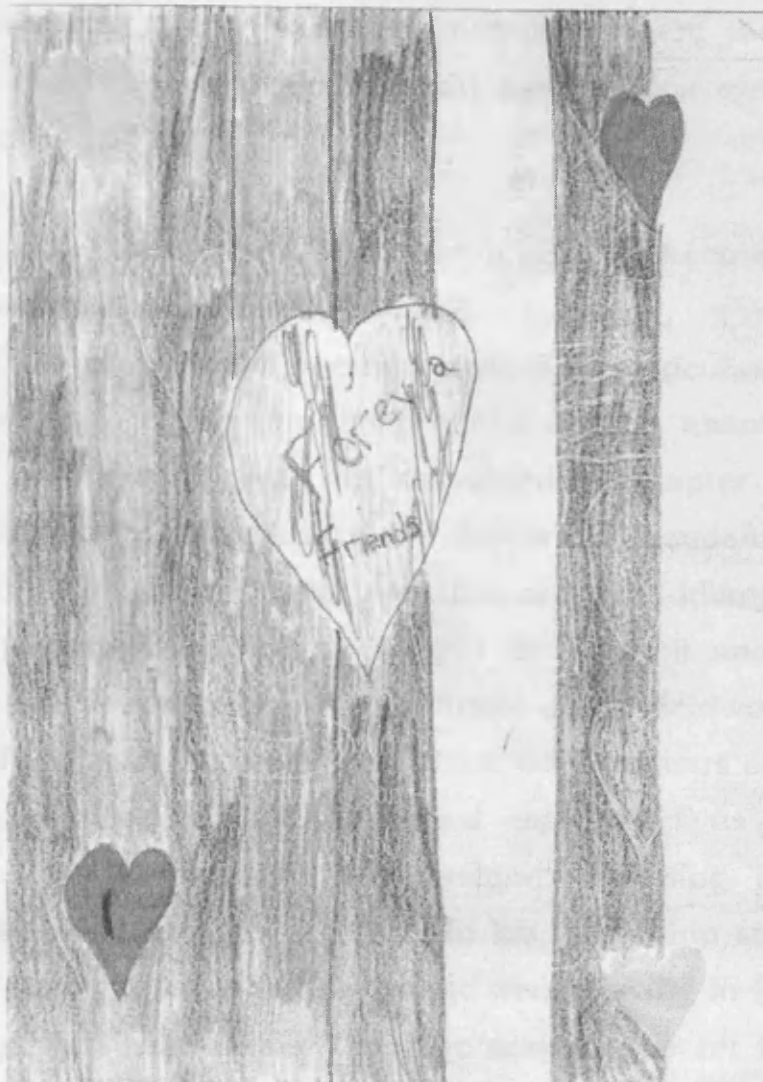
Field notebook, St. Troughton's

This set of drawings then, shows the dominant cultural romantic narrative, from falling in love, to the act of marriage, through to the practice of honeymooning. Again the negotiated nature of their construction is clear, as Vanessa, Jodi and Beth acted together in the assembling of the various elements of a romantic story. This popular cultural narrative was re-articulated through the girls' positioning of their researcher in a 'romantic gaze' within the genre of heterosexual romance. I would argue that through these

drawings the girls are actually communicating with each other and that the heterosexualisation of my gendered identity was part of the negotiation of their own identities within their friendship group. Through the fantasy of my romance the girls could explore and construct relationship narratives.

It was only girls who enacted this fantasy of the relationship over and over again in different contexts throughout the fieldwork. Boys spoke infrequently if at all about my relationship. It is possible that this practice gave the girls the opportunity to invest strongly in the 'adult' romantic narrative, and to explore a subject position that they appear to have been strongly socialised and enculturated to anticipate and desire. The resulting fantasy, it seems, was a significant means through which the girls could conduct a telling of their self as feminine and heterosexual subjects. It also provided a way by which they could draw me into the relationship economy, which was generated and governed by their own frameworks of understanding.

Everyday and eternal acts of friendship



Picture 7.18 'Foreva Friends'

Back cover of Demi's diary, St. Pertwee's

In Chapter 5 I noted that of all the children's relationships, it was their friendships that were spoken about most frequently as being of the greatest importance to them. In this section then, I explore how they organised and understood their friendships by looking at the salient aspects of these relationships: the way that hetero-gender determined who could be friends with whom; how friends were determined and defined with reference to the everyday practices and symbolic culture of friendship; and, how certain

'best friendships' were romanticised, allowing the children to accomplish what I call 'friendship escapes,' where they created symbolic bonds that provided security against their everyday and transitional anxieties.

Hetero-gender and friendship: Aaron and Katherine or Aaron for Katherine?

To begin, I want to look at one relationship in particular and make an important link between the previous section about romantic love, the practices of 'going out' discussed in Chapter 5, and the structuring of friendship cultures – this is the friendship between Aaron and Katherine. Theirs was the only self-identified 'best-friendship' between a boy and a girl at Hartnell and therefore struck me as interesting from the outset of the fieldwork. During several of the activities that I undertook with sections of the class, Aaron and Katherine both identified each other as their best friend in a very matter-of-fact fashion, choosing on several occasions to speak to me together. In his friendship story, Aaron tells of a time when he and Katherine were playing in Katherine's family's garden after school when he accidentally hit her on the nose. They both blamed each other for the incident and the friendship was declared 'over'. But as Aaron explains,

It was later on when Katherine said sorry to me and I said it back and we both said "We will be friends forever."

Aaron, Hartnell

Aaron and Katherine did not think that being a boy and a girl was important to their friendship. Indeed, they were quite insistent that the central factor and original reason for their being friends was the fact that their parents were friends. The rest of the class however usually spoke of Aaron and Katherine as a heterosexual couple, as if they 'fancied' each other or were 'in love'. Also, rather than just 'seeing' each other, their relationship was given the

heightened status of 'going out' (see Chapter 5); so the rest of the class interpreted their friendship in terms of compulsory heterosexuality. During a part of the friendship mapping activity (see Chapter 4) that involved placing the names of all the class members on a table according to who they were friends with outside school, all the children placed Aaron and Katherine together, often stating that this was because they lived near each other. In this and other contexts such as group interviews, they were talked about as 'just' friends, but outside of the organised research activities talk of Aaron and Katherine was deeply heterosexualised. Even Katherine's mother remarked during an after school conversation that 'they'll probably marry someday'.

One factor that made the heterosexualising of Aaron and Katherine's friendship interesting was the way it clashed with the Hartnell children's general liberalism towards normative gender discourses. During my time at Hartnell I discovered that gender was regulated differently dependant largely on the sites and times where identities were negotiated. In the school, the boys were given several spaces in which to assemble their gender subject positions in counter-hegemonic ways. During a role-play session about people's occupations one boy took a turn and mimed the pirouettes of a ballet dancer. His impersonation drew no criticism from any of the other children, who guessed the occupation correctly and complimented him on his convincing performance. Elsewhere in the school the boys had similar licence. Aaron, for example, regularly played on the Year 6 netball team. There was also a high level of integrated play on the playground, between boys and girls of all years. To a degree then, masculinities within Hartnell were fluid and able to flow into activities often culturally designated as 'feminine', such as ballet and netball. (Although it could be argued that these are physical activities and thus in

'easy reach' for boys. For example, some of the boys considered ballet as helpful training for football⁴¹).

By contrast, the activities outlined in the Hartnell diaries, as discussed above, were often strongly gendered. Aaron's diary for example is full of what were typical boys' diary entries involving playing football, playing on games consoles, and staying up until the early hours of the morning. Katherine's diary, in contrast, demonstrated how many of the girls were able to emphasise the things they did that were less normatively feminine, like playing football, alongside the more usual girl peer group orientated activities like shopping. For Aaron then, being in school offered a safe and unquestioning space for the adoption of certain counter-hegemonic masculinities. While for Katherine, the opportunities for fluid gender boundary maintenance seemed much greater outside school⁴². Therefore, a close cross-gender friendship appears anomalous in terms of the children's locally situated frameworks of understanding. What Aaron demonstrates in his story is that, despite recognising that his friendship with Katherine is largely due to factors beyond their control, their friendship must be framed as transcendental; they will be 'friends forever'. But when he says 'friends forever' he is not confessing their intention to marry, but displaying a romanticism that was common in his classmates own friendship stories (see final section below).

The borders of hetero-normality were patrolled by the children in the class, as underlined by the 'hetero-branding' of Aaron and

⁴¹ It is possible, of course, that the members of the class were also familiar with the film *Billy Elliott*, in which a working class boy becomes a successful ballet dancer, and therefore able to take a sanctioned position from which to adopt counter-hegemonic masculinities.

⁴² Of course, this picture of cross-gender identity work is certainly contingent. Thorne (1993) has noted the opposite, that cross-gender play is more accessible to both boys and girls outside of school. What may be reflected in the children's diaries is the way they feel able to legitimately report 'doing' boy or girl though that genre.

Katherine's close friendship. One could speak of a member of the same sex in touching, emotional terms of companionship, but such a platonic relationship was impossible between a boy and a girl, as any statement of admiration for a member of the opposite sex was coded as 'fancying', as Aaron explained:

My next door neighbour is Katherine who sits next to Sarah, and we play, but even though she's a girl, because, even though she's a girl she's not really into girls' stuff she's more into boys' stuff. We get on really well but I don't really play with her in school because I've got better friends, well, not better friends but about the same friends, but I like playing with boys a bit more... If I was just friends with her [Katherine] then everyone, eh, used to think that I fancy her, but it's cos I used to play with her cos she was my next door neighbour.

Interview, Hartnell

Aaron is glad to have Katherine as a friend, but is keen to stress that she is a 'boyish' friend who, even though she is a girl, is more into boys' stuff, thereby positioning her as a 'tomboy' and ascribing her a 'female masculinity' in order to maintain a symbolically non-heterosexual relationship with her (see Chapter 5; also Kehily 2002; Renold 2005). The boundaries of their friendship lay to some extent at the school gates, because in school, despite his access to counter-hegemonic performances of masculinity, Aaron could not escape the communal governing of his relationship with Katherine in terms of *hetero*-masculinity and 'straight thinking' boyhood. As I discussed in Chapter 5, girls and boys at all the schools used discourses of gendered heterosexuality in order to understand and organise their relationships with each other. Moreover, gendered sexualities were an important resource for the making and governing of friendships (Epstein et al 2003). The children's solidarities were formed on gendered divisions – this was the most significant

'difference that made a difference' to their peer groups – and these divisions were maintained by a fluid mixture of both gender and sexuality discourses, which the girls and boys employed to make sense of inter-gendered relationships. Due to their open closeness, Aaron and Katherine were constantly subject to the heterosexual disciplining of their friendship, even within the relatively gender-liberal setting of Hartnell. No friendships of this sort existed (at least, not openly) at either St. Pertwee's or St. Troughton's, and certainly not at St. Baker's, where the cultural imperative of compulsory heterosexual became especially powerful.

What is a friend?

As a general sociological topic, friendship has mostly been overlooked by theorists and researchers (Spencer & Pahl 2006). This is surprising, as people invest a great deal in those they classify as friends. Many of the 'late-' or 'liquid-modern' theorists (e.g. Giddens 1991; Bauman 2000) argue that the bonds of solidarity we commonly call friendship are now more transient and replaceable compared to those of earlier epochs. However, there is significant evidence that this may only be the case for a certain class of late-moderns; many people still invest a great deal in social bonds with friends that they consider to be, and actually are, extremely durable or even life-long (Spencer & Pahl 2006). The constitution of friendship is affected by factors such as social class, ethnicity, gender and one's position in the life course, as well as other social strata, particularly media representations⁴³. Researchers with children and young people have shown that friendship bonds and solidarities are vitally important to their participants. Indeed, it is within social studies of childhood that the concept of friendship has received some of its most productive

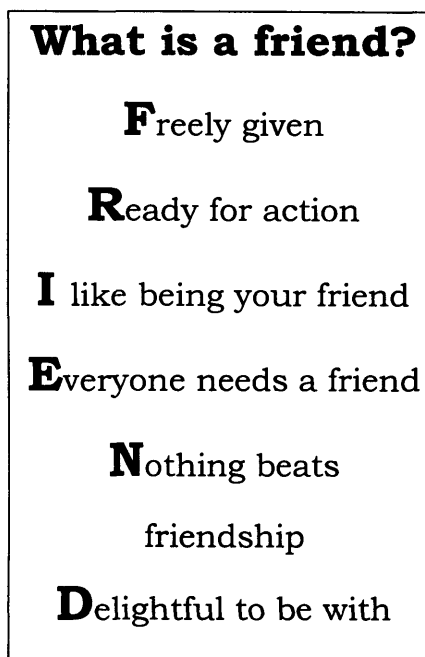
⁴³ For example, the formation and maintenance of friendship bonds during the 1990's and early 2000's could have been affected by the discourses of solidarity present in the US sitcom *Friends*, which was exported across the globe and, in effect, universalised a particular white, urban, middle class version of friendship.

analysis (see for example, Hey 2002, Corsaro 2003). Feminist research with girls and young women in particular has emphasised the significance of friendship (Hey 1997; Walkerdine et al 2001). In this section I will explore how gender shaped the children's understandings of friendship and their everyday friendship practices, taking St. Pertwee's as a particular case study.

There was a strong friendship discourse in all the schools, which was supported by posters on the classroom walls and through the curriculum. At St. Pertwee's for example, one particular discourse of friendship was inscribed on the everyday architecture of the children's school day; it was spoken to them in assembly, during PSHE and religious education, and through the resolution of conflicts ('what sort of friend are you being?' I heard Mr. Jones say on a few occasions). This 'official' friendship discourse was sometimes non-gender specific – in assemblies for example – while in other contexts, especially when teachers were speaking to individual pupils, it became highly gender specific (Mr. Jones for example, often excused boys' 'rough and tumble' – i.e. fighting – as a normal part of their friendships, but thought such behaviour in girls' groups deleterious and improper). The children's own understandings of friendship then, were negotiated through a mixture of the moral education provided by the school, easily available cultural scripts, and knowledge built on experiences from the playground to the street corner.

The text in the poster (see below) was developed by Mr. Jones in conjunction with his previous Year 6 class at St. Pertwee's. It illustrates many of the common themes in which the children invested (although it predominantly represents themes raised by

the boys, which could be a result of the way Mr. Jones managed his class⁴⁴).



Text from poster on classroom wall, St. Pertwee's

In the next sections, I map out the ways that boys and girls spoke about their everyday friendship practices during the group interviews. As noted, in doing this I focus on interviews from St. Pertwee's, using them as a case study⁴⁵. All the extracts are in response to the questions 'how do you know who your friends are?' or 'what is a friend?'

Boys' friendships

For the boys, friendship was defined predominantly in terms of physicality and fun. The following extracts illustrate how they conceptualised and explained these themes in various ways.

⁴⁴ Mr. Jones was often preoccupied with the boys' behaviour and, as a consequence, would often ask them more questions during group activities than the girls. It is likely that this resulted in the predominance of boys' voices in the friendship poster.

⁴⁵ The attitudes of the children at St. Pertwee's were echoed by the children at St. Troughton's and reasonably similar to many of the children at Hartnell, particularly in terms of the gender differences. Differences in the way friendship was expressed at Hartnell are discussed in the following section.

Dafydd: You can tell who they are by the way that act.
Luke: Yeah.
Ryan: They offer you crisps and stuff.
Luke: I'd say a friend is someone you mess about with.
Dafydd: Someone you cause trouble with.
Ryan: Me and Elliot we're always out and like causing trouble.
Dafydd: Mucking about.
Ryan: Yeah that's right.
Dafydd: Joking and making fun, that's what friends are all about.
Ryan: Joking, playing mob and stuff.
Dafydd: Having a laugh.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

...

Simon: You hang around with your best friend more.
John: You'd invite your best friends, in the summer holiday right, over to your house but you wouldn't have just normal friends over.
Simon: You'd play with them, but not have them sleeping over or nothing.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

...

Kenzie: A friend is someone who's ready for action.
DJM: What sort of action?
Kenzie: Play, messing about.
David: You play with them everyday.
Kenzie: Those are your best friends.
DJM: Does that mean that everyone you play with is your best friend?
All: Yeah.
DJM: Not one particular person?
Kenzie: No, all the people we play with are our best friends.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

Friends then, are the 'people you play with' – as the poster says and Kenzie repeats, they are 'ready for action'. This was most frequently explained in terms of football, but other common activities included fighting, and the rough, physical, gang games 'bulldog' and 'mob'. They were also the people who you hung

around with, spending idle time eating crisps while sitting on the benches (the often occurred during morning breaks when the 'tuck shop' was open and there was not enough time for a full football match). 'Messing about' and 'having a laugh' were also key indicators of friendship, certainly because they were central components of 'proper' boyhood culture at St. Pertwee's (and to varying extents at the other schools). When not in school, hanging around happened 'down each others' streets', as the boys occupied the external, urban spaces of their leisure time. The idea of the singular best friend had some currency – they were the one's who came to your house during the holiday or to eat – but the boys' strong, active homo-social cultures sometimes made it difficult for them to segregate their friends; in some senses and contexts, best friendship was extended to everyone who played together. However, sometimes a best friend could be defined as someone who was a friend inside and outside of school, illustrating one of the ways in which the daily structures of the boys' lives affected their emotional and social attachments.

Girls' friendships

For the St. Pertwee's girls, the most important aspects of friendship were symbolic.

Stepheni: I had a friend and she had someone who she thought was a friend but she wasn't cos they only just met and she made up a secret about her and then told everyone.

Kat: Made up a secret? What happened?

Mia: They broke friends.

Alex: I can trust me friends inside school more than outside, cos they talks about me behind my back.

DJM: How do you find out about it?

Alex: Cos it comes back to me.

DJM: Does that happen to all of you?

All: Yeah.

[...]

Stepheni: It's like, we're best friends really, all of us, don't you think?

All: Yeah.

DJM: Do you have one friend who you think is most special or not?

Stephenni: Like a BEST, best friend?

Mia: It doesn't really matter.

Stephenni: Some people you are like closer to though.

Mia: We like having a laugh together.

DJM: Is that very important?

Kat: It's a bit important.

Stephenni: I have to know if I can trust them.

Kat: Trust is the most important thing, definitely.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

...

Demi: [Friends are] Kind to you.

Renae: You can tell them anything.

Ellis: They are true to you and look after you, when you need a big hug.

Renae: I cheers her [Ellis] up when she's upset.

DJM: What about best friends?

Renae: If I like, tell Ellis a secret then she won't laugh, she won't spread it about, and she don't tell no one.

Ellis: When I wants to laugh I have to go away from her!

Demi: My best friend, even though she laughs at my secrets, she's still mine.

DJM: Do you have one best friend?

Demi: Well, no, but yes.

Renae: We're all like best friends together, but we still has one best friend within that don't we.

Ellis: Yeah, we all have a best, best friend.

Demi: I've got two.

Renae: I like having friends, if I didn't have friends I'd be so upset, I'd be so lonely, I don't know what I'd do.

Demi: You'd be a loner!

[Laughter]

Interview, St. Pertwee's

Friends then, are the people you can trust – they are the girls who you can confide in and rely on for emotional support. This was frequently explained in terms of the symbolic capital of sharing and keeping secrets, which was vital to the construction and maintenance of friendships. So important were secrets in fact, that the making of a new friend could result in the 'making up' of secrets, or another transgression of the code of trust, like 'talking

behind my back'. This code required a great deal of investment over time – for new friends, trust had to be earned, otherwise the girls 'broke friends' with those deemed untrustworthy; it was vital that you could 'tell them anything' and know they would look after it. What constituted a secret was sometimes unclear, however certain information – about which boy someone fancied for example – could be used to function as a secret in order to secure or repair the bond between two girls or a group of girls (occasionally as a way of excluding others). Through this action, 'best friends' could be identified. Moreover, for the girls, best friends were more 'real' than for the boys. They invested in the idea of a group of best friends, using the term 'best' as a marker of solidarity. But a singular 'BEST, best' friend remained important, as this was the person who was positioned as a specific and principal confidant. The temporal-spatial context of the school is once again significant in the maintenance and performance of friendship; for instance, Alex claims that her friends in school (those sitting with her) are more trustworthy than those outside. As Mia notes, the girls also enjoyed 'having a laugh' and messing around, but this was not as important for them as it was to the boys. Similarly, they mentioned 'hanging out', particularly when leisure shopping, although this was a lesser identifier for who was friends.

In St. Pertwee's then, the discourse of friendship existed across three particular domains: the curriculum, teachers' classroom practice, and children's cultures. Although friendship in the curriculum was, on the whole, gender neutral, friendship in terms of classroom practice and children's cultures was understood and organised in highly gendered ways. However, for many children – both boys and girls – there was a significant other, a true best friend, in whom they invested a great deal. These romantic friendship narratives were produced in a number of the group

interviews, and were also visible in other research contexts and elsewhere in their school lives. This kind of friendship is the focus for Chapter 8, but first I will set some of the context for this by discussing what I call ‘friendship escapes.’

Best friends forever: friendship escapes

During my first visit to Hartnell, a white board was placed in the classroom and Year 6 were asked to take a photographic self-portrait of themselves and place it on the board along with a sentence of two about their feelings regarding the transition to secondary school. Some of the boys’ contributions (see box below) alluded to a further, romantic discourse of friendship, which co-existed with the gendered friendship practices discussed above.

My friends were an eternal act, permanently marked in my memory – Ollie

Without friends it would be pointless going to school – Stephen

The greatest aspect of my time at school was my friends. It will be sad when we split up and go to our different schools – George

Some of the boys’ contributions to the ‘portrait board’

Hartnell

In a similar vein, some of the girls at St. Troughton’s produced poems about friendship during the creative writing task (see Chapter 8).

Friendship is my life
Friendship is my soul
Every time I lose it
I will be black as coal

Lois, Jessica, Eheda,
Lilly, David, Kerry,
All of them enjoy
A big red jelly

David got a girlfriend
Her name is Rebecca
They're just like friends
She wants to be a ballerina

Friendship is my life
Friendship is my soul
Every time I lose it
I will be black as coal

Poem, Eheda, St. Troughton's

Best friends stick together
They never leave each other, 4eva
Some R good, Some R bad
Some R happy, Some R sad
Although friends break friends
They R always best friends
The next day
We all stick together and
No matter what happens
Inside we really are best
Friends 4eva.

Poem, Lilly, St. Troughton's

These poetic statements reflect an opinion that was common to many of the interview groups: that one's best friend is at least as important, if not *more* important than one's 'true love'. Given their beliefs that they would not meet their 'true loves' until later in their life (see above) this might not be surprising; however, many did not think that the true love would be a replacement for the

best friend, on the contrary, the best friend would remain primary. Somewhere beyond the practice of group friendship therefore, many of the boys and girls invested a great deal in the notion of friendship as being a spiritual experience – ‘an eternal act’, situated within the ‘soul’, that will last ‘4eva’. Embedded in the children’s narratives therefore, are forms of Romanticism that shape their social/emotional bonds and investments (the affect of this residual culture, it can be argued, is the dominant framework at all stages of the life course). Just as notions of ‘true love’ allowed them to talk outside and beyond their experiences, so notions of best friendship gave them opportunities to construct and perform bonds with others that were symbolically deep and lifelong. This was most strongly conveyed by the common idea that one could not choose one’s best friend, as Lucy at Hartnell explained:

Best friends shouldn’t change. Yeah, you can make new friends, but best friends they just sort of happen, you can’t *make* best friends. No.

Interview, Hartnell

Lucy’s comments and the theme they represent, I suggest, display a common desire for stability, consistency and comfort that may well be felt particularly strongly at this stage of the life course; especially by children at the brink of the transition between primary and secondary educational phases. What I want to argue is that their romanticisation of their friendships could have allowed the children to symbolically ‘break away,’ to some extent at least, from the structures that shaped their lives. It is this symbolic act that I term a ‘friendship escape,’ drawing on the notion of creative escapes from everyday life in the work of Cohen & Taylor (1992). But these escapes themselves – as narrative forms – were shaped and determined by social forces, just as the

character of their everyday friendships were affected by their gendered peer culture, and the institutional, spatial contexts in which their friendships were practiced.

For instance, at Hartnell there was a tendency to see best friendships as a universal phenomenon, secured in childhood. In contrast, at St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's there was more acknowledgement of the ephemeral and contingent nature of friendship, but investments were nonetheless made in romantic best friendships. Moreover, during the interviews at Hartnell there was an upfront investment in romantic friendship, which was modified reflexively – the children realised that their bonds could be affected by structural changes to their lives. While in the interviews at St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's the children were more aware and accepting of the contingency of current relationships; yet this was counter balanced, after further consideration and at later points in the discussions, with reference to the timelessness of the friendship bonds. The following extracts illustrate these points⁴⁶:

Gareth: I think that, your best friends or your *best* friend, they last forever.

DJM: Really, you think that when you're adults, you'll still be best friends?

Gareth and Stephen: Yeah.

Gareth: At university, maybe.

Stephen: You'll always have them, especially if you've had them at primary school.

[...]

Emily: But when we move, I suppose they'll, like, there may be a difference, we might not be such best friends in the future.

Stephen: 'Cos we're going to different schools we might lose friends.

DJM: Even best friends?

⁴⁶ In this instance I have chosen examples of boys' friendships because I look in some detail at one girl's romantic friendship in Chapter 8. They also raise themes that are also fully discussed in that chapter.

All: Yeah.

DJM: Or your *best* friend?

Gareth: I think it could happen, I don't want it to though, but...

Interview, Hartnell

...

Yoris: We might be friends in the future, we don't know.

Jessica: You two will be though.

Tyron: We are best friends.

Lois: You're always messing.

Tyron: Yeah down his street like.

Yoris: It's all up to what happens when we goes to St. Baker's though in 'it?

Tyron: They's put us in different classes ain't they, see?

Yoris: People changes don't they.

[...]

Tyron: When we met in like, reception, we was like instant friends.

Yoris: It'll always be that, you don'ts just lose your best friend.

Tyron: They won't be that, or do it like.

DJM: A best friend?

Tyron: Exactly.

Interview, St. Troughton's

As these extracts demonstrate, the point of reflexivity and the moment of the friendship escape were affected by the children's positioning within a certain class culture. Furthermore, through the attachments revealed in their friendship escape narratives, differences in the character of their childhoods become visible, and such differences stem from their distinct socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

The friendship escape can be seen as a point of resistance and of creation, but it relies on stories that are already available – especially romantic narratives – rather than being something 'unique.' To echo Skeggs (1997:162), these children "are not the originators of their identities but are located in temporal processes

of subjective construction... Within these constraints they deploy many constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves [and their relationships] with value.” It is these ideas that I continue to explore throughout the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the influence of gender, sexuality and social class on the children’s experiences of childhood, and their investments in and understandings of popular romance and romantic friendship. It began by illustrating the different ways that gender, social class, and the urban or rural context, affected both the children’s experiences of childhood and their presentation through the activity of diary writing. The middle of the chapter then explored how romance was ‘spoken,’ showing the ways that this was affected by gender and social class. Girls, it was shown, invested greatly in popular romance, especially the narrative of the wedding, while boys were much less inclined to do so. Taking the example of my own heterosexual identity and relationship, I illustrated how the girls used these to draw me into their relationship economies and to construct hetero-gendered fantasies about themselves. I then discussed how romantic practice was defined depended to a great extent on a wider culture of relationships within the community and the children’s understandings of and investments in this culture. Towards the end of the chapter I discussed how romantic narratives structured practices of friendship, highlighting how difficult it was for a boy and a girl to claim a best friendship with each other without this relationship being heterosexualised. I then introduced the concept of the ‘friendship escape’ as a way of understanding how, through the production of romantic narratives, the children coped with the uncertainties and anxieties of their everyday lives. It is this notion of romantic friendship that I turn to in the next chapter, where I examine the children’s creative writings, and discuss what

happened when I asked several groups at St. Troughton's to interview me about my relationships.

Chapter 8

Stories of Friendship

Love is like the wild rose-briar,
Friendship like the holly-tree,
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms,
But which will bloom most constantly?

Brontë undated

Bill and Ben. Ben and Bob. Bill and not Bob. Bob and Bill.
Bill and Ben, then Bob and Ben, then Bill and Ben and Bob.

Story synopsis by Henry, Hartnell

Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the notion of romantic friendship and looked at how the children defined their close peer relationships. In this chapter I focus on two methods of data collection that involved the construction of biographical narratives and discuss how they enabled the deeper examination of the investments involved in these subjective processes. I begin by outlining a creative writing activity where the children were asked to write stories about friendship. These stories help me to explore the narrative boundaries available to the children when they constructed friendship narratives. I analyse a story by a girl called Anna in particular detail, showing how popular romantic imagery was a resource she was able to draw on with great success. The latter part of the chapter is about the method of symmetrical interviewing. Examining interviews the children conducted with me as interviewee – asking me questions about my own friends, family and relationships – I show how this exercise revealed various things about the children’s understandings of relationships that enriched the perspectives gained from straightforward interviewing and observation. I go on to argue that this task brought some of their central emotional investments to

the fore by bringing my classed and generational position directly into conversation with their own. Consequently, I consider how this demonstrated the ways in which my own interview questions were formed in classed and generational ways that I had only been partially aware of before.

Creating stories about friendship

The largest organised activity that I undertook with the children when they were at primary school was the writing of friendship stories. In Chapter 4 I outlined the method by which these stories were gathered, and in this chapter I will consider the stories that were created. Specifically, I am concerned with how the children produced narrative texts and how these texts can be analysed in terms of the psychosocial processes that form their social lives and their subjectivities. In total 104 stories about friendship written by both boys and girls were collected. Drawing on these stories, I aim to build toward an understanding of the multiply mediated construction of children's texts, and to tease out the threads of dominant (or hegemonic) relationship narratives within them. Such narratives were common to the majority of stories. In particular, narratives of romance and romantic love were frequently used to describe friendships, especially what the children define as 'best friendships.' The aim of this section is to explore how these dominant narratives might come to be within children's stories about friendship, and provide a provisional analysis of how subject positions are produced, taken-up, and invested in, through these acts of self identification.

Halldén (2004) has utilised such an approach to explore children's fictive narratives about family life, looking at how their narratives are grounded in both their everyday experiences and dominant cultural meanings about childhood, the family and gender (and sexuality). These grounding processes have been attributed by

Layton (2002) to the 'normative unconscious', an area of the unconscious that is produced by various social and cultural hierarchies, which work to protract and reproduce the hierarchical socio-cultural status quo. However, where work from this perspective is sometimes restricted is when it removes people's practices, like children's story writing, from their specific social context. This is a crucial point because, on another level, the children's stories are situated social acts, written within various institutional settings, a specific temporal and spatial framework, and with an audience (real or imagined).

In looking at the stories I have found it productive to incorporate Bakhtin's (1981) theories concerning the dialogic (also see Holquist 2002). Bakhtin shows us how each narrative contains the voices of previous stories because it is inescapably in dialogue with them. Dialogism is therefore the characteristic mode of all social life, which is sometimes referred to as intertextuality (Kristeva 1986). Moreover, through the concept of 'speech genres,' Bakhtin (1986) demonstrates how the conditions of possible speech are inextricably linked to what can be *heard*. From a psychosocial perspective there are two important implications to be taken from Bakhtin's dialogism. Firstly, stories contain meanings that the narrator will be unaware of (Halldén 2004): each story, as Eagleton (2004) puts it, has an 'unconscious life.' Secondly, not only is the language system the speaker draws on 'always already there', thereby limiting their narrative resources in various ways, the narrator must also *answer* for the subject position they occupy, which also pre-exists them (Holquist 2002). From a psychosocial perspective, it should also be added that the pre-existing subject position is already saturated with and mediated by intersections of anxiety and desire (Hollway & Jefferson 2000).

In my analysis I am interested in unpicking the threads of global discourses as they interact with local contexts of meaning making. The terms 'global' and 'local' are used to emphasise how dominant cultural discourses and also more localised subject positions jointly influence the processes of subjectification (the constant process of becoming/being a subject). The spatial metaphor carried by these terms is illustrative, as it underlines how dominant cultural forms are always articulated in localised practices; for example, dominant relationship narratives such as 'best friends', 'going out' and 'seeing' varying in meaning between different groups of friends (compare Chapters 5 and 7 with, for example, Renold 2005).

Another level of analysis involves exploring children's attachment to certain kinds of stories, particularly in this case attachment to romantic narratives. While acknowledging that there will only be a limited number of ways in which children (or anyone for that matter) can speak about friendship from within a particular culture, it is still possible to ask why certain kinds of stories are told at a specific time, when other types of story remain untold. As Henriques et al (2002) argue, it is important to not just identify subject positions, but to ask why some are invested in, while others are not. Discourse theory alone, they argue, does not address this. Indeed, there is the problem that subjects may appear to be simply products of discourse and nothing more. In this respect, the timing of the research is significant when considering attachment to certain kinds of stories. The transition between primary and secondary phases of schooling has been identified as a period of great anxiety for many children, the move between schools being a daunting and thrilling time (Jackson & Warin 2000; O'Brien 2003; Pratt & George 2005). It is valuable then, to explore how the romanticisation of the best friendship

narrative may well serve as a defence against the anxieties of transition.

The system of analysis I have begun to map out is geared towards exploring how dominant social structures and discourses are reproduced, sometimes reinforced, sometimes altered, while still other times resisted, by subjects who are making sense of their social world. It is therefore possible, I argue, to see children's stories as creative constructions, albeit bounded ones. Here I am again drawing on Skeggs (1997) ideas, outlined in the previous chapter, about constructive and creative strategies being used to generate a sense of value and meaning.

Narrative boundaries

Psychosocial research is typically characterised by data presented in small numbers or single cases (Hollway 2004). However, the approach developed here is slightly different in this respect. While in the following section I do focus on one story by a girl called Anna in particular detail, in this section I look briefly at the total number of stories gathered from all 3 schools in the project. This short survey is done to provide an account of the narrative boundaries that the creative writing task revealed and in some sense reproduced. In doing this, I arrange the data by four criteria (although there are, of course, many other productive ways of doing this): biographical, fictional and other styles; fantasy, reality and spatiality; popular and local narratives; and, romantic friendships. While it is surely valuable to think of children as being creative in their production of narratives, it is also important to recognise that this production will always be a reproduction, albeit a unique one in terms of the historically and culturally located biography of the narrator. By looking at the corpus of stories as a whole it is possible to get a sense of the boundaries of possible narration available to these children, and

how these boundaries are defined in terms of certain social variables, like gender, class, ethnicity/race, dis/ability, and age, and in accordance with their spatially situated relationship cultures. Due to limitations, here I aim only to provide a 'snapshot' of the narrative boundaries.

Biographical, fictional and other styles

Perhaps the most basic structural level at which the stories can be divided concerns the use of either a biographical style, where the narrator is a or the central character, or a fictional style, where all the characters are 'made-up', having been invented for the story or taken from another source. The choice of biographical or fictional style did not appear to be especially influenced by gender, although class did appear to have an affect on whether children invented characters or used their identity and their friends in their narratives.

When I moved to the city on Halloween in 2003 and my brother we had lived there a week and I started St. Pertwee's and my brother started Glynhadden, and he came back with a friend called Ross Jones so he went out and hung about places with him. So then he came home and told me what he had done and he said that he had a brother my age called Jack. So then the next day after school I went to see him and we became good friends.

Extract from 'Dream friend' by Isaac, St. Pertwee's. Example of biographical style of storytelling.

Middle class boys and girls at Hartnell were more inclined to use fictional characters than the children at the other schools. Local relationship practices also had a bearing on the kinds of narratives that children produced. For example, some of the girls at St. Pertwee's wrote poems about being friends (see Chapter 7), while others listed their friends and the kinds of activities they

usually did together. These styles matched activities that the girls took part in on the playground during lunch breaks. Occasionally, some children would provide a definition of what constituted a friend or, more specifically, a best friend, and an outline of what the practice of best friendship entailed (e.g. not telling lies, having a shoulder to cry on, sharing secrets).

...About half an hour later we were all playing mob when 'SUDDENLY' a huge, nasty bull dog jumped from over the gate and started barking and growling at my cat. "We need to work as a team to get my cat back in the house," I said quietly. So very slowly we ganged up in a group and walking quietly and steadily towards my cat, "now" I said and we rushed to the cat and picked it up and saved the day... When the morning came we all found ourselves covered in makeup all except Chrissie, so we all looked at Chrissie and she burst out laughing so we all started tickling her.

Extract from 'The mysterious sleepover' by Emily, Hartnell.

Example of fictional style.

"Your horrible little cow!" said A.
"Moo moo"
"Get lost. Just course your gelish that a cows better looking than you"...

^
|

This is not good friends.

"Hi, what's up, do you want a biscut?" said A.
"Yes please, but only if you have another one in your bag", said B.

^
|

This is good friends.

'Friends means somebody', Alex, St. Pertwee's. Example of defining friendship.

Fantasy, reality and spatiality

Often the biographical and fictional styles would be blended to create an autobiographical fiction, where the author would place themselves and a number of their friends in a fantasy context. Most often these fantasy contexts would be realist, rather than set in strange or unusual places. Indeed, spatiality was an important element across the stories. The places where stories were set included many familiar spaces, such as bedrooms and playing fields, as well as places like theme parks and holiday resorts (although these tended to correspond with real experiences). These narrative spaces were constructed in gendered and classed ways. For example, bedrooms were almost only ever mentioned by girls (when the sleepover was the central activity in the story). When playing football was mentioned, the space and class determined who would participate. Football in the park was an activity for boys, while football in the street, which was only included in stories from the urban schools, could involve boys and girls.

One day I was playing with my friend Sophie when I fort of an idea... My idea was to make a street football team... After we had got everyone else we got a football and started to train. First we warmed up, then decided who was in which position... On the big day we won 5 – 0 and then had the meddles for playing we had man of the match Sophie cos she scored a hat trick and me as best goaly. We all went home and then an hour later Sophie got all of us and said her dad had got us a match at the millennium stadium.

Extract from “A football team’, Kyle, St. Pertwee’s. Example of
fantasy storytelling style.

Although many of the narratives bolstered locally dominant ways of ‘doing’ gender, activities such as skateboarding and building camps would sometimes be included in girls stories when these activities would normally be difficult to participate in because of

gendered boundaries in play. Such stories transgressed the norms of gendered subject positioning, but did so in a fantasy space where such transgressions could be licensed and explored without risk.

My friend Danielle had a sleepover for one nite. It was all so much fun. Danielle is such a nice girl... So we were out in the garden in the tent, Gemma was scared so we went in and had a drink and got Danielle's torch and went back to the tent. The bird was squeaking all nite so we went to sleep. In the morning we woke up and it was brill all the sun was shining in the tent and we were all hot.

Extract from 'Danielle's sleep off', Casey, St. Pertwee's. Example of reality based approach.

Popular and local narratives

When writing their stories, both boys and girls drew on narratives from popular literature, television and film, and sometimes song. There were many examples of popular narratives speaking dialogically through the children's stories. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the stories involved a crisis of some kind, often drawing on themes where friendship was forged, lost, and won back. Bullying appeared in several stories as the crisis point, often with the trouble being resolved with the 'humanisation' of the bully, and their assimilation with the friendship group of their 'victims'. It is interesting to note the influence of high profile bullying campaigns in such narratives, many of which had a continued presence in each school.

“Hi I’m Ben!” There’s this boy who always would be nasty to me. I did not know what to do about it. So I thought to be myself, I could be really good friends with him. The next day I went to him and said “will you be my friend?” He said “no.” Everyday I try to be nice to him... We became really good friends and I got him to stop bullying people but to be kind.

Extract from ‘Friendship’, Philip, Hartnell. Example of bully redemption narrative.

The adventure narrative, where a plucky group of courageous friends embarked upon a risky journey or task, also featured in several stories, with the influence of styles associated with the Harry Potter series and other popular texts particularly evident. There were also local stories and folk legends, sometimes in conjunction with popular narrative. In most cases these involved a space, like an area of woodland, where activities had reportedly happened involving the older siblings of friends (or friends of friends). Besides the influence of prevalent narratives, other components of popular culture, like mass marketed toys and advertising slogans with highly localised cultural capital, could also be found in certain stories.

It was the middle of September when new student Suzie became a victim of Becky, the school bully. Suzie had just started school and only had three friends, Sammy, Becky the bully and Nat. They were always in a little group until Becky decided to tease Suzie about her little pig tails... This made Suzie very depressed. The bullying became worse, Becky would push and shove Suzie around, like a rag doll... Sammy was fed up with all the fighting and broke her friendship bracelet... That afternoon Becky saw them and ran to them and asked to be friends... The moral of the story is to tell someone if you are being bullied.

Extract from ‘Bullied by Becky’, Emma, Hartnell. Another example of the bully story as a moral tale.

One day me and my friends went on an adventure to find some gold. And I went to go on my own but my friends offered to come with me. So we went to Africa and went to camp on the amozone... Then my friend Elliot went missing so we stop to make camp...Then we sore a tiger and my friend Ashley toke care of him. Ashley went missing as well as Elliot and we were worried about them... So I was the only one left and I got to the place were the gold was and I toke some of it and carried it out then I sore all my friends and the started to help... We went back to America and counted all our money.

Extract from untitled story, David, St. Pertwee's. Example of
adventure narrative.

...we thought of a good idea. We could go swimming and wear our new bikinis, said Tanya. Yeah! said the whole group together. We all laughed. So off we all went to Western lesuire centre and dived into the pool... [Ellis] dived under and she found a key... Aimie got her goggles back and dived under water. "It's a keyhole" she answered. "Pass them goggles and the key" said Stevie. She dived in and opened the keyhole with the key. Inside was a big room. My bedroom. "Oh wicked" I shouted. It was a massive room and a small amount of it was each of our bedrooms. It has 9 beds in it and was divided into 9 sections. Oh my god! We all shouted. Taylor shut the door behind her. Our mums were in the next room. We were so amazed! We climbed back up and got our towels and when we went under water we were dry! When we climbed down again we got dressed and put our pjs on. Mums done us tea. Egg, beans, toast and a cup of tea each... The next morning we woke up and had a chat and we found we'd had the most weirdest dream!

Extract from untitled story, Demi, St. Pertwee's. Another example
of an adventure narrative.

Romantic friendships

A common theme within the stories was the romantic friendship. Such stories were told by both boys and girls, but it was noticeable that the boys appeared to be more comfortable telling these kinds of stories and loading them with emotion than they did during informal conversation or during interviews. For example, at Hartnell, Robert tells a story about meeting a boy

called Jack at a holiday park when he was several years younger. The two boys meet and immediately they form a friendship that is described as unbreakable. Over the following days they play constantly, until the holiday is over and it is time to leave.

[I] told him my name was “Robert” and he said his name was “Jack” at that moment we knew we were best friends forever.

...I went to the reception and checked out and they gave me a card from Jack so I would never forget him.

Robert, Hartnell

Robert’s story, although rather short, contains many of the elements of romantic friendship identified in Chapter 7. Through this medium these elements are expressed in a deliberate manner, in a private space, and through a particular genre, which allows the strength of feeling to be spoken more fully than in other contexts. The genealogy of this kind of subjectivity can be glimpsed when Robert’s extract is juxtaposed with the following extract from Jane Austen’s novella *Love and Friendship*.

We flew into each others arms, and having exchanged vows of mutual friendship for the rest of our lives, instantly unfolded the most inward secrets of our hearts.

Austen 2003:13

In both extracts the idealisation of the romantic friendship is exemplified: Robert’s in a short story written in a classroom in 2004; Austin’s through a private letter in a novella written in 1790. It is the theme of romantic friendships that I will focus on in the remainder of this half of the chapter, by turning to a story written by an 11 year-old girl called Anna.

Anna's story

As mentioned, my interest concerns how dominant discourses and social structures appear and are actively and creatively manipulated by the children in their stories. Specifically, through this example I will look at romance, gender, and class, to provide an indicative sample of the approach I am developing. Anna attended Hartnell primary, came from a white, middle class family and her parents were both professionals. During the interview sessions Anna often mentioned her best friend Lucy, who had moved away from the area three years ago. For example, when discussing the forthcoming transition to secondary school with the rest of the group and the affect it may have on their friendships, she noted,

Well, my best friend actually lives 100 miles away so I don't think it'll actually make that much difference. But of the friends I've had at Hartnell I think it'll be hard to keep contact.

There is an interesting contradiction here that suggests an anxiety about transition that is not being faced, which, as will be shown, arises again in Anna's story. In a different interview, Anna explains how the friendship with Lucy is sustained.

My best friend she moved away and we send letters... And I've got this necklace, I'm not wearing it today cos I usually keep it at home, but it's got like half a heart and she's got the other half, and on one half it says 'best' and on the other half it says 'friends.' We each have half of it and she gave it to me when she left. So we both keep half of it.

As with the girls at St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's, the motif of the heart was central to many of the girls most basic symbolisations of best friendship (see Chapter 6). Here it is manifest in the keep-safe that Lucy gave to Anna, much as the card left for Robert by Jack marked the continuing emotional

investment in that friendship. Moreover, there is further evidence here of the way that romantic symbolism is already at play in discourses of friendship, and through the consumption of certain artefacts.

The romantic friendship that Anna constructs with Lucy is closely reflected in her creative writing. Her autobiographical fiction begins at a sleepover where we are introduced to two girls who are best friends. After sharing breakfast together one girl leaves, and the parents of the other explain that she has to leave the following week and move to another country with her family. The full story unfolds as follows:

Small fast noises hit the roof as the two young girls lay wide awake as dawn approached. They only had a couple of hours sleep seeing as it was a sleepover. Abby muttered, 'it's a shame it's raining, we could have built a camp with the old bits of wood.' Amy felt too tired to reply but yawned, 'yes we could have built a camp but let's just have a quiet day inside.' Abby sighed but agreed.

Finally the sun rose and shadows flickered against the wall. Abby and Amy charged down the cold wooden stairs into the newly tiled kitchen. Abby's mum was cooking bacon, sausages, tomatoes and eggs. All you could really hear was the sizzling of the sausages, but all together it smelt good.

Breakfast was laid on the table and as quick as lightening everyone took their share. Amy looked shy and waited for a while and asked, 'please may I start?' Everyone had eaten half their breakfast but she wanted to be polite so Abby's mother replied 'of course you can dear, there is no need to ask.'

After breakfast Amy went home and Abby was asked by her mother and father to sit down. She did and they started to speak gently to her. Her mother said, 'I'm sorry darling but we are going to have to move away. Your father has to move to Ireland for his job so we will have to go too.' Abby sat there looking very shocked, this would mean she would have to leave her best friend Amy. She ran to her room crying. She slammed her door and wept on the bed.

An hour later someone knocked at her door she said, 'hi, it's Amy, I'm going to come in OK?' She opened the creaky door and sat on the bed and whispered, 'I now know what is going to happen, don't worry I will visit you every other month and write a letter to you everyday we will still be best friends I promise.' Abby blew her nose and said, 'all right I'll go.'

A week later she was at the airport with her luggage when Amy suddenly arrived just before she got to the plane to say goodbye. On the plane she waved England goodbye and water trickled down her cheeks but she started to feel better and to pass time she wrote her first letter to Amy.

Untitled story, Anna, Hartnell.

Anna's story is crosscut with discourses of class and gender, with the most telling example occurring half way through. In the breakfast scene she writes: "I asked 'Please may I start?' Everyone had eaten half their breakfast but she wanted to be polite". In this section of her story Anna is keen to demonstrate what kind of girl she is. Even when the people she is sharing breakfast with have been eating for sometime, she holds back to ensure that she is polite and does not break with what she deems to be the appropriate etiquette for the situation. Here, Anna can be seen as narrating a perfect performance of middle class, British childhood. By placing this detailed description of the everyday activity of sharing breakfast at the centre of her story, she establishes an important subject position within the narrative, which is, I will argue, vital to the romanticisation of the rest of the story, both the beginning and the end. Moreover, this almost mundane section of the story is perhaps the most indicative of the way that classed and gendered discourses of childhood are taken up within children's narratives. Walkerdine et al (2001) illustrate how middle class girls are regulated by social technologies of class and gender, where both rationality and the feminine combine in the making of the normative, modern, bourgeois subject. Girls do not easily achieve this subject position; it is often a struggle that

defends against 'Otherness', which is, they argue, "typified by the unreason of the masses" (Walkerdine et al 2001:166). In the breakfast scene Anna undertakes the labour of reproducing this subject position, framing herself, as the narrator, as fundamentally successful at being a self-aware and self regulating 'good girl.' She will not risk being seen as unreasoned, and must convey her civility through her comportment and manners. This framing allows Anna to construct a story about emotion that is imbued with the romantic.

The airport is the crux of the romanticisation of the latter part of the story. The airport is a clear representation of a place of meeting and exchange, which fits with a middle class, Eurocentric notion of an 'international consumer class' of travellers (see the Richard Curtis film *Love Actually* (2003) for example). There is also a clear influence of popular culture, as the 'last minute' rush to the airport is well represented in many mainstream films and television programmes. The final season of the US sitcom *Friends*, which featured such a climax, had just aired in the UK when Anna wrote her story. It is also possible that Anna's narrative borrowed from the stories of the immensely popular children's author Jacqueline Wilson, whose books were widely circulated among the girls at Hartnell (as discussed in Chapter 6). Bakhtin's theories can help illustrate the deeper processes that might influence Anna's emotional investment in the airport narrative. As Halldén (2004) notes, Bakhtin (1981) uses the concept of a threshold chronotope (a chronotope being the interrelation of time and place in the framing of a story) to discuss how borders are marked and important issues raised in narratives. An airport is such a border and represents a meeting/departure point from where crises can occur and in this case be resolved. Similarly, it is Amy who breaches the threshold between the public and personal spaces by crossing into the bedroom by opening the 'creaky door.'

Through the fiction of the airport departure and the resolution of the crisis of separation by sustained letter writing, the anxiety of the transfer from primary to secondary school can be faced. Because Hartnell is a rural school from where the children transfer to several secondary schools, anxiety about the loss of life-long friends was high, and several stories were produced that concerned the continuation of an absent friendship. The accident of fate that has taken her best friend from her is a fantasy that enables Anna to confront and cope with the difficult realities that face her in the coming months when her school class will disband to various high schools (Walkerdine 1997). And it is a fantasy that carries and is shaped by dominant cultural forms. As Layton (2004) argues, individual desires are formed around those within popular culture and discourses of gender.

The yearning and melancholic nature of the romanticised story stands in contrast to the idealised, reasoning, bourgeois subject. But the cultural contradictions present in this juxtaposition are deeply embedded in popular romance, which is an experiential mode crafted around bourgeois, middle classed economic and cultural capital (Illouz 1997). Furthermore, the romantic also provides the foundation for self-exploration and confession (letter writing for example) that is crosscut with discourses of gender, which are particularly accessible to girls (and women) because of the way that gender works within hetero-gendered popular romance in Anglophone cultures (Langford 1999). What Anna's story amounts to then, is a romanticised fiction of a classed femininity. Indeed, the majority of the stories can similarly be seen as fictions of gender (Walkerdine 1990), where the children compose fantasies about being a girl or a boy, which are embedded in local friendship practices via their articulation in the

narrative. But they are in a Foucaultian sense, fictions that function as truth.

Anna's story, as with all the children's narratives, provides a site where the processes of subjectivity can be glimpsed. There is something new here, something specific to the cultural, historic, social and biographical circumstances of its production. But although the act of creating the narrative is transformative, taking elements from popular romance and blending them with relationship practices from within the localised milieu, it remains necessarily bounded by and saturated with dominant cultural forms.

Through the above analysis I have begun to set out an argument for a particular way of exploring children's narratives in terms of dominant relationship discourses. Limited and partial though the analysis has been, I have suggested that by adopting and adapting a psychosocial perspective it is possible to analyse children's emotional investments. But there are certain problems with this approach, because not all children have the competency to construct written narratives, while the theorisation and construction of narratives can be seen as classed activities in themselves. As Skeggs (2004) has shown, access to the reflexive, late-modern personhood presented by many current sociological theories can be seen as the reification of a class based, socially located position (also see Adams 2006). The ability to articulate narratives was shown within my fieldwork to be particularly effected by gender, ethnicity and class. Boys were significantly less inclined than girls to produce written stories, both in the classroom and in the field notebooks. Moreover, working class boys had the most difficulty in articulating relationships within the narrative conventions of the written story. In other circumstances, especially informal playground conversation but

also during interview, they were adept at constructing detailed conceptual frameworks through which they would explain and understand their friendship groups. Their solidarities were expressed in different ways, as outlined in the previous chapter, which shows that the research method of the creatively written story was not best suited to eliciting narratives about their relationships and investments. These differences in gender, social class, and the construction and negotiation of friendships are the prominent themes, along with age, which are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

So, who's *your* best friend? Using symmetrical interviewing to investigate friendship cultures

The second activity I want to look at involves what I refer to as symmetrical interviewing. Because I had the freedom to use the art room at St. Troughton's when talking to the children, I decided to explore the possibilities of using this valuable research space to involve them in the fieldwork in symmetrical and participatory ways that were impossible under the space restrictions at the other schools. Asking the Year 6 children in Miss Cross' class to arrange themselves into four small groups, I talked with them about the way research interviews are organised and asked them to participate in a task where they interviewed me. This approach avoided some of the problems with participation outlined in Chapter 4, while still allowing the children to be part of the research in an active capacity. It also gave me an opportunity to deliberately place my own classed and gendered subjectivity into dialogue with the children's subjectivities, and reveal something about their and my own investments, by using a method that was driven and shaped by psychosocial theories.

I began by explaining that I was interested in how they might go about doing the kind of interviews about friendship that I had

been conducting with them. The groups responded very positively to this and eagerly took the paper and pens I spread across the table for them to use. I then showed them how to design an interview schedule based around the kinds of questions they may want to ask about my friendships. As we had already done some interviews, my input at this point was minimal, and I simply asked the children to imagine that they were interested in finding out about my life in the same way I had asked them questions about theirs, and to organise a 5 minute interview. They then spent about 15 minutes in their groups discussing the kinds of questions they would like to ask and arranging who would ask each question (this turn-taking was instigated by the children, rather than something I had asked them to do). Below is the full transcript of one of the interviews. This example illustrates all the common aspects of these interviews that I will go on to discuss, interweaving them with examples from the other interviews.

Vanessa: This is our interview. The time is 11.18. The location is St Troughton's art room, The interviewers are Kerry Jones, Damian Lewis, Vanessa Brown. The interview is with David Mellor. How close are you with people and friends, like your girlfriend?

DJM: How do you mean close?

Vanessa: Like how much of a relationship do you have?

DJM: Well obviously very, very close with my girlfriend. We're very much in love and we live together. I've got very good close friendships too, you know, very few, very good close friendships

Vanessa: What made you want to find out more about children's friendships around the time they went to high school?

DJM: I was very interested in giving children the opportunity to speak and to talk to someone about the good things in their lives, rather than the bad things and always being told to be quiet.

Kerry: Who told you about doing this job?

DJM: I discovered about this job from doing other pieces of education work, so I did my degree and thought about doing something like this because I enjoyed it so much.

Kerry: Would you consider this job to anyone else?

DJM: Would I *recommend* it to anyone else? Yes it's great fun, very rewarding.

Kerry: What would you say?

DJM: I'd say that it gives you an opportunity to work with people and let them have a voice who are sometimes not allowed to speak, especially children who are always told to be quiet, so this gives you a opportunity to actually say something.

Vanessa: Would you consider taking you relationship with your girlfriend further?

DJM: Taking it further? How do you mean taking it further?

Vanessa: Marriage and having kids.

DJM: Yes, I'd certainly consider having children in the future yes. And we'll have to see about marriage.

Damian: How long have you lived in this city?

DJM: For about 9 or 10 months, something like that. It was September last year that we moved here.

Damian: Would you like to live here for the rest of your life?

DJM: I like it here, I like it here. My girlfriend isn't so keen, but it's a nice place to live and the university's very good. Plus I get to meet people like you!

Damian: What made you want to come here?

DJM: Well I had to come here because of someone that I work with who also moved here, someone who is not really my teacher but someone who is kind of above me.

Damian: A boss?

DJM: Yes, kind of a boss, but we kind of work together.

Vanessa: Do your friends from Kent live here?

DJM: No they don't, they all still live in Kent. I also have some friends who live in York because that's where I went to university and lived for a few years.

Vanessa: Do any of your friends want to live here?

DJM: I don't know actually, I think some of them like it, it's a lot cheaper than London.

Vanessa: Is it difficult to visit Kent without getting upset or wishing you could stay?

[Pause]

DJM: Yes, yes it is, sometimes it is. It's more difficult for my girlfriend cos she's got very close family down there. And very close to them and she's a lot younger than me so she does get upset sometimes. But I don't really mind cos my life's here now. At least for now anyway.

Vanessa: Do your parents still live in Kent?

DJM: They do yes. My mum's actually from this city, so she's very happy that we're here in a way.

Vanessa: Was she upset when she heard you were moving to this city?

DJM: Yes I think she'd like me to stay there more, she gets a bit lonely.

St Troughton's, children interview me no. 4

Kerry, Damian and Vanessa's interview is a good example of how all the groups understood the interview genre and were able to articulate a successful performance as interviewers. With little input from me, they drew on their knowledge of popular culture in order to present themselves as competent investigators. Vanessa and Kerry's initial questions about my life reflect the same biographical questions I addressed in Chapter 2, and they ask me several questions that demonstrate an interest in my work as they attempt to gain clarification about my identity as a 'researcher.' Vanessa's first question about 'closeness' illustrates their investment in having a 'best' friend or friends, something that I share as shown by my answer that I have 'very few, very good friends.' However, as noted in the previous chapter, there was a prevailing notion at all the schools that the *quantity* of your friendships was also very important. In one of the interviews I was asked about my friends' names.

Ryan: What are your friends names?

DJM: What are my friends names? Oh, I've got lots of friends. I've got friends back home, back in Kent and they're called Tim and Penny and Jo and Dan. And I've got friends here called Andy and Mark and Ali, and lots of people.

St Troughton's, children interview me no.2

When asked to name all my friends I make the contradictory claim that I have 'lots of friends... lots of people.' The children were very keen on naming all their friends, while in contrast I found it quite

difficult, claiming that there were many when in reality I had named all those I would consider to be 'good' or 'real' friends. In other contexts too, names (often including surnames) were central to the children's negotiations of others biographies. Names, in their eyes, equated to some kind of proof. This exchange helped me to think reflexively about how I approached the notion of friendship during the fieldwork, by fleshing out and building on the 'common sense' notion that my own investments could differ from those of my participants. Moreover, it brought to my attention how such differences could result from a mixture of biographical, generational and class-cultural positions.

Furthermore, in Kerry, Damian and Vanessa's interview I state that children are always told to be quiet, but this is arguably not a great concern for these children. Although the children at St. Troughton's and St. Pertwee's were sometimes told to be quiet, their teachers explained to me that they never expected or achieved silence in the classroom – there was always a hum of noise and activity beyond the educational task at hand. From what I could gather, their home lives were similarly noise saturated. This underlined a fundamental difference between the childhood I had experienced and the childhoods of my participants in these primary schools and at St. Baker's high school. In part it is likely that I was working through the anxieties of my own middle class childhood. This then helped me think about how, despite my conscious efforts, my own experiences and emotions could affect both the concept of 'childhood' that I articulated during the fieldwork and my relationships with my child participants.

There is also an indication of the children's sense of place coming through in this interview. My mobility causes them some consternation and they search for meaning regarding my life in

the city. The first questions from Damian probe my reasons for being there, but he also asks if I think I'll live there all my life. This is followed by Vanessa asking about my friends: Do they live there? Do they want to? On one level it may be that they do not want to confront the idea of moving from somewhere they have lived all their lives, while on another it may display an anxiety about the imminent move to high school, leaving behind the security of their primary school, in which they have spent half their lives. These joint anxieties came through during the round-up session after all the groups had taken a turn at questioning me.

DJM: What did you think about doing that, about interviewing somebody, was it easy, difficult?

Kerry: It was interesting, really interesting finding out about your lifestyle and how good your friendships are.

Vanessa: But we thought you might get upset at some of the questions.

DJM: Why did you think I might get upset?

Vanessa: Because you've got to stay in this city most of the time and you've got your friends in Kent who you can't see all of the time and we thought you might get upset.

DJM: Is that how you might feel if you were in my situation?

Kerry: Yeah.

Vanessa: Yeah, definitely.

St Troughton's, children interview me, round-up session

Their sense of place then was a deep emotional investment. The presence of their friends and family in the city and its manifest spaces was, not unsurprisingly, very important. But this thread illuminates the differences between how they and I thought about the places where our, as Kerry puts it, 'lifestyles' are negotiated.

Discourses of gendered sexuality also came through in the interviews. Vanessa's question about 'taking my relationship further' is another example of how the dominant hierarchy of popularly romantic heterosexual relationships was reconstructed

in their friendship cultures (despite, as I have noted in Chapter 7, the fact that many of their familial relationships were hybrids of this hierarchy, or at least troubled it). These interviews also provided an opportunity for the children to ask me further questions about the heterosexual practices of my life, in many cases historical ones. Lois, for example, was interested in when I first became involved in heterosexual relationship practices, like 'having a girlfriend.'

Lois: Did you have a girlfriend when you was in high school?

DJM: A girlfriend in high school? Not really no, I didn't really have girlfriends when I was in high school, no.

Lois: In primary school?

DJM: What? Girlfriends in primary school? I think I probably did have a few girlfriends when I was in primary school, yes.

Lois: What were their names?

DJM: I can't remember [laughs] I don't remember. They weren't very serious relationships [laughs].

St Troughton's, children interview me no. 2

Again there is the interest in finding out names, as Lois looks to build a picture of my experiences. But here I make the mistake of dismissing my girlfriends in primary school as not 'very serious,' when, of course, for Lois and her friends such relationships could often be very serious indeed. This curiosity about my personal experiences and the attempt to construct my hetero-biography was mirrored in the interview with the group at St. Baker's who questioned me constantly about when I lost my virginity. In these moments of biography construction, I was also asked about the longevity of my friendships.

Jessica: Did you have a friend that you had when you were in reception that you are still friends with now?

DJM: No, I'm not friends any more with anyone that I went to primary school with.

St Troughton's, children interview me no. 2

This reply resulted in expressions of shock and disbelief. Sharing the experience of the reception class, especially the 'first day,' was something that the Year 6 children often used to explain their current best friendships. That I not only had no friends from this time, but also none from primary school *at all* generated a moment of ontological insecurity among the group, and for a moment the interview broke down. This is a key example of how the use of these interviews allowed important emotional investments and social constructions of meaning come to the fore. They also demonstrated how the children would use my biography to make sense of the experiences that lay in their futures, such as the transfer to high school.

Ella: In primary school was your relations different to what it is in high school?

DJM: Yeah I guess they were different, they were because you have to move around a lot more in secondary school, and meet lots of new people.

Ella: But did you trust your friends more in primary school or more in high school?

DJM: I think I trusted them more in primary school

St. Troughton's, children interview me, no. 4

In this context I became a useful resource for information about the unknown. I address the question by mentioning concerns they have voiced to me about moving around the school and meeting new people, but it seems that here it is the *quality* of friendships that is of most concern. Ella expresses the sense that there may be a qualitative difference between friendships made and/or situated in the two contexts, although it is not clear what her

feelings are, or whether she thinks it will be better or worst following the transfer. Trusting friends is at the core of this difference, and this was a theme that arose throughout the interviews. For example, Ella asked about the trustworthiness of my friends.

Ella: Are they trustworthy?

DJM: [Laughs] I think so I think they're trustworthy

Ella: Can you rely on them?

DJM: Sometimes. Sometimes you can. Sometimes friends do let you down but I don't think that means they're not friends anymore

Tyron: Would you like to have your friends round your house? What are they like?

DJM: Well, they're very well behaved. It's nice, they come around and if they bring a bottle of wine, they're always welcome.

Ella: Can you trust your friends in Kent more than you can trust your friends here?

DJM: That's a very good question. I suppose that I could probably, well it depends on the individual really because for me how long I've known them for doesn't necessarily mean that I can trust them more

Tyron: Do they respect you?

DJM: I hope so

St Troughton's, children interview me no. 4

Trust, reliability and respect, as outlined at the start of the chapter, were core values of friendship that many of the children had expressed during the other interviews. In this instance, it appears that having friends at your house was clearly a marker of 'better' friendship, and that sharing this space with them indicated the presence of the three core tropes within that relationship. Where my friends in Kent are mentioned, it is possible this spatial difference provides another allegory through which anxieties about the transition between schools can be expressed. Ella relates the presence and quality of trust to the two places.

By using this form of data collection I was able to achieve several things. Perhaps most importantly I was able to open up some of the processes of my research to the children, at least in some partial way. By interviewing me they were able to express their interests and gain some control of the interview context in ways previously unavailable to them. Moreover, while the children were not normally shy about asking me personal questions or talking about my relationships, the reversed interview context allowed them to ask direct questions about my life from the position that I usually questioned them from. This is not to suggest that the power relations between interviewer and interviewee(s) are ever fixed (Scheurich 1997), and my discussions in previous chapters indicate that this is clearly not the case.

The activity enabled me to see how the children organised questions about relationships, and this provided a different perspective on their emotional investments, which I was able to explore further with them in our follow-up discussion. The interviews also allowed me to investigate how my own interview questions were formed in classed and age related ways, something that I had only a partial awareness of before. Furthermore, I could explore both the way that I spoke as an interviewee and my emotional responses to the interviews as I worked with them as data. I found my repetition of each question in several of the interviews to be quite striking and I spent some time considering why I may have done this. I could, for example, have been reaffirming my position of power, unconsciously retaking the status of controlling participant, despite my conscious decision to distance myself from this. On listening to interview no. 4 during the preparation of this chapter I experienced a highly emotional reaction to the last few sentences, as certain memories of my grandparents surfaced in my mind. This indicates that, much as

psychosocial theorists suggest, there is a great deal going on in the interview setting that can be explored (Clarke 2002, Hollway & Jefferson 2000, Walkerdine et al 2001) 'between and beyond' the lines. My pause before the response to Vanessa's question 'is it difficult to visit Kent without getting upset or wishing you could stay?' indicates that these emotions were at some level present at the time. Had I not positioned myself as an interviewee I may not have noticed this level of meaning within the data.

The foregoing analysis is necessarily partial and incomplete, but it does support the argument that much can be gained from the application of psychosocial concepts when trying to build a complex understanding of subjectivities in the interview context (Clarke 2002, Hollway & Jefferson 2000). There is certainly something to be gained from a consideration of how the psychic and the social interplay in the interview setting, as it allows the researcher to think about how this occurs throughout all the settings and contexts of their fieldwork. This activity also shows how reflexivity can be a tool to generate further data and provide analytic lenses through which to view that data. The interviews were neither indulgent exercises in self-psychoanalysis or confessional. Rather, they provided a structured way that I could use my biography as a research method, prompted by the children's ongoing interest in my life, which ultimately led me to better understand their social worlds and the power relations that affected how I went about representing and constructing them in my texts.

Conclusion

This chapter has continued to explore the theme of romantic friendship introduced in Chapter 7. By looking at the children's creative writing about friendship, I examined the narrative boundaries and cultural recourses available to them when telling

stories about their relationships with each other. The styles they used illustrate the influence of popular media, local culture, gender and social class on the kinds of narratives they could construct about friendship. I used Anna's story to focus in detail on what I argued to be the multiple, intersecting, psychosocial processes at work in the creation of a romantic relationship narrative. Through this analysis I suggested that Anna's narrative contained certain anxieties about leaving primary school and her current childhood status, as well as expressions of her own gendered and classed subjectivity. In the second part of this chapter I discussed how the activity of symmetrical interviewing produced fascinating data about the children's investments in particular relationships by placing their frameworks of understanding in direct and purposeful conversation with my own. This activity reinforced and enhanced the perspective on the core values of friendship highlighted in previous chapters. It also allowed me to analyse the dynamics of the interview context and explore how my own investments might affect my understanding of the children's everyday worlds. The next chapter opens by considering a related theme – how research can be thought of as a romantic journey. This introduces an exploration of the various transitions and endings that occurred during the fieldwork, with the discussion centred on the children's transfer from primary to secondary education.

Chapter 9

Transitions and endings

A story has not beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.

Greene 2004:1

Introduction

In this penultimate chapter I look at several transitions, their effects and artefacts. I begin by discussing research as a romantic journey, examining the way that the researcher's travel through their fieldwork is explained in emotional terms in certain research 'guidebooks.' Then I turn to the children's transition between primary and secondary educational phases, focusing on the how the prospect of the journey gave rise to certain kinds of narratives, myths and transgressions, all of which contain elements of gendered sexuality. From the other side of the transition, I go on to explore how the children at St. Baker's talked about the new social structures and hierarchies of their high school, and look at how these affected their relationship cultures. I also discuss how the growing use of mobile phone technologies affected the girls' representational practices, as they moved away from drawing and towards photography. Having discussed some significant aspects of the educational transition on their relationship cultures, I juxtapose these with an examination of how the children understood and defined the life course periods of childhood, the teenage, and the adult, focusing on how they constructed and negotiated notions of spatiality, maturity and their own imagined futures. I bookend the chapter with some further reflections on the personal and emotional character and experience of PhD research, especially the point at which the researcher leaves the field.

Research as a romantic journey

There are many guidebooks for undertaking PhD research, which map out the terrain and provide advice on how to navigate the field and all the relationships that must be built with participants, supervisors and others. Such books tend to fall into two categories: the first, where the student is positioned as a trainee professional (e.g. Philips & Pugh 2000), and the second, where they are conceived of as a traveller (e.g. Salmon 1992; see Stanley 2004 for a detailed discussion). (In reality, most texts contain a blend of both these perspectives to some measure). The notion of the PhD researcher as traveller is, I suggest, to frame the research as a romantic journey – one which involves the discovery of the self by placing it into deep contact and dialogue with the Other. Coffey (1999:105) too notes that the lived experiences of fieldwork – particularly ‘first fieldwork’ – are romantic in the sense that they depend on a personal journey undertaken with a cohort of participants, which will be retold numerous times, and which, simultaneously, involves the socialization of the individual into the research community.

Throughout the preceding chapters I have utilised the ways that my fieldwork has been a romantic journey by using my ‘ethnographic self’ in various ways to provide critical perspectives on the production and analysis of data. In this chapter (and indeed throughout the thesis) I explore the journeys made by the children, and I argue that it is important to note that I was undertaking a journey of my own at the same time – a journey that affected and shaped the relationships I had with my participants. This chapter then, focuses specifically on the transitions and endings experienced by the children and their researcher, beginning with the last days of primary school.

“Everybody’s changing (and I don’t feel the same)”: leaving the primary school

After spending the majority of the summer term at St. Troughton’s and St. Pertwee’s I returned to Hartnell for the final three days of the school year, which included the ‘leavers’ special’, a day of activities organised on the first day of the summer holiday, including trips to the cinema, bowling ally and swimming at the leisure centre. In the morning on the way to the swimming pool, I made the following observations.

Sitting in the middle of the minibus on the way to the leisure centre the sun shines down, warming us to a high temperature, but the children don’t seem too worried. All the windows that can be moved have been pushed open as far as possible, allowing some air to flow through, but it doesn’t seem like very much to me. I’m sitting next to George who’s staring out of the window, apparently lost in his own thoughts. The rest of Year 6 are either chatting loudly against the combined noise of road, the wind and the radio, or, like George, watching the world that passes by. Several songs have played and a few of the girls have sung along, much like they do on the playground, picking up on choruses and snatches of lyrics that seem to interest them or have stuck in their mind for some reason. Then, the song ‘Everybody’s Changing’ by the band *Keane* comes through the speakers, and slowly, all the children start to join in, so that by the chorus the mini-bus is in full song.

So little time
Try to understand that I'm
Trying to make a move just to stay in the game
I try to stay awake and remember my name
But everybody's changing
And I don't feel the same.

You're gone from here
Soon you will disappear
Fading into beautiful light
'Cause everybody's changing
And I don't feel right.

George mouths along with the second verse, then leans forward to see everyone else singing, his voice rising in volume next to me.

Field notes, Hartnell

I cannot say for certain why it was that the Year 6 children on the minibus sang this song in unison. It could be argued that the lyrics had some kind of unconscious resonance, which bonded them together as they shared their last moments together as a cohort. On the other hand, it might have just been a very popular song with the class at that moment. However, reflecting on the lyrics it does seem that on some level this song was particularly suitable, encapsulating as it does so many of the thoughts and anxieties expressed on their last day together as a class. Previous research has shown that for many children the move to secondary school is a transition that is surrounded by uncertainty and concern (see, for example, Jackson & Warin 2000; O'Brien 2003; Pratt & George 2005), and this is the focus for the first part of this chapter.

In the group interviews I spoke with Year 6 children at each of the primary schools concerning their feelings about the up-coming move. This was often an early topic of conversation in the interviews, perhaps because it was a common theme in many of the children's everyday discussions, and it was also part of their schoolwork at the time. At Hartnell, the children in Year 6 commonly transferred to up to as many as six different secondary schools, with the majority going to one of four. For the high achieving boys and girls this commonly meant sitting the 11plus selection exam so that they could go to the Grammar school in the nearby town. The following extract highlights the concerns common to many in Year 6 and those particular to the prospective Grammar school boys.

Henry: There'll be hundreds and hundreds of people there, so it'll be a lot different. 'Cos it's a lot bigger it'll take us a long time to find our way around.

George: I'm going to the Grammar School and my dad and my granddad have been there, so I want to follow them and keep the line going.

Henry: You'll have more friends cos you'll keep all the friends you've got here and you'll make loads of new ones at your new school.

Ollie: It'll probably be quite different when we go to different schools, difficult to keep friends cos we live in different places, I mean, I live in Mayfield, but some of my friends live in Hartnell. I know some of them are coming to the Grammar school with me so I'll have new friends and old friends together.

George: I think it will affect your friendships cos I've got lots of friends who are going to different schools and you might not see them again.

Interview, Hartnell

Whether they were transferring to the local comprehensive, Smithfield's, or one of the Grammar schools, the growth in the size of their educational environment and the 'hundreds and hundreds' of new people there were certainly the most prominent concerns for the children. Moreover, while the prospect of the move scared some of them, there was also, as Nadine's comment in the following extract illustrates, a sense of excitement and growing feeling of independence.

DJM: What's it going to be like going to a new school?

Anna: Scary.

Gemma: Yeah, we'll probably get lost. Year 7 at Smithfield's is bigger than whole of this school.

Nadine: I think I'll feel independent because I have to get the train all by myself.

Interview, Hartnell

The Hartnell children were also adept at telling the story of how, despite the problems associated with the move, they would be able to retain some friends (although losses were accepted as probable) even blending 'new friends and old friends together'. And as discussed in Chapter 7, there were many examples of the 'friendship escape' story articulated around this period, which I argue may have been a useful form of defence against the upheaval of the transfer. For several of those aiming for a Grammar school place there was the added pressure of the family connection. As George explains, there is a strong patrilineal connection within Grammar school, and he felt he must succeed in order to continue this; it was important that he kept the symbolic 'line' going, by going to the same school as his father and grandfather

Year 6 at St. Pertwee's did not have to worry about undertaking the 11 plus exam, as the Grammar school system has been abolished in Wales. For them, however, family remained an important aspect in the transfer to their high school, as the following extract illustrates.

Today there has been a visit from the head of lower school at St. Baker's, Mrs. Williams, and a few of the students from several of the years. Both Year 6 classes gathered in the hall to watch a set of musical performances by the St. Baker's students and listen to a talk by Mrs. Williams... When talking to Year 6 she picked out several of the children and said things like 'You're Sally's sister aren't you?' and 'Yes I can see there's another Lewis brother too'. Her discussion about their transition was founded to a large extent on talking about family connections to the school... On the walk back to the classroom I asked Kat and Luke about whether they thought it was good to have the family connections in St. Baker's. They agreed, saying that everyone either had brothers, sisters or cousins there already.

Field notes, St. Pertwee's

For many in Year 6 at St. Pertwee's then, their move to high school was understood within a broader kinship network, where both the teachers and the pupils made sense of the transition with reference to siblings and extended family. This was not surprising because there were few Catholic secondary schools in the area and St. Baker's was the closest by several miles. The children therefore prepared for the move to their new school by telling stories to each other about their siblings and cousins' experiences, thereby using family connections to develop their own narrative pathways between the settings. This was mirrored to a degree in the educational transition work they undertook in class, which involved creating a biographical pamphlet with drawings and writing that would be sent to the Year 7 staff at St. Baker's. In this way the school was giving them the opportunity to send a symbolic representation in advance of their physical transition.

At St. Troughton's the situation was different once again, as many of the children came to school from further away, meaning that they had fewer opportunities to spend time with each other outside of school. For them, like the children at Hartnell, the anxieties of the move centred on friendship.

Lois: We don't see each other much out of school, but we speak to each other on the phone.

Jessica: It'll be worse at high school too because we won't even be in the same class.

DJM: And you were saying that you're all best friends together.

Jessica: We're all best friends together, yeah.

Lilly: Cos we're going to high school soon we've become closer, cos we don't want to leave and be all broken up.

Interview, St. Troughton's

Here, Lois, Jessica and Lilly, use the notion of group best friendship discussed in Chapters 5 and 7. Because there were

only 15 children in Year 6 at St. Troughton's, the group of 9 girls were particularly close, as they had no opportunities to form alternative friendship groups – such fluidity was possible at St. Pertwee's for example, where the two classes were much larger. The idea of losing this network in a school of much greater size, like St. Baker's, is defended against by a strengthening of their bonds of friendship against the possibility of being 'broken up'⁴⁷. This brief overview demonstrates how differences in primary school structure can affect the experience of the transition to secondary school, and shows that many of the children at the three primary schools expressed anxieties and concerns about making the move. Such concerns were commonly about their gendered peer groups, but as the following extract shows, other kinds of relationships were also considered important. Here, a group at Hartnell discuss practices of 'going out' over the primary-secondary transfer, asserting that such practices are 'normal'.

Philip: Yeah, it *should* be normal, I think, especially in secondary schools.

Emily: It should be with us because we're the oldest in the school.

DJM: What about the fact that you're going to be the youngest?

Emily: It's weird, it's going to be weird cos you've got to make new friends and some of your friends will have gone to different schools.

Philip: You've got to gain your confidence all again.

DJM: How will your friendships change do you think?

Philip: Well, you start off with like no friends and then you make them again, you need more confidence.

Becky: I think I'll have more mixed friends, but maybe not if I got to the girls school.

Philip: Yeah but you do have discos and stuff so you do get to meet then and mix and stuff.

Emily: I think there should be a boys and girls grammar.

Philip: I think that would be sensible.

DJM: Why?

⁴⁷ Unfortunately this did happen and the girls were, inevitably, placed in several different classes. By the time I spoke with them in the following January however, they seemed to be happy with their new social arrangements.

Philip: Well the reason they have single sex schools is because they think that boys and girls get on too well and they think they'll concentrate more if it's just single sex.

DJM: Is it important to go to a mixed school?

Philip: Yes, so you can make more friends than just girls or just boys.

Emily: And you won't be able to be romantic and stuff.

Becky: You probably wouldn't be if you don't meet boys, and that's not right I don't think.

Interview, Hartnell

Many of the worries about friendships are present once again in this extract, but there are also concerns about how the prospect of going to a single sex school will impact on their ability to take part in the heterosexual practices they feel should be normal when they reach secondary school and become teenagers. This was a particular concern for a group of the children at Hartnell (see Chapter 5), but it illustrates how the transfer was understood in terms of gendered sexuality, especially regarding the normative practices that were anticipated as lying on the other side. As some of the extracts above indicate, many of the children in Year 6 were worried about the size of their next school and the new, bigger spaces they must occupy. During one group interview at St. Troughton's, dominant themes about the spaces of the new school and gendered sexuality clearly overlapped.

Damian: We went into the changing rooms right, and guess what was there?

Jodi: Where? What?

Damian: They had like a condom machine in there!

Jodi: A condom machine?

Beth: Reeeeeeally!

Damian: Yeah, we all saw it.

Kerry: I think that's right bad that is.

DJM: Why do you think it's bad?

Kerry: Cos it'll go encouraging people and they're not old enough.

Ryan: Some of them are.

Damian: It's better than having a kid you don't want if you ask me.

Jodi: You can't be having sex in Year 7.

Ryan: Some people do.

Kerry: Noooo!

Ryan: I'm just saying that they do.

Interview, St Troughton's

This interview was on the day following a taster visit to St. Baker's where the current Year 6 had spent a day as a Year 7 class, going to lessons and moving around their future school. The story of the condom machine echoes many spatial narratives that are told by children making the transition to a new school⁴⁸, which involve the construction of myths about the spaces of the institution (Delamont 1983). The high school is a site with a complex sexual geography that must be negotiated, and in this extract the boys and girls in Year 6 attempt to make sense of this. The older children's relationship practices are located in particular spaces and at certain times, and the younger children's narratives about these practices are also temporal and spatially bound, as well as being tied to certain situated artefacts; in this case, the condom machine.

For the children then, the transfer was a matter of drifting friendships and shifting relationship practices. Moreover, it was a matter of maintaining gendered peer group bonds and establishing new gendered sexuality practices, which they considered to be age appropriate. This theme is discussed further in the next section, which focuses specifically on how gendered sexuality was explored by the children as part of the transfer experience.

⁴⁸ This was the visit, mentioned in Chapter 2, where I decided it would be better for me not to join the children

Licensed transgressions

What I argue in this section is that the move away from the primary school created a liminal space during the final weeks and days of Year 6, where the children were able to blur and cross certain boundaries due to their transitional status. To do this, I focus on several events that occurred at Hartnell during the final week of the summer term.

Names on shirts and girls with beards

It is a common practice among school children to sign each other's shirts on the last day of school and keep the shirt as a memento of their friendship group at the time. This is exactly what happened on the last day of the summer term at Hartnell. During the lunch break a packet of felt tips was spilled on the grass outside the classroom as the children sat in the sunshine, and they took the coloured pens and began to sign their names and write messages on their classmates shirts. After a while the girls started to draw felt tip beards on each other's faces, much to their amusement. When they returned to the classroom for the afternoon registration they were asked to remove their scribbled beards, but for a while they were able to wear this mock facial hair, and in doing so, perform what I term a 'licensed transgression.' That is to say, given the liminal space afforded by their final day in the school and the way they were already transforming their school shirts into former-school shirts, a space was opened for the transgressive performance of gender. Through their felt tip beards, the girls performed a mockery of embodied gender, yet they did so only in parameters provided by the transition; at any other time, such a 'carnivalistic' (Bakhtin 1984) transgression would not have been permitted, but it gained license because it was their final day at Hartnell.

Boys don't cry (at discos)

On the morning of the 'leavers' special' all the class gathered in the school car park and waited for the minibus and cars to arrive to take them off to their various activities for the day. All the talk was of the school disco the following evening where, apparently, many of the boys had cried because they were so upset to be leaving the school. Philip turned to me and said he 'shouldn't have cried cos boys don't cry'. While Hartnell was, as previously noted, a relatively gender-liberal school, boys were certainly not expected to cry, and I heard the head teacher Mr. Malcolm make such comments on several occasions. So although the disco itself did provide a space where the boys could perform a form of masculinity not usually seen in the school, Philip's comment highlights how this transgression was retrospectively disciplined with reference to a more dominant form of stoic masculinity, even though this kind of masculinity was not held in particular esteem by the majority of the boys.

'Spin the bottle'

As there were no lessons on the final day, Year 6 were allowed to spend most of their day on the grass areas that surrounded their classroom. Sitting on a wall nearby I observed several of the girls and boys gather in a circle with a plastic water bottle. They took it in turns to spin the bottle round and, depending on whether it stopped with the end facing a member of the opposite or same sex, they would hug the person or shake their hand. Gemma told me later that that was how they always played the game; there was no kissing, they hugged and shook hands instead.⁴⁹ While this was

⁴⁹ As far as I could tell, the knowledges and practices surrounding similar games were quite different at St. Pertwee's. For example, while walking out onto the playground one lunchtime, Charlene was talking to me about what she and her friends had been doing after school the previous day. 'We played truth or dare', she said. So I asked – trying to take an unknowing ethnographic position – 'How does truth or dare work then?' Charlene stopped and looked at me and said, knowingly, 'you've been out of school for a while, haven't you David?'

the case, who one hugged or shook hands with was still organised as a heterosexual practice: boys hugged girls and shook other boys by the hand. Nevertheless, the 'spin the bottle' game provided an opportunity for the exploration of more 'teenage' relationship practices. It could only be played in the school because of the children's status as 'leavers' who were, in that 'end-time', more loosely governed by the rules of the primary school, both official and cultural.

I suggest that these examples illustrate how the liminal space of the transitional period of the last days of primary school opens up space for certain 'licensed transgressions', where the power of gendered sexuality is revealed through its temporary disruption. Indeed, the girls could only wear the beards because they had the 'wrong' bodies, both by age and gender. The boys could cry in the disco, but outside its more permissive boundaries, the pressures of hegemonic masculinity made them narrate the experience differently in retrospect. The group playing 'spin the bottle' could bring a 'teenage' practice into the school because they had access to that form of heterosexuality, as their expected child-like gendered sexuality – their asexual heterosexuality (Epstein et al 2003; Mellor & Epstein 2006) – was being blurred, or was open to blurring. In the liminal space of the final days then, the children had the opportunity to explore the boundaries of their own age-related, gendered and sexual relationship practices. In Chapter 5 I looked in detail at the children's relationship practices in the primary and high schools. In the next section I return to look at how these were affected by changes in both an educational and a technological context.

Rites and wrongs of passage: after the transfer to High School

When Mrs. Williams from St. Baker's visited St. Pertwee's for the day to meet the children and talk about their transfer I spoke to her in the corridor as Year 6 settled back into their classrooms. The official position at St. Baker's, she explained, was that they worked in consultation with the Year 6 teachers at each of the feeder schools in order to identify what they determined to be 'problem' friendships and split the children by placing them into different tutorial groups. Year 6 were not aware of this at the time, but following the move to high school it was something they considered to be deeply unjust. As Shanice explained to me when we met on my first day at St. Baker's, the children were very angry when they discovered this had happened; they felt as if their plans for a 'safe' transition between the schools had been unnecessarily hampered by the breaking up of friendships. As I was to discover during the group interviews however, there were other problems that the children had had to face during their rite of passage to the high school. Furthermore, I discovered that at the high school some of the children's representational practices that I had observed on the primary school playground had evolved due to developments in mobile technology. It is these two issues which form the focus of the following sections.

Plussed off with Year 8 and other problems

One of the major obstacles for the children who had newly arrived in Year 7 was the need to find a new space in the hierarchy of the school because, significantly, they had switched from being the oldest pupils at the top of the school to the youngest students at the bottom. As the following extract shows, this also involved finding a new place within Year 7, which was much larger than their previous classes in primary school.

Shanice: Everyone's awful at this school.
Vanessa: Yeah, Kelsea's a little cow
Charlene: Kelsea, Renae, Ellis, [other names under noise].
Vanessa: And Ellis, she can be a right little cow sometimes.
Steven: Well if any of them pisses me off, I'd like punch them.
Vanessa: Yeah, yeah whatever, yeah I bet you would.
Charlene: Do you want any more names, the names of the others?
DJM: No, no you don't have to give me names.
Shanice: Renee's really bad, she pushed me over, or she tried to. And she's really horrible, she'll look at you like you're a piece of shit in' it?
[Noise]
Steven: And when you plays football sometimes they'll just come and like whack the ball miles over there like, or maybe like kick it to each other so you has to be running all over trying to catch up with them.
Shanice: They're worst in Year 11, Year 11 and Year 9.
Luke: No, no that's not fair my cousin's in Year 11.
[Noise]
DJM: So does having cousins in higher years make it better?
All: Yeah, yeah.
Luke: Definitely.
[Noise]
Shanice: Well if they're picking on you, you can go over to them and they're better than teachers because they'll go over to them and punch their lights out.
Vanessa: I gets well pissed off with the people in Year 8 cos they think they're all that and they knows everything, but like, I just hate the way they always starting on me just to like, prove something, acting hard.
DJM: What does acting hard mean?
Luke: It's like bullying.
Vanessa: Like 'shut your fucking gob' and all that.
Steven: Well I know, I don't care if they start picking on me cos I know I can just beat them up, cos I am hard and they act it.
DJM: There's a difference?
All: Yeah, yeah.

Interview, St. Baker's

Many of the girls who were participating in the research were in two oppositional groups of friends. Kelsea, Renae, Ellis and several others were in a group who considered themselves to be

the 'cool ones', and in order to achieve this position they spent a great deal of time talking about how the other girls – including Vanessa, Charlene and Shanice – were 'losers', and associating themselves with older children in the school. The 'cool ones' attempt at taking a powerful position within Year 7 was read by the other girls as false; they were 'acting' rather than 'being hard'. Having cousins in higher year groups could help sort out problems with other Year 7s and troublemakers in Year 8 because the cousins could use the hierarchies of age and the school year group system to exercise influence over those younger and lower positioned than them. However, the older year groups could also cause many problems for those in Year 7, and bullying was a constant complaint⁵⁰. The hardness of these children was not questioned. Moreover, there was a great deal of resentment of Year 8 and the way they acted towards the new arrivals to the school. It was apparent that a significant number of students in Year 8 had taken the opportunity of having children younger than themselves in the school to draw on the established hierarchy of the year group system in order to gain a position of dominance. This system of power relations then, provided many problems for Year 7; they either had to negotiate it by associating with the children in Year 8, as the 'cool ones' did, or draw on relatives in higher years whenever problems arose – an approach considered to be far more effective than seeking assistance from teachers, whose powers lay somewhat outside of the students' power relations. As this discussion illustrates, when my participants reached Year 7, they were often preoccupied with the system of student power relations in St. Baker's. Their understandings of what school was about – their major frames of reference – were predominated by the relationships between themselves and their fellow students.

⁵⁰ When I spoke with some of the young people in Year 11 they admitted to spending a lot of time 'picking on' and 'bullying' the children in Year 7, something that they saw as normal and acceptable, because it was what happened to them.

From drawing to photography: changing acts in the representation of self and others

[They start taking photos of me on their phones again].

[Noise]

Steven: You know the girls all fancies Gareth Gates? Well that's stupid cos you're never gonna meet him are you?

DJM: So is it only worth fancying someone if you can go out with them?

Steven: Yeah.

[Noise]

DJM: I notice a lot of the girls have got pictures of Usher on their books and stuff.

Charlene: Look at that, look at that! [shows me a picture of Usher on phone] In' it wicked?

Shanice: Ahh, yeah!

Charlene: It's good cos you can look and that, but then again it's not cos you knows you can't have them, you can't have them cos they're famous.

[Noise]

[The girls show me more photos and ask me who all the men are].

Interview, St. Baker's

The children's transfer to high school greatly affected their practices of drawing, which were outlined in Chapter 6. After the transfer there was a noticeable change in their practices of representation that was, to a great extent, due to geographic and technological differences. The majority of children were far less inclined to use the research notebooks that I carried with me for drawing pictures, preferring instead to use their mobile phones to take pictures of each other. The fieldwork occurred at a time when mobile phones with digital cameras were becoming inexpensive and very common, and as the interview extract above illustrates, their phones became significant elements of both their relationship cultures and the research activities.

In the extract, the girls are using their phones in several ways: to take photos of me, to take photos of each other, and to look at pictures of famous men. Although the fantasy positioning of male pop stars has become more reflexive – they know they ‘can’t have them cos they’re famous’ – all the practices here are evolved forms of earlier practices, seen either in earlier phases of the fieldwork or during previous research (e.g. Ali 2002, 2003). So the introduction of mobile phone technology significantly altered the acts of representation that the children could undertake, even though the practices remained similar to those already observed. The geography of the high school also had a significant effect on the opportunities for drawing. While in the primary school there were plenty of small spaces that the children could occupy for talking and playing that were under little adult surveillance, the high school was organised in such a way that every area was visible or regularly patrolled and controlled. These spaces also contained students from higher year groups, whose presence, as noted above, was often more problematic for the Year 7 children than that of the teachers. This meant that the children were constantly moving and found it difficult to settle down for enough time to produce drawings; they had become far more nomadic.

Other school-based research about children’s gendered identities has utilised photography and involved the researcher giving their participants cameras to use (Ali 2000, Allan 2005). Although I had considered using this method myself, I chose not to pursue the idea because of a number of possible ethical problems, particularly concerning how the photographs would be used and how the anonymity of the children could be assured. (Particularly if the photographs were to be used in my texts. The last thing I wanted to do was blank out the children’s faces and make them look like criminals or victims). However, what I encountered in my fieldwork was children using cameras by and for themselves, with

no input from the research project. Although the proper analysis of these photographs and the processes of photography requires a entire project in itself, here I will outline some central aspects and events because, as I will explain, the comparison of the practices of drawing and photography led to an important conceptual development.

Much the same negotiation of subject positions occurred in the acts of photographing as had taken place with the drawings. For example, many of the girls from the single crew/lover losers friendship group would capture images of each other that inscribed many of the same discourses as were evident in their earlier drawings. The poses the girls struck for the pictures were obviously more sophisticated than those drawn in the notebooks (where limited artistic competency was a crucial factor) but the embodiment of subject positions in these acts of gendered group identity work was very similar. Moreover, the authorship of the images remained within the group, as the poses, stances and content of the photographs were negotiated between the photographer and those under the gaze of the lens.

The only times this did not occur is when they took photographs of me. In these moments, some of the children would openly admit that they were photographing me so they could take my image home to show their families. Although 'research' is a two way process, with the participants investigating the researcher in many ways, it is not so common that participants can 'capture' the research in such an active fashion, the way an academic researcher might be said to do. In this sense, being photographed was a reversal of the surveillance under which I had placed the children; a realisation that made me at times quite uncomfortable. Importantly, this emotional response aided in the building of my understanding of what was happening with both the drawings and

the photographs. The production of images of the self and others in these ways were, I would argue, in terms of the settings, the interactions and the symbolism *combined*, particular to the cultural experience of being a child. They were shaped by the children's own understandings of identity, their own emotional needs for these identities to be supported, and the ways that the systems of communication within their localised friendship cultures operated. In the next section I outline some of the social interactions involving the children's mobile phones, exploring them with reference to some of my own memories of school.

Body parts and pop songs

It was during the afternoon registration period on my first day at St. Baker's that I noticed the children's mobile phones and began to observe how they used them. Luke was boasting about how he had the new model of what he claimed was the most desirable brand, and was busy showing it off to the rest of the class. Indeed, the make and model of their mobile phone was very important to the children; none of them wanted to be seen as owning a phone that was not 'cool'. An essential capacity for a 'cool' phone was the ability to take photographs, which, as discussed above, was a common practice among my participants. Although I had no access to the photographs⁵¹, I could witness the social interactions involved in their production, as this extract from my field notes shows.

⁵¹ This is a methodological hurdle that could be overcome following the widespread introduction of Bluetooth wireless technology, which enables the simple transmission of data (such as a photograph) between two devices. The use of such technology would, of course, open up further ethical issues for serious consideration.

A few of the girls are using their phones during the lesson to take pictures that look like ambiguous but risqué body parts. Vanessa puts her finger through her bent elbow and Jodi takes a photo of it. Crowding round the small screen they giggle and point. "It looks like a bum and prick!" says Vanessa.

Field notes, St. Bakers

I observed this form of use several times in the classroom. The phones would be used under the desks when the teacher was not looking (and sometimes when they were) and the resulting photograph would be shown among friends, with a great deal of amusement resulting from these 'virtual' bodies. Moreover, as the interview extract above illustrates, the girls also had many images of male bodies stored on their phones, especially pop stars posing with naked torsos, which they would show each other during classes (and during the interviews). At the time I wrote in my notebook how much these practices reminded me of practices that were common when I was at school. For instance, many of my friends would spend time in Maths lessons trying to spell out what they considered to be rude words with the numbers of their calculators.⁵² And at around the same time there was a plague of crudely graffitied male genitalia on almost every chair in all the classrooms. What these examples show is how the discourse of the sexual body can be used by children in schools as a way of resisting the way that they are positioned by the dominant educational discourse. The school is framed as a space where bodies are disciplined and regulated; the learning body is a non-sexualised body, because sexuality is deemed disruptive to the learning process. By symbolising the sexual bodies through various practices, the dominant discourse can be actively disrupted, as the body and its functions represent the uncultured, the poorly mannered and the private (Foucault 1998; Elias 2000).

⁵² For a while it was popular at my school to type 55378008 and turn the calculator upside down.

The phones provided a technology through which such resistance could be enacted by the girls in Year 7.

The children also used their phones to share certain kinds of cultural texts, either as images or sounds. Sometimes they would send these to each other via a message, but mostly these would be used as a form of display or performance. For example, a ring tone called the 'crazy frog' was very popular at the time, and this would often be heard during registration periods as members of the class showed off their phones. This particular ring tone became, over the space of a week, a 'must have' that signified a certain kind of cultural capital within their peer groups. Similarly, some of the children possessed phones that could play mp3 ring tones that were large fragments of songs by famous groups and pop stars. These had to be the 'right' songs, those considered most popular across the different peer groups in the year and throughout the school. The 'crazy frog' ring tone craze reminded me of a time when I was in Year 7 and everyone had 'sticky hands' – small rubber hand on stretchy string that could be flicked onto certain kinds of surface. For a week or so, to have a 'sticky hand' was essential. At around the same time, my friends and I would take our vinyl records into school in order to show each other and talk about their contents, even though we had no means of playing them – nonetheless, we were able to give a performance as active consumers and literate listeners.

In many respects therefore, the practices the children engaged in with their phones were similar to those undertaken by my peer group when I was their age, two decades ago. There was, I would argue, a significant difference between my experiences and the experiences of my participants. My friends and I had to negotiate forms of cultural capital in our (sometimes disruptive) school-based performances, but these were always singular forms, like

the 'sticky hand'. For the children at St. Baker's, however, the technology of the mobile phone became a hub of several types of cultural capital. Not only did they have to have the 'right' phone, it must contain the 'right' songs and pictures, and they had to know how to display these in the 'right' places and times. What these examples suggest is that the use of the phones provides a new context for forms of cultural exchange and social interaction that pre-date the technology – in these instances, the phones did not generate new forms of interaction, but did provide new pathways for pre-existing systems and performances of cultural capital. Moreover, it strongly suggests that forms of advanced technology, which are prominent and widespread in contemporary Western societies, do not simply determine kinds of social interaction; rather, as the examples of friendship in the classroom show, they are drawn into pre-existing systems by creative actors. Furthermore, in terms of research with children and young people, it suggests that researchers must consider how best to expand from an ethnography of pockets and graffiti (Hey 1997) to encompass an ethnography of inboxes and instant messages.

Blurring boundaries: constructing and defining childhood, the teenage and the adult

In addition to the educational transfer between phases of schooling, the children were also experiencing the cultural transfer between childhood and the teenage. This penultimate section focuses on how some of the children spoke about the life course stages of childhood, the teenage, and adulthood. In doing this I examine how their constructions and understandings of age were affected by social class and gender, and how, in attempting to negotiate these cultural boundaries in terms of their own experiences and feelings, they blurred, troubled and challenged the boundary between childhood and the teenage. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the transfer between schools provided the

context for a great deal of questioning about identity. I propose that it brought forth many narratives that disrupted conventional notions about the boundaries between stages of the life course, while at the same time leading to the creation of imagined futures that were deeply gendered and classed.

Being a child

In many of the initial interviews I asked the groups what they thought being a child means. By asking this question I was trying to build an initial picture of how the children in Year 6 thought about their own experiences and show the groups that I was interested in their everyday experiences and interests. Below are two extracts from interviews at St. Troughton's and Hartnell,

DJM: What do you think being a child means then?

Damian: Having fun.

Ryan: Messing.

Damian: Yeah messing.

Ryan: Playing and stuff.

Yoris: Being friends.

Steven: Not being able to do stuff.

DJM: Like what?

Steven: You can't drive.

Damian: But it's good though, you can just play football.

Ryan: Or have sleepovers.

Damian: You can run around and play in the street.

Ryan: Adults, they just drives in the street in'tit?

Interview, St. Troughton's

...

Katherine: Going to school.

Lewis: Yeah, going to school and doing homework. Boo!

[Laughter]

Katherine: And playing I suppose.

Lewis: Playing football and other games.

Robert: Going to clubs.

Maxine: But I think it also means being taken around or waiting to be taken places.

Katherine: Sitting in the back of the car.

Maxine: Having to go to bed when it's the right time.

DJM: When is it the right time?

Maxine: When your parents say it is. I don't really have a bedtime anymore, but I still get told.

Lewis: Yeah, me too.

Interview, Hartnell

These extracts highlight many of the differences between the everyday lives of the children in rural and urban settings discussed in Chapter 7 where I looked at extracts from their diaries. There was a sense of a lack of autonomy at both schools – not being able to do things – but the adult control of time and disciplining of bodies was recognised more intensely at Hartnell, where the children's activities were far more likely to be organised and, due to the rural setting, involve transport by car. By contrast, the children at St. Troughton's all lived in urban areas, so while they noticed things they were not permitted to do, like Steven's comment about driving a car, they actually celebrated the use they could make of urban spaces. As Damian and Ryan point out, they could make more inventive use of the public space of the street, shaping it with their games and imaginations – adults just drove on it.

For both these groups and others, childhood was about playing. Indeed, this was the key activity that differentiated childhood from adulthood, and as the discussion in Chapter 7 and other points in the thesis suggest, playing was a gendered friendship practice central to their everyday lives. The children at Hartnell however, as in this extract, were more likely to position themselves primarily as school pupils. In conjunction with the details about their organised leisure activities (see Chapter 7) and disciplined bodies, this tendency highlights not only how the children experienced different kinds of childhood determined by their social class and local environment, but also how they invested in their own, particular classed childhood.

Understanding the teenage

Many of the children considered themselves to be entering – or presently in – a liminal stage between what they thought of as childhood, and what they understood to be the teenage. For example, the following extract shows how the paradoxical entanglement of innocence and masculinity caused some of the boys at St. Pertwee's problems as they attempted to articulate their own transitional identities. This, I argue, is because there are contradictory subject positions available to them within the context of the discussion, which must be negotiated across the group. Throughout the discussion the boys explore the cultural parameters that compromise the conditions within which they can construct and perform possible boyhoods – the telling and doing of hetero-gender. Drawing on the available cultural corpus, the boys can only provide certain accounts of themselves and each other, and in doing this there is often a tension between what it means to be a boy and what it means to be a child – something that is further complicated by their negotiations of the complicated transition into the teenage.

Simon: It's like you're not this or that, but like, waiting, cos you can't be a teenager yet cos you're not the right age.

DJM: What's the right age?

John: Duh! Thirteen.

Simon: Don't have to be.

Danny: [To DJM] What do you think?

John: Yeah does.

Kenzie: No.

DJM: Maybe.

Simon: No, yeah, cos sometimes me Mum says to me 'oh, ya being all stropky like a bloody teenager' and I say well I can't be cos I ain't yet.

DJM: But you don't think you're a child though?

John: Yeah, well sort of, but maybe cos we're in school.

DJM: [To Simon] Why does she say that do you think?

Moz: I think we can be teenagers sometimes, but not really like.

Simon: She says it's all about hormones, which is well annoying. [With exaggerated disgust] I'm not a girl.

Danny: It's not only girls who has hormones. [To DJM] We all do don't we?

DJM: Yeah.

Simon: But they ain't the same.

Danny: No.

Kenzie: They makes them [girls] all crazy don't they.

Danny: Yeah, moody.

Interview, St. Pertwee's

The boys negotiate what defines being a teenager. This exchange demonstrates that in some ways often they feel in a third, unnamed space between the status of child and the status of teenager. John and Moz particularly seem to recognise the ways they can be both. Across the discussion, however, there is an uneasy ambivalence as to the exact nature of their identities. They also appear to recognise how the defining of their status is often beyond their control. Here, this occurs in two ways: firstly, in the exchange between the boys, and secondly, outside the interview setting in the family home, as shown by the dialogical presence of the voice of Simon's mother. The influence of intersubjectivity in the defining of identity status becomes apparent in talk about the ambiguous nature of transition, and age – defined in terms of constructed categories of age – becomes elastic to a certain extent.

However, the embodiment of age is reinstated through the discussion of hormones. Here, a scientific, bio-medical discourse enters the debate about age status and bolsters the idea of transition as a status in itself – much as the teenage years are regarded in contemporary Western culture. Moreover, this is taken up by the boys as a way to define their masculinity. Although they do have hormones, the boys agree, it is the girls who are negatively affected by them, with their hormones controlling them and even making them 'crazy.'

Adulthood and imagined futures

At several points throughout the preceding chapters and particularly in Chapter 7, I have looked at how the children talked about their imagined futures in terms of heterosexual marriage. For the girls especially, their adult futures were framed in terms of marriage and the narrative of the wedding. The other major factor that featured in discussions about their future adult selves was employment. Indeed, it was their imagined careers and jobs that were discussed when I asked them what they thought they would either like to do, or end up doing, when they left school and went to work. The boys at St. Pertwee's for example, gave the following answers.

Moz: I think I'll be like a welder or a scaffolder.

Danny: Footballer.

John: Duh! You can'ts be a footballer, they trains for ages to do that and you have to start when you're really young.

Moz: You're too old for that.

Kenzie: I'd be like a bin man or something.

Simon: A bin man!

Kenzie: Shut up they earns good money they do

DJM: And you?

John: Maybe like a bus driver.

Simon: I think I'd be like, working as a builder.

Moz: His dad's a builder.

DJM: Is he?

Simon: Yeah.

DJM: So you'd like to take after your dad?

Simon: Yeah.

Interview, St Pertwee's

Here, the boys' careers and aspirations are clearly defined by their family experiences and the opportunities they see as open to them in their local community. Building from these, the boys are able to construct a good understanding of what is likely to be available to them. This is why Danny's suggestion that he could be a footballer is disregarded by his friends – their extended knowledge of football

and football culture tells them that this suggestion must be false. For the others, a future in manual work is considered likely and desirable. Indeed, it was common for boys at St. Pertwee's and St. Troughton's to think about their future adult selves as working primarily for money or, on a few occasions, following in the footsteps of their fathers and taking on a trade. For the girls in the urban schools, as the following example from St. Troughton's illustrates, there were additional considerations.

On the field with some of the girls. They are idly picking leaves off the hedge and talking about their future lives. We start talking about the kinds of jobs they'd like to do in the future and whether they'll have a career. Ehedra says that it's important that if you're having a baby then you need to be married – Kerry agrees, and adds that they will have to make a choice between a having baby and having a career. I ask them if it has to be a choice and they say it does, because you'd be abusing your baby if you left it at home all day and went away. What's most important, they decide, is love.

Field notes, St. Troughton's

The idea of having a career had come from a classroom discussion in a lesson and had spilled out onto the field. Between themselves the girls had difficulty managing what they considered to be the contradictory positions of 'mother' and 'career woman.' But it was motherhood that was the central future concern for them, rather than having a career. They knew they were likely to work, but there was perceived to be a stark incompatibility between work and motherhood – something they framed in strong terms as being abusive to children. Although Kerry presents it as a choice between the two, the girls' investments in marriage and having babies stood at odds with the official position offered by the school, where, so the narrative went, they had to take care to make the most of their career opportunities. Whereas the boys considered money to be the most important aspect of their future

working lives, for the girls, who all invested in the imagined future of the wedding and motherhood, it was love.

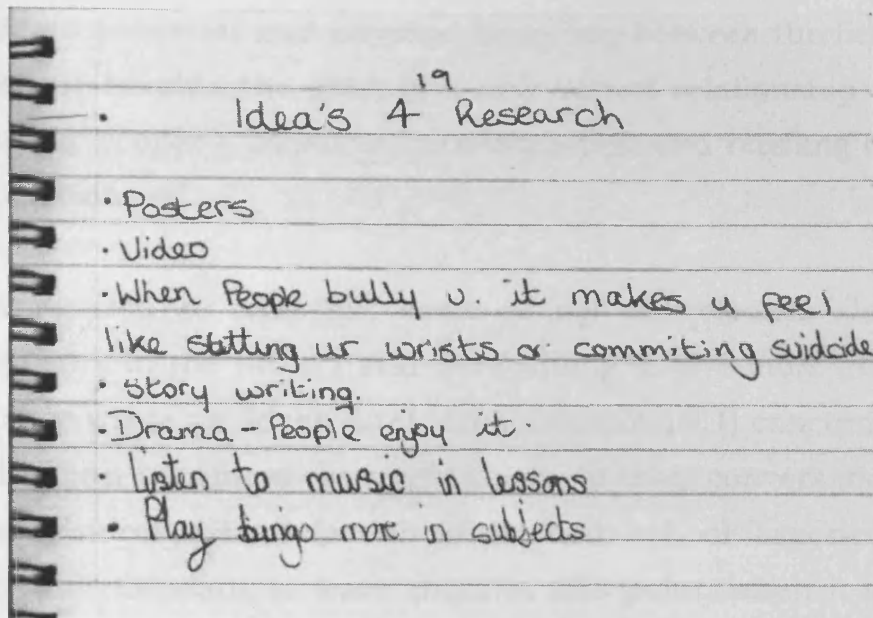
During the last day of the summer term at Hartnell I sat with a group of girls and had a similar conversation.

The girls are talking about what they want to do when they are adults, the kinds of jobs they'd like to do. Cerri says that she'd like to be a teacher, probably at primary school. Nadine agrees, she'd like to be a teacher too, or maybe a runner – she tells me she's a member of the county cross-country running team. Anna says that she'd like to go to university and become a doctor by doing a 'medicine degree'. Lucy says she might study Law and become a solicitor.

Field notes, Hartnell

The girls at Hartnell did not speak about the possibility of a future clash between their careers and their position as a potential mother. In fact, the futures they imagined seldom made reference to families and motherhood. Instead, as this episode illustrates, they were able to negotiate various positions as university educated career women. Teaching, medicine and law were all careers that could be considered because they reflected both the experiences of their family members, and their parents' expectations (like the pressure on them to do well in their 11 plus exams – see Chapter 7 and above). Although I have not been able to go into detail about these episodes due to limitations of space, they do provide a further perspective on how gender and social class affected the children's lives, both real and imagined.

Leaving the field



Picture 9.1 'Idea's 4 Research'

Field notebook, St. Baker's

On my last day at St. Baker's I sat in the small entrance hall of the school with Vanessa and Shanice, while they wrote suggestions for future research in my notebook for me. They did this without being asked and I wondered if perhaps they thought I was going to come back and see them again, just as I had after visiting them at their primary schools. It seemed that, for them, just as for me, the fieldwork did not really feel like it was coming to an end. But that is exactly what happened as we sat there having our final conversation during the last fifteen minutes of the school day. My own investments in the research were obviously huge: it was part of an important transition of my own as an academic and a researcher – a significant rite of passage (Coffey 1999). I also lived with the research outside the sites of the fieldwork and would continue to do so for years to come, as I wrote and re-wrote my narratives about the episodes and events of the project, and constructed representations about this period in these children's lives. As Coffey (1999:107) notes, "ending

fieldwork is a distinctive part of the process of ethnography. It provides a temporal and physical boundary between the field and the self. It heralds the start of a new sort of relationship with a site and a people – based on reconstruction and retelling of lives and experiences”.

I was pleased to see that some of my participants also had investments in the project and were willing to give more to it. But what they wrote as ‘Ideas 4 research’ (Picture 10.1) concerned me. Bullying had become a recurrent theme in their conversations, as had a general dissatisfaction with their school experiences. I simply did not want to leave them at this point, when it seemed that they were experiencing and communicating so much unhappiness. But what could I do? I had to leave, and I would probably never see most of my participants again. It was a difficult walk home that day.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at a variety of transitions and endings which were involved in the children’s transfer from primary to secondary school, their transitions towards a teenage status, and my own journey as a researcher. The chapter has highlighted the complex emotional and identity work that occurs both before and after the transition to secondary school (or, in the case of St. Baker’s, high school) and the way that this is affected by gendered sexuality and power dynamics within friendship groups. To begin, I explored how ideas about family and friendship helped the children deal with worries about the unknown nature of their new schools. I also discussed how the end of Year 6 created a liminal space where the boundaries of dominant notions of gender and sexuality – and how these are aged – could be disrupted (but ultimately restored) through licensed transgressions. I then looked at how the children in Year

7 managed the power dynamics and structures of St. Baker's through different ways of positioning themselves with the student hierarchy. The move also constituted an evolution in their practices of representation, and I discussed how these could be considered displays of cultural capital by focusing on the technology of the mobile phone and its place and various uses within their peer groups. Towards the end of the chapter I provided an overview of how some of the children thought about being a child, how they understood the teenage, and how they constructed their imagined futures. In analysing each of the examples provided, I showed how gendered sexuality and social class affected their experiences, understandings, and expectations of each of these stages of the life course. In the final chapter I consider the themes of this and the preceding chapters by returning to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

Chapter 10

Thankyou for
reading.

Picture 9.2: Back cover of Stevie's diary, St. Pertwee's

Chapter 10

Returns and departures

Theorising and researching romance

At the beginning of this thesis I explained how it was an interest in theorising and researching romantic love and romance that led me to undertake this research project. The project itself, reflecting the character of ethnographic research, has covered many themes in addition to romance, most notably friendship, although as I have shown, there are strong romantic narratives detectable in the ways the children involved in the study talked about their friendships. Therefore, it is important that here, in this final chapter, I begin by explaining what I see as the most important findings that can be drawn from my research with regard to sociological understandings of romance.

During the project I began to realise that there were many levels of romance that could be analysed in my work, and I defined these in Chapter 3 as playground romance, popular romance, subjects of romance, sociological romance, and writer's romance. This typology set the ground for the analysis that followed throughout each subsequent chapter. Yet it does not wholly capture the picture that is assembled as the stories about the children's lives and my research with them accumulates. I will therefore briefly explain here what I see as perhaps the most significant contribution of my work to the sociology of personal relationships and sociological understandings of romance.

Previous views of romance, as discussed earlier, tend to focus on romance as a cultural script and suggest that people draw on such scripts in making sense of their lives. Some of the evidence presented here from the children's experiences supports this; for

example, the girls' articulation of the wedding dress narrative at St. Pertwee's. However, where this research builds substantially on and departs from the notion of scripts is in the evidence that it presents which shows how romance is *relational*. The girls did indeed draw on a romantic narrative about the white wedding that is culturally and economically dominant, but they did so while constructing and negotiating social bonds with others that were hetero-gendered and classed.

This research therefore highlights that there is an important aspect of romance that is intersubjective; that is to say, that it exists in the creation and maintenance of social bonds between people. Such an aspect has not been discussed in previous research, which has tended to emphasise romance as a genre or narrative, without fully exploring how it is negotiated in people's everyday lives. Moreover, by drawing on the notion of subject positions rather than just narrative scripts, romance is placed firmly in the social.

For example, a largely fictional Rebecca and myself became subjects of the children's own romantic expressions, particularly the girls' romances. When, as detailed in Chapter 6, Vanessa and her friends drew us as if we were 'about to get married' and 'on honeymoon' it was part of a group performance of certain hetero-gendered subject positions. This also, of course, has methodological consequences: how would this have worked out if I had been a woman? Or if I had been married? My subjectivity was clearly very important in the generation of this data, which strengthens the notion that romance should be understood as intersubjective and relational.

The idea of romance as relational, I argue, provides a highly productive avenue for considering romance and romantic love in

sociological theory and research. Furthermore, when considered in conjunction with the arguments outlined concerning ‘the romantic subject’ (see Chapter 3) these theories, I suggest, provide the basis for a move towards a reframing of sociological understandings of personal relationships.

Returning to the research questions

In the Introduction I explained that when I first started to approach the topic of children’s relationship cultures and romance I had one overarching research question. That was:

- *How do children understand and invest in romance and romantic love?*

I also noted that as the design and staging of my project developed, a range of other research questions clustered around this initial question. It is these questions that I now return to in order to summarise the findings presented in the foregoing chapters.

- *How are the children’s peer groups structured in terms of gendered sexuality? And how do they understand and govern their own hetero-gendered relationship cultures?*

In Chapter 5 I presented several perspectives on the children’s relationship economies. By looking at the ‘archaeology of love’ in their primary schools and the ways that girls and boys discussed their relationships within and outside their gendered peer groups, I illustrated how gender was a key factor in the meanings, structures and interactions of their friendship cultures. Relations between girls and boys were dependent on a set of hetero-social practices, meaning that gender and sexuality were conjoined in the everyday maintenance and practice of the children’s peer

groups. Moreover, as the data throughout the chapters indicates, it was the girls who primarily acted as the custodians of the relationship economy at each of the schools. After the transfer to high school, these children placed increasing significance on heterosexual subject positions that were governed according to a complex array of rules and definitions, which determined the 'right' way of going about being a girl or a boy, and a girlfriend or a boyfriend. In Chapter 7 I discussed the friendship of Aaron and Katherine, illustrating the way that, even among the 'gender liberal' children at Hartnell, their friendship was heterosexualised; because they were a boy and a girl they were constantly positioned as a heterosexual couple.

- *When constructing narratives about relationships, how do they negotiate and draw on meanings from both popular and local culture?*

In Chapter 6 I investigated some of the creative processes within the children's friendship cultures by looking at one group of Year 6 girls and the way they defined themselves and each other as members of either the 'Single Crew' or the 'Lover Losers'. Through this division, I argued, the girls were constructing narratives about themselves that drew on a variety of popular cultural resources, notably, gendered sexuality, hip hop, and a brand of doll. These were made sense of through the playground practice of group formation and localised frameworks of understanding about the kinds of relationships currently available to them. Such intersections between global culture and the children's own cultures were shown again in Chapter 9. Here, I illustrated how the children used their mobile phones as complex forms of cultural capital in order to gain status within their peer groups, to practice and symbolise their friendships, and to disrupt the asexual, disembodied discourse of the classroom. Furthermore, in

Chapter 8 I explored the narrative resources and boundaries of my participants' friendship stories, showing how certain styles and genres were available to them, and the various ways that they articulated these.

- *How do gender and social class affect the children's investments in different kinds of romantic relationships? How do these investments shape their imagined futures?*

In Chapter 7 I discussed how social class and gender affected both the children's propensity to 'speak' romance and the forms that these romantic narratives could take. As also noted in Chapter 5, many boys often found it hard to talk about 'feeling feelings', while girls were likely to talk openly and often about their desires to be involved in romantic, heterosexual relationships, investing a great deal in the narrative of the 'white wedding'; as a result, the majority of data collected about romance was about *girls'* romantic attachments and investments. Moreover, the middle class children at Hartnell thought they would find 'true love' while at university, whereas the working class children at St. Pertwee's and St. Troughton's thought that this relationship would occur in their early-to-middle teens. In Chapter 7 I also illustrated how the girls at each of the schools drew me into their relationship economies by talking about and drawing pictures of me and my girlfriend Rebecca – they even spoke to her via my recording equipment (and once on my doorstep). Through these actions and fantasies, I argued, the girls were able to explore future subject positions within hierarchical, institutional heterosexuality. Similarly, in Chapter 9 I discussed how the imagined futures of two groups of girls – one at Hartnell, the other at St. Troughton's – were shaped by differently classed versions of heterosexuality.

- *How are these children's experiences and understandings of their own childhoods affected by gender and social class culture?*

In Chapter 7 I provided a number of examples from the research diaries that were produced at Hartnell and St. Troughton's. The diary covers and their contents illustrated how the children's childhoods were shaped according to gendered leisure practices, educational discourses, and social class culture. These factors could be seen through the differences in reported activities and the presentation of the diaries, both in terms of cover decoration and the style of the entries. Furthermore, the interview extracts in Chapter 9 show how the children's own definitions of childhood and the teenage were strongly affected by the same factors. Similar themes were also found in the symmetrical interviews discussed in Chapter 8, where my own gendered and classed subjectivity – my personal understandings of and investments in certain kinds of relationships – was placed in purposeful dialogue with the children's own frameworks of understanding.

- *How do the children negotiate various kinds of sexuality knowledge, within the contexts of their own cultures, their schools, and the research?*

In Chapter 6 I looked at several examples of how the children negotiated sexuality knowledge in these different contexts. For example, I discussed how a group of boys talked about the 'unofficial' knowledge of pornography, and how this involved constructing and moving between different kinds of masculinity. I also looked at the example of the girls and boys at St. Baker's talking about sex education, showing how they re-constructed the official discourse of the school with reference to their own frameworks of understanding. It was in Chapter 6 that I also

illustrated how the research generated situations where sexual and gendered knowledge was negotiated. The three examples provided concerned the boys talking about my hairy legs, the girls quizzing me about the 'orgasm badge', and the group asking me about when I lost my virginity. Furthermore, in Chapter 9 I discussed how the last few days of primary school, and the transitional identities this period provided, created various liminal spaces where some of the children could disrupt dominant performances of gender and experiment with older forms of hetero-social practice.

- *How do they understand and define friendship? And in what ways are their friendships romanticised?*

In Chapter 7 I explained how the children's friendships can be understood from two perspectives: the everyday and the eternal. Their everyday friendships are shown to have been structured to a great extent by gender, which is supported by the various extracts provided in Chapter 5, where girls and boys discuss how they see each other as different. Eternal friendships are viewed as those where the children perform 'friendship escapes', thereby using romanticised notions of friendship in order to escape the uncertainties brought about by the end of their time in primary school. This theme is discussed at length in Chapter 8, where I highlight how many of the children wrote 'romantic friendship' stories during the creative writing task. I analysed Anna's story in depth in order to explore how various defences and desires might be at work in such narratives.

- *In what ways do romantic narratives manifest before or after the transfer between primary and secondary phases of education?*

This final question is one that I have not been able to answer clearly. Although I have shown that romance was important for the children at either side of the transition between schools, it is hard to say for certain on the basis of the data presented here whether the romantic narratives that I found were of increased frequency or intensity when compared to other periods – say, during Years 4 or 5, or Years 8 or 9. When discussing Anna’s story in Chapter 8 I did suggest that her use of the romantic friendship narrative may be a defensive reaction to the uncertainties of her impending move away from the security and certainty of her current school and invested subject position as a primary school pupil. I think that this is a reasonable way to interpret this and other similar data presented in Chapters 7 and 8, but clearly this is an area for further investigation. Indeed, this is the point to which I now turn in concluding this final chapter.

The hinterlands and futures of romance research

The children in this study invested in and understood romance and romantic love in a variety of ways. They understood romance themselves, in terms of the popular culture they consumed, mediated to a certain extent through their localised frameworks of understanding. Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, as I have argued, they also acted romantically and invested in romance in other ways, particularly when it came to their friendships and the idea of the ‘best friend’. As I have argued, in all cases, sexuality, gender and social class had an affect on romantic investments and articulations. Doubtless ethnicity too has some kind of affect, but it was unclear how this may be at work in the children’s lives, so I have not focused on this factor in

my analysis of the data gathered during this study: ethnicity is a noticeable 'hinterland' of this project (to use the terminology discussed in Chapter 1). One reason it may not have been particularly evident could be due to the way that popular romance is predominantly ethnically White; that is to say, the dominant narratives of popular romance are very deeply racialised in terms of white, western culture (Ingraham 1999). Indeed, this is the case with many dominant stories about the way we can or in fact should conduct our personal lives (Bruner 1990). Having explored gender and social class throughout this thesis, it would be interesting to conduct further research with a similar cohort of children, which specifically investigated the possible affects of ethnicity on investments in romance, and their articulations and understandings of romantic narratives. It would be interesting to see if any of the children constructed different forms of romance depending on their ethnic identities and their investments in such identities at different times and in different places; at present I have yet to determine any such evidence, but I think this is a significant direction that further research could take.

Moreover, I can conceive of several other pathways for future research about romance stemming from this study. The study of popular romance in people's everyday lives can be extended in multiple directions. Indeed, it should be possible to investigate how popular romance is negotiated and 'glocalised' across numerous different cultures – children's relationship cultures being but one example from many. As I explained in Chapter 1, the majority of people invest deeply in romance, yet, with a few notable exceptions, there has been little by way of sustained sociological study of this area of people's personal relationships. With regard to the point raised above under the final research question, it would be useful to conduct an extended longitudinal study with a group of children beginning when they are in Year 5

and following them until they are in Year 8 or 9. This would allow a more developed focus on how the primary-secondary and childhood-teenage transfers affect investments in and articulations of romantic narratives. Of particular interest in such a study would be how romantic friendships and/or romantic friendship narratives are used to ease the anxieties of transition and rite-of-passage. Furthermore, of course, both types of romantic relationship could be investigated at other points of life course transition – at the point of entering or leaving university, or moving between employers for example. At present, I think there are three directions in which I would like to steer future research projects, and I will briefly mention my current thoughts about these.

Firstly, there is the need for the continuing ethnographic study of children's relationship cultures. This project and the work it builds on have shown that this perspective on contemporary childhood produces insightful and ethical knowledge about children's everyday lives. Although the issues of working with children tend to mean that studies are located in schools, it is important that future studies consider the various spaces within which contemporary childhood is lived. This will mean conducting research across the spaces of the school, the family home, the street and elsewhere. This would undoubtedly produce significant methodological and ethical challenges that would need to be overcome, but I will not discuss these at length here. In several places in this project I attempted to reach the children's lives outside of school through the diaries and interviews. This produced useful and insightful narratives about their lives, but these narratives cannot substitute research in the actual spaces they spoke about. I aim to carefully consider strategies that will meet these challenges when I design future research.

Secondly, it is important that we gain some sense of where romance is learned. I realise that, rather ironically, I am returning to the overarching research question that I modified in Chapter 2, but this is significant point. It is clear that very young children are encouraged to act – and *do* act – in romantic ways, performing symbolic, yet surely deeply influential, heterosexualised practices in their everyday lives. With this in mind it would seem sensible to study the relationship cultures of young children with the specific intention of analysing the influence of romantic heterosexuality – how they, their families, carers and teachers inscribe it into their daily play activities. Consequently, I will be considering the development of a research proposal that aims to work with children in the early years, studying the influence of popular romance within their peer groups.

Thirdly, and finally, as this research (and the body of work on which it builds) has suggested, children and young people construct their sexuality knowledge from a range of cultural resources and a complex blend of formal and informal sex education. It would seem that narratives of romance and investments in romantic relationships are key aspects of this process. Further research is needed about the different forms of sexual and relationships learning that occur in the different educational contexts of children's lives. Working towards a richer and fuller understanding of the social and cultural processes of romance will provide important information for those looking to eliminate homophobic and heterosexist bullying, construct a Sex and Relationships Education curriculum that speaks to children's frameworks of understanding, and provide children and young people with information and support that will strengthen their acts of sexual and relationship self-determination.

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