

'"The Company She Keeps" : The Social and
Interpersonal Construction of Girls Same Sex
Friendships'

Submitted as Ph.D. Faculty of Social Science
University of Kent at Canterbury. December 1987

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Acknowledgements

This thesis was produced in the following contexts : the financial assistance of the ESRC, the substantial and invaluable critique of my supervisors Mary Evans and Jeffrey Weeks, the personal generosity of Guido Casale, the forbearance of Laura Grace Hey Casale, the loving consideration of my parents Elizabeth and John Hey and the sisterly support of Elaine Hey who typed the transcripts.

Thanks are also due to Eloise Smith and Clem Smith who provided me with constructive feedback on my early thoughts on girls school cultures. Jacqui Halson read an earlier draft of Chapter 5 and gave me some helpful criticism and Sheila Riddell shared some of her insights into girls and the curriculum with me.

Perhaps it is also particularly appropriate to record my own indebtedness to my own 'best' friends Helly Langley and Pat Barrett for their sisterly solidarity and unfailing encouragement.

In this light I'd also like to cite my immense gratitude to 'the company I've kept' with a group of people who constitute some of my closest friends as well as being known as Management Development Services, especial thanks therefore are owed to

Graham and Libby Smith, Paul Elms, Michael Cole and John Huson.

Finally a special mention needs to be made of the⁰⁵ teachers and senior staff at both B school and C school who were not only on the side of the girls but on my side too in assisting me in the commission of my work by tolerating my incursive presence.

However, perhaps the last acknowledgement must go to all those girls at both schools who offered me so much of their lives, far more than I had any right to expect.

Abstract

'"The Company She Keeps" : The Social and Interpersonal Construction of Girls' Same Sex Friendships'

This thesis begins a critical analysis of girls' 'private' interpersonal and social relations as they are enacted within two school settings. It is the study of these marginal subordinated worlds productivity of forms of femininity which provides the main narrative of this project. I seek to understand these processes of (best) friendship construction through a feminist multi-disciplinary frame, drawing upon cultural studies, psychoanalysis and accounts of gender politics. I argue that the investments girls bring to their homosocial alliances and boundary drawing carry a psychological compulsion which is complexly connected to their own experiences within the mother/daughter bond as well as reflecting positively an immense social debt to the permissions girls have to be nurturant and ; negatively their own reproduction of oppressive exclusionary practices.

Best friendship in particular gives girls therefore, the experience of 'monogamy' continuous of maternal/daughter identification, reminiscent of their positioning inside monopolistic forms of heterosexuality. But these subcultures also represent a subversive discontinuity to the public dominance of boys/teachers/adults in schools and to the ideologies and practices of heterosociality and heterosexuality. By taking seriously their transmission of the values of friendship in their chosen form of notes and diaries for example, I was able to access the means whereby they were able to resist their surveillance and control by those in power over them.

I conclude by arguing that it is through a recognition of the valency of these indivisibly positive and negative aspects to girls cultures that Equal Opportunities practitioners must begin if they are serious about their ambitions. Methods have to be made which enable girls to transfer their 'private' solidarities into the 'public' realm, which unquestionably demands contesting with them the causes and consequences of their implication in the divisions which also contaminate their lives and weaken them.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY

Contents.

1. Introduction : 'Being a New Girl' ; Finding Your Way
Around.
2. The Metropolitan Borough of Westpark.
3. 'Down and Going : Up and Coming' - Ethos and Reputation in
Two Westpark Schools.
4. 'Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative, Latch
onto the Affirmative and Don't Mess with Mister Inbetween'
: Things I Wish I'd Known About Being a Feminist
Researching Into Girls.
5. 'A Stranger Across a Crowded Room' : Problems of Access at
C School.

1. Introduction : 'Being a New Girl' ; Finding Your Way Around.

Very soon into my foreshortened field notes on B school I made these heartfelt comments :

'Felt foolish 'cos I couldn't recollect the names of all the staff with whom I'd just been liasing. I kept calling Mrs Harris, Mrs Taylor (shit) felt just like a new girl, overwhelmed by the bureaucratic nightmares that schools are (to newcomers). Not only do you have to learn the buildings, but also staff names, statuses, subjects, timetables, timings, routines, protocols and facilities.'

(FN B Jan 6 1986)

In fact throughout the course of my field work I never quite lost the sense of being in a state of suspended animation, stuck some place between childhood and adulthood, (like so many of the girls I spoke to), playing at being grown up.

Whether this is explicable with reference to my personality or to the necessary role requirements of an ethnographer I cannot for certain say which played the more determinant part, but I am also convinced that school institutions foster these confusions.

In these circumstances therefore, it isn't at all surprising that I found it remarkably easy to identify with the customers of this system so that the very insecurity and relative weakness of my position became in practice a strength. Not that the two sites I worked within were identical, indeed there were *stunning* contrasts between the two, which I will exemplify later, but at a general level of truth all schools are similarly predicated upon adult authority though this is capable of being mediated in differing degrees of coerciveness.

I put this truism down at this point before I go onto specify in some detail how I found my feet, so to speak, to remind the reader of the act of faith required by researchers when they enter a new terrain. The management of the identity of the insider/outsider certainly took up a vast amount of my time and judging by the anguished remarks dotted throughout my field notes was the organizing narrative which seemed to hold it all together.

In many respects I had something of a head start on other school ethnographers.....I had after all been a teacher of some ten years duration. Indeed if that hadn't been the case I don't think I would have elected to focus upon the school cultures of girls in the first place.

In coming to the experiences of girls as culturally produced, I went to the school principally for two reasons ; one being the practical considerations of access ie. in this society schools provide one of the few material bases for collectivities of girls (a rather over-simple faith as it turned out. See the remainder of this chapter) and two being my previous involvement with the post-eleven school and college culture.

In the event, my past knowledge worked both to dilute my own awareness about the defensive nature of professional life whilst paradoxically providing me with the essential personal resources to manage the rejections which came from this same source.

I don't want to exaggerate the difficulties of my stay at C school if only because they became reconverted into very interesting opportunities which actually succeeded in delivering to me something of the same form of marginalisation which the girls with whom I was working shared. Our 'solidarity' probably was the more easily established from the ostensible impediments to its' achievement.

But I want to say something of the constraints affecting my work right at the beginning, not for some sort of self-congratulation but to make the case for the recognition of the necessarily stressful life of an adult researching on and with young people. A stress which is compounded by the researcher being both feminist and the subjects being female.

In a sense my work demonstrates that these differences can become sources of mutuality and collectivity and that the actual circumstances in which such work takes place can also constitute a commentary upon gender antagonisms of such locations. And as such my little local difficulties are as nothing compared to the systematic structures of oppression which confront these girls, whose friendship and help ameliorated my own insecurities in the face of the indecisive and unreliable senior level support at C school.

In many ways the friendship of the girls in both schools more than compensated for the suspicions of the staff, the withdrawal of

access facilities, the covert and sometimes overt hostility of the boys, so that it functioned in precisely the same way with me as I identified it as working amongst themselves. This was one of the most interesting 'findings' of the earliest part of my field work. As such it provides another gloss on the arguments about good fieldwork practice, which I think is often obliterated in the fine detail of the debate over 'doing feminist research'.

Issues of time and space and interest mean that I am not going to rehearse these arguments here, instead I am going to return to another 'dilemma' about dealing with the impact of choosing girls as respondents/subjects and of recording this choice in terms of the effect upon the 'marginalised' male peers.

I will deal with this in a specific section (See this chapter section 4)

However, before then I would like to comment upon the historical, geo-political, economic, and social environments of the two schools.

2. The Metropolitan Borough of Westpark.

The borough is twenty two square miles, the eighth largest in London. It is situated on the north bank of the River Thames and has shown traces of a Neolithic past but it was probably the Romans who left the most enduring landmark, in their typically ambitious construction of a road which ran the whole length of the borough and which now forms its' spine from the west to the east.

The two schools, B school in Crossfil and C school in Eastfax, lay either side of this spine and although only separated by a few miles are situated each within diverse locales so characteristic of city life.

Historically, Westpark was the home of brickmaking and timber cultivation which gave way in later decades to gunpowder manufacture which formed the basis of a thriving industry from medieaval times for four centuries. The last gunpowder makers in the borough finally closed down in 1926. Simultaneously the borough developed its' capacity as a market garden and orchard centre to feed the rapidly expanding populace of the 19th century inner city.

It is, for example, estimated that at one time the borough had over 3,000 acres devoted to fruit growing. (Borough Profile 1985/86)

Crossfil was described in this same publication as having :

'Expanded rapidly as a coaching stop on the main road to London, and later as a port for river and canal traffic' which went into something of a historical decline with the advent of the railway. However, before the switch from water to rail, several other major manufacturing plants had established their location in Crossfil on the strength of the site's easy accessibility for barge transportation. In the nineteenth century it housed a vast laundry, a gas works, saw mill, a huge gin distillery, and a chemical works which all sprang up along the expanding westward direction of London following the natural transport routes utilised in the movement of coal and other raw materials.

In contrast, Eastfax had by the 18th and 19th century, attracted the interests of the gentry and the lesser aristocracy, whose lifestyles were able to support the more substantial^e properties and grounds which their income encouraged.

I mention these past associations because they are still current in more diluted and fragmentary form even today. The social status of belonging to a 'nice' address in Eastfax registers just that much more of worldly success than having a home in a 'nice' part of Crossfil. But again qualifications have to be made. In London some roads are upwardly mobile and some distinctly downwardly going - further given the inordinately expensive cost of any London accomodation Crossfil is becoming more like Eastfax every day. Indeed even the artisans's houses which dominate the area (in equal proportion to the council blocks and develop^lments) fetch £70,000

plus. Gentrification continues apace even if it is not yet sufficient to erase totally its' proletarian historical identity.

An identity best personified perhaps, by the looming presence of the borough's own ailing football club based in Crossfil. Forced to market themselves afresh to the ever decreasing number of supporters and increasingly reliant upon the hi-tech and service sector businesses for financial solvency, through sponsorship deals, Crossfil United struggle in the third division, with dwindling gates and poor form.

Crossfil's location, only a stone's throw away from one of London's great arterial roads, makes it a particularly interesting locale, registering as it does the deeper rhythms of the economic and social alterations of the post-Thatcher 'modernisation' initiative. The major consequences of which prompted a profound disruption to the older manufacturing base which used to provide most of the employment in the borough in general and in Crossfil in particular.

And although my stay at B school was not extensive, my familiarity with the area made it relatively easy for me to map how this new 'enterprise' culture intersected with the girls' expectations.

Eastfax's more visibly middle class environment meant that it seemed more cushioned, at least visually, from the more proletarian concerns of unemployment, poverty, poor housing and neglect. Certainly as a physical environment it was extremely attractive, that is apart from the horrifically busy Great Surrey Road which split C school

off from the nearby shops. But for the most part, its' large playing fields, recently developed new arts/crafts facilities and solid, if uninspiring, main building did 'look' better resourced and more affluent than the ad-hoc jumble of buildings which made up B school.

The latter's neighbourhood seemed almost to have taken over any spare land that the school could have well used for its' own expansion ; altogether the impression was one of over-crowding here. A situation in contrast ^{with} the bourgeois aesthetic of C school seen in its' large playing fields, proximity to the river and the parks, and the detached houses-tended to give the impression of an independent school, which neither its' current pupil intake nor 'reputation' could substantiate.

Moving on from the physical aspects to the industrial and commercial description of Westpark, I want to indicate something more of the local economy. Not to suggest that this *automatically* transmits into the social realities of pupils' lives - because in London 'local economies' are more than anywhere else fragmenting under the impact of both new movements of capital facilitated by the prolific (rather than efficient) public transport system.

Westpark is in many ways symptomatic of what is happening to the British economy as a whole ; in the substitution of manufacturing industry for high technology, office developments, and service facilities. The borough profile records the solidity of the 19th century manufacturing base which developed alongside the great

westward road route, which grew to feed the market for consumer goods to reach its' nadir in the early 1960's. Adding pertinently that this expansion of the road as a major site suffered a drastic reverse in the mid-70's as 'several long established firms along the road have relocated to other parts of the country and their factory sites have been redeveloped as offices or as industrial warehousing'

A deeper investigation into the whole of the West London economy commissioned by the GLC in the early 1980's and entitled 'The West London Report' attempted to detail the precise character of the alterations to the 'factory mile'. And in so doing it posed a less sanguine view about the impact of the country's busiest airport on the borough's economic infrastructure. Its' researchers demonstrated the harsher facts behind the myth of the 'booming' economy which was said to have been stimulated by its' expansion.

In contrast the writers claim that :

'The switch over from manufacturing to warehousing uses in West London has been underpinned by the change in ownership of property and land from major manufacturing employers. As part of their restructuring programme they continue to capitalise on their assets in the enhanced high value property market of the western corridor providing opportunities for pension funds and insurance companies to create speculative warehousing developments at the expense of the skilled manufacturing workers of the local

community.'

West London Report page 33

Thus a tyre company's famous listed building was bulldozed to be replaced by a vast glass office complex with the loss of 2,000 jobs. This 'feminisation' of the economy has probably accounted for the surprisingly high percentage of women in paid employment in the locality. I suspect that the displacement of older manufacturing jobs by newer service ones means, amongst other things, the possible 'widening' of female part time employment opportunities.

Interestingly this aspect of the shifts within the local economy were not stressed in the report, though some of the ramifications of these changes upon ethnic employment patterns were.

Indeed the borough's own extrapolation from the 1981 census indicates that : 'The number of working mothers in Westpark has tended to be higher than the national average largely due to the favourable local employment conditions, particularly for women.'

According to this publication where Westpark residents were found to occupy 67% and 72% of service jobs - male and female respectively (OPCS Census 1981) whilst this broke down even further when posed as the precise type of service sector job Westpark females predominantly engaged in : →

'Amongst women, occupational groupings are much more concentrated with 70% of women being employed in three types of occupation :

1. Clerical (40%)
2. Catering, cleaning, hairdressing, and other personal services.
3. Professional, including education, welfare and health.'

Important though it is to register the economic activity rates for residents, it should not be forgotten that women's availability for employment is not only predicated upon their childcare and other dependent responsibilities but is also closely linked to the actual availability of suitable work which matches in with these other commitments ie. school timings etc. Thus whilst Westpark mothers were highly implicated in the economy there were predictable differences not only about the type of work available to them but also its' status both in terms of skill rating and duration.

In a sense all these things run together : one of the worst paid jobs within the borough was that of doing shift work cleaning at the air terminals and this was done characteristically by Asian women who lived in close proximity. Indeed even within the rather bland prose of the profile the sexually and racially segregated nature of the local economy was plainly visible in the descriptions of the allocation of resources, and opportunities ; of decent jobs, and good housing for example.

Thus it comes as no surprise to read that of the 66% of women registered in work in 1981 nearly a half were in part-time employment (Married women) The figures for lone mothers were 58% in jobs of which 32 % was of a part-time nature. (These statistics all refer to women with children aged between 5-15.)

Something of the 'flavour' of local employment patterns is indicated in the development of new shift rotas at United Biscuits factory in a nearby site :

'UB's food division announced in 1982 that it was hoping to move towards employing only part-timers in its' factories keeping them open 75 hours a week on three 25 hour shifts. This it is claimed would suit the 90% of the current workforce who are women '

(West London Report GLC my emphasis)

As the report goes on to show this practice further institutionalises the 'almost total sexual and racial division of labour' characteristic of most British, not to mention world wide, capital accumulation.

Because of the relative prosperity of London compared to other areas more blighted by the effects of capital restructuring and because of the relative prosperity of West London within this - then factors of deprivation and pockets of social disadvantage are the more easily overlooked. Indeed it is important to recognise

that within Westpark itself there was a very wide range of incomes and opportunities, with this being the case even within small geographical areas too.

Thus surrounding both schools and constituting their respective catchment areas, owner-occupation flourished alongside council tenancy : in the forms of the discredited tower blocks of Crossfil or the 1920's tenements recently re-furbished by the council which supplied many of the pupils for Eastfax's C school. Single parenthood, frequently used rather carelessly as some measure of deprivation, was the predominant family form of the 1984 intake at the Eastfax school ie. 52% of children of the first form intake. And this pattern was even more established in the 2nd year when 62% of children were in single parent units. (Findings from a report on Pastoral care at C school)

I don't have comparable figures for Crossfil school where the situation is complexified by the high percentage of the most recent intake being from the Asian community where there is far less likelihood of single parenting. The ethnic differences of the school to some extent map the ethnic ditribution of the borough - which contained, according to the 1981 census, the following breakdown of heads of household described by country of birth - to produce the following ethnic composition :

Ethnic Composition of households in Westpark 1981.

Birthplace of Head of Household Households Residents →

	Number	%	Number	%
United Kingdom	58,000	79.9	145,129	73.8
Eire	2,500	3.5	7,558	3.8
Indian Sub-Continent & East Africa	6,380	8.8	26,799	13.6
Africa/Caribbean	970	1.3	3,343	1.7
Other	4,730	6.5	13,941	7.1

The Asian population is heavily concentrated in the area to the west end of the borough whilst the eastern end hosts other ethnically diverse groups ranging from Eastern European and West Indian as well as Irish families. How this ethnic patterning dispersed amongst the various schools is highly contradictory and different for each of the schools I visited.

As I don't have access to accurate ethnic/social class breakdowns of each school I have to be dependent upon the impressions mediated to me by school senior staff who sought to characterise their respective school compositions.

Asking for data of this type was always greeted with a certain

frisson, as if it wasn't quite a decent enquiry. This could be because of the political sensitivities invoked in any association of class/race with performance : issues which when posed in the context of girls and underachievement caused quite a stir in Eastfax's C school. (Note 1)

Indeed it was this latter anxiety over girls performance in mixed schools, closely allied to the preference of the more orthodox Muslim families for single sex education, which had provided the large influx of Asian girls into Crossfil's single sex school. Though this had itself changed in recent years with the phasing out of discretionary fares which discouraged these parents from sending their daughters from one end of the borough to the other. Thus in Crossfil's school the 4th/5th and 6th years had almost equal numbers of black and white pupils whilst the newer intake into the school was less evenly divided.

According to the senior staff at B school this depletion in girls from the Asian communities also evidences the increasingly liberal attitudes of these communities with respect to their previous insistence on single sex education.

Thus, when staff described the school as having hosted three generations of the same family, they inadvertently reference the older established white community from the immediate vicinity who had been sending their daughters to the school since it opened on its' current site in the 1930's. Its' sense of homogeneity, which they insist on, is very much that of a neighbourhood secondary

school fed by the 'locals' whose ascribed ability as 'average' working class meant that they felt themselves as teachers suitably well experienced in measuring up to the task of motivating the 'comprehensive' child.

The school, originally built from public subscription in the 1834 and opened as the British School, became then the subject of the beneficence of local plutocrats - who endowed the school in the beginning of the 20th century. In 1930 it was redesignated as a senior school, accomodating both boys and girls but in 1968 the boys peeled off to their own school, leaving it to be fully comprehensivised and female only.

This history has had a tremendous effect not only upon the school's 'reputation' (almost as elusive a concept as a girl's !) in the sense of the 'secondary modernism' of the expectations of most of its pupils (and possibly of some of its' staff Note 2), but also upon the actual physical facilities available for the girls whose disadvantageous access to science and CDT and other 'male' areas is acutely observed in the simple lack of such facilities. A situation which is rapidly being attended to according to the insistence of the acting head teacher in co-operation with the local authority's increasing commitment to Equal Opportunities.

Similarly the social class mix is undergoing some transformations as registered in the increasing 'gentrification' of the area, where even modest terraced cottages can now fetch £70,000 plus.

Thus the myth of 'homogeneity' as white working class is being also fundamentally rewritten by the addition of the more affluent middle class neighbours - who, impressed by some of the arguments about the academic benefits of single sex education for girls, are bussing in their offspring in the hope of achieving a better opportunity for their child.

Increasingly therefore the school's 'reputation' as being able to deliver high academic standards (the school boasted a physics undergraduate at Oxford ; a choral scholar and a past pupil doing well at Leeds University) was seen as attracting the higher aspirations of Eastfax's parents, for example, and this was cited as an esclating phenomenon and in the last case as definately related to the local intelligence about 'what was going on at other schools'.

The inter-school competitiveness of which such talk is indicative does not mean that I discount these 'subjective' impressions at all. Far from it, they are the stock in trade of the ethnographic method, but they do raise questions about verifiability with respect to exam performance, success rates and pupil destinations.

But in the light of my not having access to such data either because, by its nature it is both controversial to collect and to definitively measure, I have to rely upon the 'feel' of a place, rather like prospective parents do. However if it is important not to discount these statements of the respective staff as being

the mere utterances of self-interested parties - it is also important to register the extent to which both schools feel under inordinate pressure to keep their numbers up, fearing that staff job security was definitely under threat from demographic changes which have reduced all recent secondary school rolls.

Thus Crossfil's B school contracted from 6 form entry to 4 form entry over 4 years. and Eastfax's C school 9 form entry to 5 form entry over 5 years.

The local education authority's policy of expanding community education, directly applied yet another tension to the numbers game, in that this scenario, premised on integrating the school more fully into the life of the surrounding area to open up its facilities to all, threatened to attack the conditions of service of the staff committed to a regular school timetable. This was not so much of an issue in Crossfil but Eastfax's militant staff were keenly resisting the development : thinking as one teacher put it, 'That the authority want to do this on the cheap.'

In the climate of disappearing pupils, the move to make the school more open access seemed to smack of opportunism and this suspicion when allied to the teachers' action (in operation throughout the full length of my tenure in both schools) certainly made for a heightened temperature inside Eastfax's C school. I will return to these teacher politics later if only because they had a direct impact upon the issue of my own negotiating stance within C school which eventually propelled me into Crossfil's all girl institution.

3. 'Down and Going : Up and Coming' : Ethos and Reputation
in Two Westpark Schools.

If Crossfil's school was upwardly going in the sense of its' perceived ability to administer to the aspirations of some of its' more ambitious girl students and their parents, then the opposite seemed to be true for the ethos within Eastfax's mixed comprehensive.

If within Crossfil's B school, the staff tended to demonstrate high morale coupled with a sense of 'being on top' of the job, as one year head expressed it to me, the Eastfax scenario evinced less conviction in terms of having the necessary resources of good will and good team performance to secure the sort of commitment which makes or breaks a school.

Until very recently C school had always enjoyed a 'good reputation', in part this was a carry over in terms of its' original building being the boys' grammar school since its inauguration in the 1920's. In the intervening years it had an enviable record of producing good academic results and competent sportsmen. It had been comprehensive for 13 years as a result of a merger which brought together the old grammar schools for boys and girls plus the parallel integration of the two secondary modern schools. They all were rationalised into one institution on its' present spacious site in 1982. The new

school retaining a strong vestige of the old male grammar school 'masters' whose retention of 'grammar school' mores frequently acted as sources of difference amongst the already heterogeneous staff.

Teacher unemployment and lack of career prospects meant a slowing down of staff mobility in present times which seems to have produced an ill-tempered and rather brittle 'stability' amongst the staff here making for a fair amount of dislocation and disagreements within all levels of the management teams within the school. This was personified for me by the existence of three interconnecting but 'separate' staff-rooms.

Historical precedent seemed to have dictated that the 'masters' occupied the quieter, non-smoking 'senior' end which aspired to the atmosphere of an Oxbridge common room. The middle chamber was peopled by the 'activists' whose political concerns to make the teachers' sanctions work - united with their distrust of new initiatives to produce a high level of solidarity and energy which they frequently articulated either in the open staff meetings (severely curtailed precisely because of the action) or which more subversively found an outlet in their involvement in the publication of an alternative bulletin : a series of running commentaries upon the management of the school, the borough, the county and the country.

Written in their own argot of elaborate parodies, rich in literary allusions it certainly was more readable than the worthy prose of the official one.

The end room, nearest the tea counter, were the non-aligned : a mix of 'staff room wags' and crossword fanatics, younger staff on the whole with the addition of older and quieter female staff, engaged within the same remedial department. It was with this group that I felt most 'at ease', particularly enjoying the support and company of one self-declared feminist, who along with the newly appointed deputy head and the form tutor of 1 and later 2M were my principal adult contacts. Not that I ever felt truly 'comfortable' inside the staff room or about the school. I was made much more welcome by the girls themselves thankfully, who tolerated my presence with amazing fortitude. I always felt more at home on the playing fields, at the local cafe, down the 'prom', anywhere when break meant our freedom from the rather oppressive main building. I will say more of this later.

In some contrast Crossfil's staff occupied one room and generally seemed to have worked at establishing a more 'caring' environment.

It's very hard to specify this but when I was first negotiating access I had the impression (and this was indeed borne out in practice) that the way pupils were referred to at B school testified to a genuine sense of concern for them, a sense of the staff actively liking even the most difficult of girls, an atmosphere evincing a warmth and an understanding based upon 'knowing' them and even appreciating their often aberrant qualities.

I wouldn't want to over-generalise here in citing a school 'ethos'. It is often necessarily the case that nuances and starker differences

between individual staff members are elided. Indeed one male member of staff at Crossfil's school provided me with the most alarming example of a discourse both unprofessional and utterly sexist whilst one of the most successful relationships I saw blossom was between a new probationer at C school who welcomed both me and her new charges with equal openness and vigour.

But at the level of the institutional 'ambience' Crossfil's girls seemed more 'cherished' (and I use the word without equivocation) than Eastfax's students. I never, for example, heard of pupils damaging cars at B school (an end of term speciality of the fifth form boy leavers at C school, nor smearing excreta on the handles to a form room, nor engaging in grafitti raids on internal school walls. This is hardly the litmus test of client satisfaction, it could actually be ^egender related of course. On another indicator, truancy for example, I have no evidence to suppose that C school was any worse than B school - indeed it seemed pretty endemic in both (amongst certain factions). But I got the sense of it mattering in Crossfil if girls were suspected of having 'bunked'.

In the midst of the serious morale problems at C school, exacerbated by the solid application of teacher sanctions on 'no cover' (ie. in case of sickness, cancellation of out of school trips, non-essential meetings, parents evenings) then the policing of pupils became simply unworkable when so many pupils were being sent home legitimately. (Note 3)

The student body of Eastfax's school were split along the following

class lines : 2 in 3 pupils coming from working class homes whilst the remaining third were middle class. Its' gender composition divided in similar proportions too, with the school having just over 450 girls out of a total school population of 1,200 (year 1985). A figure entirely commensurate with the distribution within ILEA mixed schools. An unevenness which reflects the preference some parents of all classes are showing for their daughters to be educated in single sex establishments.

This class profile probably reveals a higher than average presence of high-earning parents using the school (especially given the competition from the prestigious private boys' and girls' schools within the locality) and shows something of the past power of the school to compete - a power which I have tried to show as diminishing in effectivity. Certainly the proximity of upmarket sectors of Eastfax to the school geographically and its' attractive location aided the recruitment of pupils of academically minded parents and given that Eastfax was a media-persons enclave (partly because it was one of the most desirable locations near to the BBC's Wood Lane centre!) the school's upper forms had more than its share of 'celebrity's' children - whose presence seemed to be cited as enduring evidence of the school's status and indeed these same parents were the backbone of the thriving theatre club which flourished despite the difficulties of the rest of the school.

Ethnically Eastfax's C school was much more homogeneous : the school being predominantly white with approximately 10% of pupils from other ethnic categories : the largest group were probably Afro-Caribbean

students and Asian children : with some recently arrived refugees from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos.

These differences between the schools both reflect the class nature of the schools 'catchment' area and the class and ethnic distribution within the borough itself. I have already explained the reasons for the changing composition within Crossfil's school as integral to the cultural make-up of the Western population of the borough with its' lack of girl only schools - a trend in recent reversal since the abolition of free/discretionary travel. Historically the Eastern parameters of Westpark with their greater availability of private rented property have housed the small West Indian community and this is still the case today.

I want now to move from mapping out something of the respective cultures of the two schools to suggesting how these cultures impact upon the performance, values and expectations of their girl pupils. It is inordinately difficult to summarise these highly diffuse and contradictory processes but I think it is important to try to show something of the effectivity of each school climate as one of the many diverse influences articulating with the wider economic, social and ideological forces which also constitute the 'outside' as well as the 'inside' of every social institution.

I have tried to give the 'feel' of each place and its' immediate environment and to register something of the way the multi-cultural mix is sedimented upon historically produced classed

communities : the social relations of which are all complicit with the movements inside the local, national and international economy.

Perhaps the ambitions of the argument are defeated by the sheer descriptive difficulties of having to hold onto the multivarious qualifications which such a task necessitates ? However I thought it important to try to give a slice of the Crossfil and Eastfax social ecology to set up the backcloth to my findings not with a view to make any direct comparisons but as showing something of the enormous diversity within the raw material as actively and self-evidently responsible for producing the discontinuities within the girls' accounts - whilst simultaneously and more intriguingly demonstrating the failure of these differences to suppress their shared (though differentiated) subordination to patriarchal relations - manifest in institutional life, community relations, ideological 'common sense', boys' practices and girls' own understandings.

Femininity after all is not something girls can opt out of !
Like colour it is with you for life.

4. 'Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative, Latch onto the Affirmative and Don't Mess With Mister Inbetween!' :
Things I Wish I'd Known About Being a Feminist Researching Into Girls.

Before addressing the question posed in the preceding section ie. how do girls take up the culture of the school in their practice and more precisely how is this seen in the aspirations and values of those girls who became my confidantes - I'd like to move the discussion onto another level of analysis which it is necessary to insert at this point.

I'd like to show something of the 'fine print' of my ethnographic experiences - itself something of a case study in gender politics.

An essential pre-condition for the type of information divulged is the circumstance surrounding its' solicitation : the two processes are but opposite sides of the same piece of paper meta-phorically speaking.

Thus it is important to register the way that the narrative of the methodological project, in this case that of ethnography, was actually done. I once heard a speaker at a conference quote a Martin Hammersley precept : 'That research was like a voyage of discovery

where you spend most of your time out at sea.'

Certainly it felt just this way to me as I graduated from the 'Just hanging around' principle to the more structured formulae of participant observation within lessons, form periods, school assemblies and school breaks. Being an existentialist by temperament probably kept me from feeling completely unfocussed and the bureaucratic impulsions of institutional life for, bells, routines and schedules propelled me along with my subjects to the next locale.

Having set up, along with most other research students I gather, an unfulfillable brief : which if I'd have tried to deliver would have required a decade of work at least ! - the pragmatics of timing, energy and absorption by the predominant force of one particular theme - female friendships which honed down the field of vision to more manageable proportions, once I'd begun to practice this 'being there' pose. So having shifted my emphasis from that of trying to identify those processes in which girls actively engaged to manage the contradictions of femininity, to that of the more relational focus of these cultural reproductions and contestations - I was indeed responding to the situation at hand.

It wasn't so much that I chose to concentrate on the homosocial constructions of girls' lives it seemed to choose me. Maybe this is what Angela McRobbie means when she says that subjects 'hijack' you?

Thus the horrible vagueness of 'gender disaffiliation' as a working theme, gave way to the more concrete and mainstream recognition of the all important investments girls bring to and get from each other.

And if this was the case then it was worthy of investigation since it seemed to suggest that the cruder model of female behaviour as either more or less collusive with oppression was of only limited value in understanding the wholesale reliance girls placed on their female relationships.

Paradoxically, the more I became fascinated by the particularities of female friendship, the more it taught me about the culture of heterosocial and heterosexual relations. Because unlike the assumptions which are held as truths for older girls ie. that the 'boy-friend' automatically dislocates the girl's best friend (an assumption recently challenged in some sociological work on NE hairdressers with unemployed boyfriends. Note 4) the material locality of a mixed comprehensive makes it far more likely that girls' conduct complex trade offs involving their shared time and status as girls' 'best-friends' and boys' 'girl-friends'. Girls proved to need both and whilst the failure to 'get a man' was often a source of much misery in older girls in particular (Eg. One of the girls who provided me with her personal diary recorded throughout its' duration, an abiding fear that she was not pretty enough to 'get a boyfriend') Indeed the questionnaires I distributed at B school on self-image are laced with evidence of endemic dieting as the taken for granted solution to self-perceptions of 'fatness'- the isolation and pain of either not having or losing a cherished

girl-friend was compelling too. (See the notes sequence in Fragments of a Friendship and the ensuing emotional turmoil which will be discussed in Chapter 3)

It is extremely hard to reconstruct the actual sequences within which the narrative of female friendship displaced the wider theoretic project. In a sense the ambitions of the original proposal, which was very much about the need to register the resistance and struggles involved in the making of adolescent femininity, were merely re-expressed in another form - whose materiality drew it so loudly to my attention.

It is at this juncture that I have to move the account into an abbreviated description of other pragmatic factors impinging upon my earlier free-wheeling conceptualisation of 'girls cultures'. For, embedded within this next heavily edited sequence, are some of the real material difficulties encountered as I tried to do my 'hanging about'. These problems proved instrumental in pushing me into various practices which probably more effectively than other more 'professional' techniques or styles secured my 'identification' with the girls who became my subjects at C school. These problems are chiefly to do with access and as far as C school were concerned they were 'solved' by the head passing me onto another nearby school, like some poisoned chalice.

My reluctance to compare B and C school stems not only from this explicit comparison as missing from the original problematic which had meant to feature some comparison of the cultural repertoire of

middle-class with working class girls but had not sought as part of the initial design to represent this within two distinct institutions.

But it also lies within my ^erecognition of the immense generosity shown to me at B school which made my brief stay so welcome and where access proved as easy as walking through the door.

Conversely the failure of the Head at C school to keep to his side of the access bargain which was less than lucidly struck I must admit (I had by then been refused access to several schools and was rather panicking about getting into any at all) similarly feeds a sense of bad faith - a feeling I am not self-centred enough to believe is not also shared by him. In a sense the problem of negotiating with mixed schools about girls' values, cultures etc speaks for itself.

In the opening bid to gain permission to research on girls in C school in Eastfax I was somewhat circumspect about the precise nature of what my being in school might involve, by then I desperately wanted access to a local mixed comprehensive school and I was fast running out of them and time was pressing. On reflection I probably was less than accurate about the purpose of my research and less than clear about what the school would 'gain' from having me around. I had tried to express my position as being interested in recording the behaviour and values of different groups of girls over a year and I had insisted that the focus of my work was not so much that of adult/pupil relations as about female/female pupil relations and the hidden agenda of their social worlds.

But despite this emphasis, my original loosely formulated request, was usually 'read' by the staff as though I was somehow monitoring them for equal opportunity performances. At least this is the impression they conveyed to me. The mismatch between my intentions and their perceptions was never satisfactorily resolved and the misunderstanding and lack of communication about this mediated my public reception throughout the school.

Having got into a school I felt that I had to persevere despite their and my apprehensions. In a way I should have been alerted to this possibility (of being treated with suspicion) given the texture of my first meeting with the head, who spent most of the time defending the school's practice with regard to its' female pupils. For example, he defensively emphasised the innovative design course which all the pupils took and the fact that the disproportionate number of boys was probably a crucial factor in determining how the girls performed within the school.

I did the best I could to explain myself more satisfactorily to those less defensive teachers who proved both open and welcoming of me within their classrooms, and on the whole, rather like the girls, I made the best of it. If it hadn't been for the assistance of some of the female staff at C school I would have been frozen out of extensive classroom observation entirely.

That I managed to obtain such rich material is mostly thanks to the immense forbearance of the girls, who put up with me during

their lunch hours, their free time at breaks, their morning tutor times and who invited me home when they had been sent 'off the premises' as required by the no-cover action. Those who 'took me in hand' and 'showed me the ropes', who let me tag along with them on their jaunts to the local 'prom' and recreation ground when they were not allowed on the school site during the dispute. Especially Carol, whose patronage greatly eased my initiation into the culture of female friendship, which she herself so often refused.

Neither me, nor my stomach, will ever forget our many visits to the 'Pond Cafe' safe refuge for so many of the Eastfax's school refusniks : indeed the more I was actually marginalised by the institution, the more I was actually forced to act the vagrant, some of the staff thought I was. Towards the end of my time at C school I felt exactly like the other truants, skulking around corridors, only going into lessons I 'liked' (ie where the staff had made it plain that they welcomed me) and finding nice safe spaces to make my tapes and continue my work.

I was never short of fresh air at C school since very soon into the work I realised that if there was a lot going on within school supervision there is even more 'girls' work' going on at breaks : I certainly felt odd at playtime initially, but this wore off, if only because I felt even odder sitting in the staff room.

I used to make regular appointments to meet my contacts which gradually grew from the small core of girls in the fifth form - the trio - to include Carol and her acquaintances in the third year, to

the girls in 3G, the best friends Amelia and Gabbie of 3H : another trio of girls from 3C and all the girls from 1M with whom I spent most of my participant observation time. Since my tenure at the school lapsed over the end of one academic year and two terms of another, I was able to track girls from the whole age range from the first to the sixth year.

Additionally I got to know several other girls who 'tagged along' with me when I was 'tagging along' with someone else. Because of the way the divisions worked at C school and because I tracked various groups I was able to make other connections with girls from outside my immediate contact group. PE featured as a whole year activity and despite my nervousness about joining in with this more strenuous part of the curriculum I did find it one of the most facilitative mechanisms for introducing myself to the girls and this natural camaraderie was made that much easier by the significant absence of boys from the scene.

PE was one of the few all female times in the school that I witnessed where 'girls could be girls' in the privacy of their own space. I certainly enjoyed these rare moments and like the girls appreciated the sense of fun and relaxation generated in the changing rooms and gym halls. In part this was a consequence of the superb female staff who were mostly responsible for the creation of this mini-ethos of solidarity.

My opting to do games meant that I had been serious about wanting to get to know their lives in school and it acted as a test

of that seriousness. It was one of the many 'daft' things I did in the course of my time there and it eased my acceptance as an 'outsider'. Indeed if I was expecting them to welcome my intrusion into their lives then they had every reason to expect me to add to rather than subtract from it.

Just as I saw one of the trade offs as my being a 'bit of a laugh' (when occasion permitted - there is not much to laugh at in schools) I also tried to answer their questions about some of the things which worried them, some of it advice on the problems of growing up, listened to their personal stories of family upsets, palled up with them when their all-important 'best' was away.

Not that I ever felt able to repay them in any way for the friendship shown to me. I think that part of their openness was produced out of the very circumstances which made for their marginalisation ie. that their willingness to tolerate me is not at all a comment upon my personal charisma or methodological competence but is in fact constituted from their being 'flattered' that anybody should find them interesting in the first place.

Janet Finch has similar evidence of female receptivity in her account of research she did into play-group mothers and vicars' wives. (Finch 1984) Similarly Ann Oakley shared this pleasure in female openness in her description of the reality of 'Interviewing Women', though as Angela McRobbie cautions :

'But what I think Oakley fails to recognise is the way
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that as a researcher she had everything going for her. At no time does she dwell on the question of their co-operation. She doesn't concern herself with the fact that pregnant, in hospital, often cut-off from family and relatives, it's no surprise that the women were delighted to find a friendly, articulate, clever and knowledgeable woman to talk about their experiences. Surrounded by distant and aloof doctors and over-worked nurses, their extreme involvement in the research could also be interpreted as yet another index of their powerlessness.'

A. McRobbie : 'The Politics of Feminist Research : Between Talk, Text and Action.' Feminist Review 12 1982 p57

This double edged interpretation of female co-operation is undoubtedly present in my own work too.

Before I go onto show the logistics of managing my time at C school, I want to add to this section of the account by making some remarks, which like the above comments contribute to an understanding that the processes of data collection are inextricably linked to the subject matter being elicited.

Thus the political choice I made to put girl as centre stage caused staff defensiveness (especially amongst the male staff but not automatically so, several female staff expressed unease over this) and further that this suspicion was actively shared by the boys

who wanted to know why I was excluding them. This presumption of male rights to attention (which will be expanded upon in an ensuing chapter) also evidenced in their greater freedom to 'show off' was also expressed to me when some of them quizzed me or their teacher about the 'funniness' of my topic :

'(I saw FC the 'trio's' English teacher)

She said that the boys had been indignant with my concentration on girls and that they had wanted to know why my topic was so 'odd'. She had replied that it was difficult to select original research topics and cited to them the case of her friend who was doing research on "Fish Symbolism in Shakespeare"!

FN 1 p38-39

That girls are the equivalent of 'fish' just about sums up the character of adolescent male sensibility. The male as norm principle also took on less benign aspects during the course of my field work at C school, which also underlined the depth of the resentment certain boys felt.

These 'strange' moments at the school, or more accurately on the way to and from the site, indicated that this hostility was not merely verbal. In that on a couple of occasions I was the victim of open hostility and intimidation. It is tempting to read it as the 'natural' suspicions of pupils towards adults but I think something else was going on than simple anti-authoritary posturing.

I had specifically (and perhaps foolishly) pointed out that I had no authority in an institutional sense over the pupils : I could not punish any misdemeanour and I had never sought to pretend otherwise.

So how to explain their antagonism ? My first guess is that the male grapevine were actively trying to resist their exclusion and that the boys were showing a grievance about it. These instances involved me in several weirdly orchestrated 'stare-outs', plus two occasions when they threw things at me, accompanied by name calling and abuse.

Maybe the issue has more to do with my stranger/unknown status ? Possibly, I cannot separate out this more understandable enmity from a recognition that they realised I wasn't a stranger to some of the girls. I couldn't exactly ask them and expect them to provide me with the transparent truth!

All I had to go on were their actions, which as typically authoritarian - centered male power ploys, I'd met many times before in the repertoire of highly macho boys. As a teacher I had understood this behaviour as the kneejerk expression of a particular male style which seeks to recoup its' masculinity (held in check by bigger/tougher men) by venting this on 'softer' females. That female authority is often attacked in this way is now becoming the focus of much important work being undertaken by feminist teachers' groups within ILEA. (Note 5)

That I was singled out for this attack I am sure is not accidental but is crucially linked to my gender and the gender of those whom my work seeks to represent. I have full accounts of these bizarre instances in my field notes and the actions I personally took to deal with them. I don't want to publicise them anymore, I allude to them here as testimony to the continuum of 'obstacles' which were literally and metaphorically put in my path in the course of my work.

And whilst I wouldn't subscribe to the existence of the male conspiracy theory I wouldn't go so far as to dispense with the concept of male conspirators!

5. 'A Stranger Across a Crowded Room'

I draw attention to these negative experiences and local difficulties, initially to provide the context to the political culture within the school : by this I mean to register the way in which my insertion into an already fractured and demoralised climate meant that I was in a situation whose contradictions made for the very difficult personal management of my own 'front'. As a 'stranger' I was obviously beholden to the Head's 'permission' and to the tolerance of staff (and students too!) and as such I had to rely upon the good will of everybody when that was the very commodity which was in the shortest supply ; not only as the result of past staff and senior management team differences and suspicions but which by sheer timing were lucidly focussed in the light of the teachers' dispute when both of the main teaching unions were resolute in applying the sanctions in defence of their negotiating positions.

For example, no teacher other than one renegade, braved the school canteen since it was union policy to vacate the premises in order to try to shut down the school at lunch time. The only staff who prevented this eventuality were the head and one of his deputies who patrolled the room taking the chief responsibility for policing the 400 or so students who ate there. This bitter split seemed to

personify the tensions within the school, though it did not exhaust the provenance of their expression. Hence there were differences about the level of commitment to community education, to the new exams being introduced, to the pastoral hierarchy and to all sorts of crucial policy matters. I am not claiming that the school was exceptional in this but I do think that these differences produced heat rather than light and that in an institution where the temperature was high and the morale low, fragmentation and poor communication created very low staff tolerance thresholds.

I was yet one more straw to break the comprehensive's back and the fact that I was summarily 'suspended' before time, rather like a difficult child, needs to be recorded as one of those 'exciting' bits of field work which can 'hi-jack' you as well.

However before I left Eastfax's C school I did manage (believe it or not!) to do some classroom observation and to meet the girls aided by those members of staff who actively helped me in the commission of my work.

In shorthand form I want to simply list down a timetable of my involvement with the school and to convey something of the range of practices I deployed in trying to maintain my profile as a gatherer of the sort of data which I deemed essential to the task of representing the complexity of girls' social existences. The fact that I had to keep shifting my research antenna around in the direction of the best reception and the richest opportunities meant that I became almost as familiar as the girls with all those

marginal spaces within a social institution where female needs are expressed in spite of, rather than because of, the general cultural frame. This reser^a_h calender (See APPENDIX A) will contain two narratives therefore :

1. the negotiation of access and the renegotiation of access.
2. the girls in various classes and their preoccupations.

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The main organising element in this chapter has been the attempt to weave something of the narrative of the research methodology into the context of its' reception and deployment within both school settings, in particular this process was exemplified in Appendix A.

It is now time to draw this chapter to a close by providing in a fairly schematic way the enumeration of the time spent in various research activities : this will principally consist of a note of the respective number of hours I spent in classroom observation, since I have no reliable way of knowing the time I spent out of the classroom within the schools environment pursuing my work. Just like other ethnographers I found it impossible to know when I was 'on duty' so to speak and in truth I always experienced myself in this mode around and about a school and this feeling was with me all the time even when I wasn't anywhere near the school! It impacted upon how I related to young friends, my own friends and their children, everything I saw on television or in books or at the cinema (other prospective Ph.D's may know this feeling. I am beginning to think there is no cure!) So much so that one's whole consciousness (yes, I've even dreamed about it all) is filtered through the preoccupation. So if I was to enumerate the hours I've spent in this way they would literally be commensurate with most of my waking time since 1983 when I began this project. I can honestly say that only the transcendent and transformative experience of childbirth has been

more preoccupying!

In terms of annotated time spent in PO work within the two sites I have collated from my field notes over 200 hours spent within the classroom environment. Added to this are the facts of my almost continuous presence at Eastfax's C school for one year involving my participation in lunch and break activities as well as my presence in the formal curriculum as previously described.

My time at Crossfil's B school, though covering less of a time span was in its' condensed fashion very 'research friendly' and highly productive in terms of the school support demonstrated and the level of interest shown by the girls.

I have obtained over forty hours of taped material, most of it of a usable and engaging quality containing conversations with a variety of girls ranging from the first year right through to the sixth form.

I have gathered many diaries offered by the girls in response to my request for a slice of life 'week in their lives' and some material voluntarily given when other girls came to hear of my request.

Similarly I have acquired from younger friends samples of their diaries and examples of the note culture to support my feeling that these convey something of the emotional texture of girls' lives in ways which the more orthodox material cannot get to.

I have also in my possession over 200 times 4 themes questionnaires which space has not permitted me to comment upon except in very general ways. These were principally administered at Crossfil's B school to a whole 4th year cohort.

The remainder of this thesis will give form to one of the most substantive mechanisms which I identified as central to girls' enculturation into femininity, namely that 'the company she keeps' is both an account of resistance and capitulation, in other words, the rhythms and resistances of feminine friendship are structured out of the same contradictions which suffuse the rest of girls' lives.

Chapter 1

Notes

1. Item in Bulletin 9 November 1985 C school.

A copy of this item which contains the gender distribution of a range of O level results, showing what the deputy head called 'alarming' disparities, has temporarily been mislaid. As interesting as the figures are for what they might reveal about female underachievement the deputy's contextualising cautionary remarks are even more revealing for what they say of the school's sensitivity to parental concern over girls' performance in mixed schools.

2. This was not a universal value in the school. Indeed co-existing with this solidity of confidence in dealing with 'typical B school girls' was the rather eccentric subculture of treating the 'gals' like 'young ladies', a style favoured by the older single career women teachers and it no doubt reflected a nostalgia for their own 'nice' girls' schools.

3. At the height of the teachers' action in June 1986 a writer in 'The Guardian' using data from ILLEA, argued

that the truancy rate had escalated.

4. 'Love in a Cold Climate : Women, Class and Courtship in a Recession' Kris Beuret and Lynn Makings. BSA Conference paper 1986 Loughborough.
5. This theme was very much germane to the extracted information from the ILEA inspectorate's report on sexual harassment. See this and all the briefing papers distributed in preparation for the ILEA conference on sexual harassment, convened at the Institute of Education by ILEA Equal Opportunities advisory teachers on November 2nd, 1985.
6. 'Studying Girls at School : the Implications of Confusion' Mandy Llewellyn in Deem, R. Schooling for Women's Work. Routledge (1980) Her work is highly suggestive in expressing the 'difficulty' unattached girls encounter in trying to 'fit in' See for example her respondents' hostility to 'Diane Snail'

For another perspective on this see how some of the boys in Julian Wood's work : 'Groping Towards Sexism : Boys Sex Talk' treat the independent girl 'Eve' in McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. in Gender and Generation Macmillan (1984) p61-63
nb. how the same punitive categorisation of unfemininity is invoked in both instances.

See Chapter 6 this thesis for more discussion of these exclusions and their meanings. In this light it seems to me

we need a gendered concept of the catch-all phrase 'bullying'.
At the very least we need to re-interpret and politicise the
power dynamics to these in-group and out-person encounters.

CHAPTER 2

'A WORKING CLASS HERO IS SOMETHING TO BE'

John Lennon

'ONE OF THE LADS' : A CRITICAL REVIEW OF
SUBCULTURAL STUDIES AND THEIR FEMINIST
APPROPRIATION.

Contents.

1. 'Lads and Ear'oles' : Aspects of the Work of CCCS, Paul Willis, Angela McRobbie and the Politics of Class.
2. 'Semiotic Guerillas and Faces' : Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie and the Politics of Style.

1. 'Lads and Ear'oles' : Aspects of the Work of CCCS, Paul Willis, Angela McRobbie and the Politics of Class.

Introduction

Amelia in her diary spelled out the important things in her life :

'So the only things that are important are : my mum and dads (step and real dad) and Boys that's all I think of - oh yeh and clothes and what I look like and my family and Gabbie\ (her best friend) and my other close friends.'

January 1986

This is not only accurate in terms of self-reportage but it's a workable definition of the feminine realm, at least in regard to the articulation of white working class girls' values and priorities. Here we see the importance of the domestic, the heterosocial and homosocial domains (Note 1) expressed in the language of feelings, of desires and anxieties. (Note 2) The dominant frame is that of the relational - of the family, of fears about her heterosexual acceptability and almost by way of a throw away remark - her taken for granted acknowledgement of the

significance of her girl-friends.

As I have shown in the opening chapter, my recognition of the salience of this female realm of best-friendship which as the principal focus, enabled me to make coherent so many of the contradictions within the observable facts of female behaviour. As the chief way 'into' my understanding about the conceptual world of young girls it also impelled me to look at other descriptions of peer collectivities, one of the most influential and sympathetic of which - the subcultural model -will form the basis of this discussion of the literature.

From the outset, it is interesting to note, that if for girls, bonding is inevitably and explicitly about the dynamics of friendship ; male bonding is hardly ever commented upon in these terms. Indeed the subcultural model simply omits the male interpersonal realm altogether, leaving us with few insights into the 'inner workings' of male subcultural life. Thus, just as it is tempting to read girls' absence from the subcultural ethnographies too literally as indicating their empirical invisibility : it's even more tempting to speculate that on the basis of this evidence males don't have friends, or at least Mods, Rockers, Skinheads don't!

If this is true that issues of friendship are simply irrelevant to boys and young men, this is doubly ironic, given the fact of female invisibility similarly produced in the ensuing ethnographies.

This polarity around friendship : girls open expression of strong affiliative needs within the institution of best-friendship - boys' non-existent/displaced/disguised (?) desires for same sex companionship offers a caricatured but nevertheless useful first thought about the very different forms which adolescent femininity and masculinity takes, both at the level of lived reality and within the descriptive accounts which are given of those differences.

As such, and as my argument already intimates, questions about girls' social construction cannot be addressed by the application of the subcultural model to them, if only because it can't (in its' present formulation) even get close to issues of male identity - with which it is, on the one hand so obsessed, but equally and almost perversely, reticent.

I therefore propose looking at certain subcultural studies and their shared informing theories through two principal concepts :

1. Male spectator sports
2. Female in(visibility)

These two inter-related narratives can be read throughout the genre of subcultural texts and it is one of the main purposes of this review to account for their symbiotic relationship. I want to suggest the pertinence of the spectacular as the 'common sense' starting point for the codification and description of male street style within the CCCS project as having problematic consequences

with which any feminist appropriation has to contend.

The somewhat allusive use of the term 'male spectator sport', points both to the unacknowledged and collusive pleasures produced out of being part of a subcultural group and the even more illicit pleasures invoked in identifying with the tabooed narcissism of masculinity. It is therefore used to alert us to both the inner workings of subcultural social formations and of the unreflexive representation of a deeply oppressive form of working class masculinity in subcultural male discourse.

Parallel with this celebration of heroic masculinism is the almost complete erasure of girls/women from these accounts : an oversight that cannot be justified by either empirical findings/ methodological inadequacies/theoretical shortcomings. Even if one was to concede the point and accept the 'design' faults as causing the omission : it still requires explanation in non-tautological terms. Instead commentators merely reproduce women/girls subordination (Note 3)

'Skinhead girls admire the way their boys treat them as if they weren't there They never include them in their conversation, you must do this yourself, and even introduce yourself to new friends. They have no manners, are cheeky and disrespectful, but the girls respect them for being this way.....'

14 year old girl quoted in The Sociology of Rock. S. Frith →

(1981) p63-64. Constable

My emphasis

Or :

'You didn't need to get too heavily into sex or pulling chicks or sorts as they were called. Women were just the people who were dancing over in the corner by the speakers'

Pete Meaden NME quoted in A. McRobbie, 'Settling Accounts with Subculture.' Screen Spring (1980) p43.

Such a positioning of women certainly ought to elicit the question - 'Why?' Especially given the wider cultural obsession with the female as the 'object' of the male gaze and as the bearer of the representation of sexuality. As Christine Griffin depicts in her work :

'Women play a crucial part in men's "leisure", whether as escorts (paid or unpaid), prostitutes, or simply as objects of the male gaze. (A 35 year old university lecturer recently informed me that he and a colleague frequently spent the evening at a city centre disco ; "We only go to look at the girls")

C. Griffin 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly : Images of →

Given this is so, why do we read in subcultural material, the uncommented upon phenomena of such apparently mutually exclusive male/female divisions ?

For an explanation, we need to turn to the subcultural model itself - for it is within its' mode of operation, its' theoretical and subsequent empirical preoccupations with producing accounts of visible resistant cultural strategies, which conditions its' location and ensuing celebration of the behaviour/style of the self-advertised 'spectacular disaffiliates' to coin Hebdige's term.

And it is tempting to read this version of male bonding as evidence of the great repressed within patriarchal heterosexual discourse - the homosexual taboo concealing desire. For as Kathy Myers argues in another context :

'.....in our culture homosexual expression (because it) speaks too literally of the economic and desiring relations which exist between men. This battle for desire is heterosexualised, and fought over the body of women.'

K. Myers 'The New Women's Question. Power, Patriarchy and Privilege.' New Socialist No. 11 May/June (1983)

I think it is possible to argue that girls' marginalisation within the genre of subcultures functions to permit such 'fantasies'. The fact that they are there at all seems to be as much about their usefulness as chaperones in relation to male anxiety about themselves and other men. At another level one similarly speculates that the visibility of male stylists to other male commentators as speaking more to the voyeuristic permissions this form of field work necessitates.

I don't want to overstate this case or indeed to suggest it is a conscious activity descriptive of the genesis of the whole enterprise - this would be both to psychologize what is essentially a sociological tradition and simulataneously reduce the project of subcultural studies to male erotica (even if there is something Whitmanesque in the genre. (See especially Hebdige's lionising of Genet in the introduction to 'Subculture : the Meaning of Style)

However, I think this tangential gloss on female tokenism has power in partly explaining both the 'actual' position of women/girls in relation to male dominated and controlled subcultural 'solutions' and their representational status in the literature.

I would now like to take up more directly the two themes cited earlier and link them to the feminist intervention(s) in subcultural work.

My principal focus will be to provide a critical commentary upon Angela McRobbie's 'reading across' two important texts namely ;

Paul Willis's 'Learning to Labour' and Dick Hebdige's 'Subculture : the Meaning of Style' In so doing I hope to be able to amplify both the strengths of her critique and to show why her plangent engagement with the subcultural paradigms cannot be 'settled' in precisely the terms she advocates.

She sets down her ultimatum to subcultural theorists in a complex and compelling deconstruction of the many 'silences' which resound throughout both texts. Noting :

'Although few radical (male) sociologists would deny the importance of the personal in precipitating social and political awareness, to admit how their experience has influenced their choice of subject matter (the politics of selection) seems more or less taboo.'

A. McRobbie 'Settling Accounts with Subculture' Screen Spring (1980) No. 34. All the following quotes will be from this article unless otherwise specified.

I would argue that this silence, partly and obscurely references the other taboo (on homosociality/homosexuality) as well as relating to what she sees as the absence of self from the literature.

In respect of the latter she connects this to the reproduction of another more serious omission, namely that of the private world of

home, domesticity and family relationships ; ie. that space where a skinhead hung up his Ben Sherman after a busy day 'out there' on the street. She places the neglect of this domain as partly arising out of the unfashionable status of the 'Sociology of the Family' in the early '70's which was 'still steeped in the structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons...everybody's least favourite option.'

Indeed, the family itself was being seen by some left commentators as counter-revolutionary - a bourgeois strategy of pacification designed to soften the revolutionary will. McRobbie recognises Sheila Rowbotham's analysis of the twin benefits of this line of arguing which worked to keep women's oppression unarticulated whilst providing an opportunity for women to be read as 'a temptation provided by Capital to divert workers and militants alike from the real business of revolution.'

Historically too, the late 60's were redolent of the counter-culture's debt to male beat fantasies of perpetual motion. Marriage - women - children represented commitment - fixity - responsibilities. (Note 4)

As Rowbotham herself notes her ideal man of the pre-feminist era :

'.....was constantly leaving and arriving, he rode a bike, hitched, rode on the top of trains, or stowed away. He ate magic mushrooms on mountains in Mexico, or crossed the Sahara four times at least. He was the kind of man who wouldn't tie

you down because he had nothing spare to cover you with. '

S. Rowbotham 'Women's Consciousness, Man's World.'

Penguin (1973) p15.

Certainly the male left's nostalgia for 1968, in which it was possible to be both a militant and middle class provides some clues as to why there was an emotional as well as a theoretical/ political investment in identifying with other groups who seemed to be 'walking on the wild side too' As McRobbie comments :

'The writers having identified themselves as against the family and the trap of romance as well as against the boredom of meaningless labour, seem to be drawn to look at other, largely working class groups, who appear to be doing the same thing.'

A. McRobbie (1980) p39.

She is certainly right in exposing the misogyny that lies beneath this identification and she is equally correct in situating these 'silences' within an acknowledgement of the historical genesis of the discourse itself. She is suggesting in so doing, that these omissions and their consequences are not products of patriarchal myopia alone.

Indeed it is one of the ironies of the subcultural project that its' intervention in the late 60's into the debates over deviancy and

youth stemmed from progressive democratic impulses ; in which committed critics of authoritarianism sought to understand the 'youth problem' in terms which marked a decisive break with the punitive rhetoric current at the time. (Note 5)

Despite the important need to rescue the category of 'youth' from the crudities of the charge of animalism what happened was that the 'new' sociology of youth (un)wittingly(?) produced and reproduced a collusive celebration of masculinity's less appealing aspects.
(Note 6)

While^s it is essential to situate the 'silences' of subcultural texts within their own historical production (Note 7), I also want to maintain that a transhistorical, transclass alliance of men remains tenaciously resistant to feminist/female demands because it serves material and ideological^e male interests. Thus any attempt to exculpate male left sociologist's failures using the convenience of history not only obscures the workings of these patriarchal privileges as well as distracting attention from a consideration of the actual inadequacies of the theoretical model underpinning the whole design.

I'd like to illustrate what I mean in the second stage of my argument. What follows is a speculative attempt to 'read underneath' or to read 'symptomatically' (Note 8) McRobbie's critical text for the theoretic/political tensions it reveals - gaps in the text which I hope to fill with some of her own subsequent arguments.

What I intend to show is her accelerating disengagement from the subcultural paradigm, from macro theories of social and cultural reproduction and from the particular account of Marxism which informs them.

This is certainly a deconstruction made with the benefit of her hindsight and it is offered as a necessary first step in placing my own research.

It is apposite at this juncture to present a simplified account of the CCCS subcultural position in order to establish something of the theoretical, political and empirical scope of its' ambitions.

(Note 9)

I indicated earlier that these new cultural youth studies sought to produce coherent and sympathetic answers to questions about the generation of competing and often conflicting youth cultural forms. In so doing the ethnographers relied upon the practice of seeking points of identification with their mostly male subjects.

Intellectually their ideas owed a great deal to the historical material of commentators like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson whose overlapping concerns featured the notion of collective agency in the productivity of group cultures.

Exemplified in the prioritisation of 'history from below' in Thompson's phrase and expressed in an intellectual and political commitment to theorise ideology as a 'lived relation' in contrast

to the earlier and discredited notion of it as 'false consciousness'.

Appropriating Gramsci's concept of hegemony as that situation in which a provisional alliance of certain social groups can exert 'total authority' over other subordinated groups, not simply by coercion or the direct imposition of ruling ideas, but by the 'winning and shaping of consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural' (Stuart Hall 1977 quoted in Hebdige (1979 p15-16) - ethnographers like Phil Cohen, Paul Willis and Stuart Hall proffered a reading of youth subcultural styles as 'counter - hegemonic' as 'symbolic forms of resistance ; as spectacular symptoms of a wider and more generally submerged dissent which characterised the whole post-war period' (Hebdige 1979 p80)

Taking from 'Resistance through Rituals' a definition of culture as 'that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give expressive form to their social and material experience' (Hall, S. et al 1976a) we note that each subcultural 'solution' works with and upon the ingredients of social relations mediated by particular historical contexts and is 'posited upon a specific ideological field which gives it a particular life and particular meanings' (Hebdige 1979 p80)

Cohen's formulation of subcultures as 'magic resolutions' to the contradictions which beset the parent culture in which it is embedded provides one of the most sophisticated theorisations of how class-specific experience was reconstituted and re-assembled in

specific youth cultural forms. According to him, the mods, for example :

'attempted to realise, but in an imaginary relation, the conditions of existence of the socially mobile white-collar worker....(while) their argot and ritual forms.... (continued to stress)....many of the traditional values of the parent culture'

Quoted in Hebdige (1979) p77

As can be seen from the above, the 'new' youth studies inserted themselves into the already pre-constituted Marxist paradigm which takes as its chief dynamic, questions about the reproduction and rupture of class relations. Unsurprisingly in such a paradigm, the specific experiences of women and girls were elided in an account of class subjects, class cultures and class solutions.

In other words when girls arrive in youth(sub) cultures, they are already positioned 'as if they weren't there'. This is however, not the place to rehearse the detailed debate about Marxism's 'gender-blindness' (Note 10), except to remind the reader about the conceptual and political dangers involved in 'marrying' the projects of Marxism(s) and feminism(s)

I do so at this point because it is the tensions endemic in that ambition which offer an insight into McRobbie's own review of subcultural theories and ethnographies. Indeed I would go further

and argue that the major obstacle to recuperating subcultural theory for a feminist analysis is precisely its' location around the labour/capital contradiction. Therefore any attempt to stretch subcultural definitions so that they become explicit and loud on the reproduction or contestation of subordinated/dominated gender identities and practices, runs the risk of reading gender solely for what it can tell us about Capital's social relations - but as Gayle Rubin warns :

'....no analysis of the reproduction of labour power under capitalism can explain foot-binding, chastity belts, or any of the incredible array of Byzantine, fetishised indignities, let alone the more ordinary ones, which have been inflicted upon women in various times and places.'

G. Rubin 'The Traffic in Women : Notes on The "Political Economy" Of Sex. p163 from Towards an Anthropology of Women ed. Reiter, R. Monthly Review Press. (1975)

Therefore what is called for in the light of the multiplicitous 'silences' is an awareness of the equally multiplicitous causal factors producing them , not least of which is the question about the suitability of the Marxist problematic to address issues of femininity, sexuality, and sexual oppression. Unless this too is recognised any intervention into the field which seeks to 'feminize' subcultural theory underestimates the degree of difficulty involved and is in danger of recommending a model which simply cannot get at girls' experiences, no matter how finely tuned it might be

or however sensitive the resulting ethnography based upon it.

Consequently the feminist insistence on holding onto a conceptualization of gender oppression as autonomous from the capitalist mode of operation and as such bearing no necessary relation to the 'needs' of Capital because of a theorisation of the material and ideological power relations of gender as irreducible to such class relations seems to be jeopardised, by trying to make the Marxist discourse speak about 'what it has passed over in silence'

It might indeed be possible to tease out the social construction of masculinity (working class varieties) from Willis, Hebdige et al but, is it possible to read subcultural descriptions for what they tell us about that ultimate hegemonic magic resolution of all time - heterosexual monogamous marriage - premised as it is upon the practice and ideology of romantic love? And if not, ought we still to be using its' framew~~or~~k if it excludes such crucial questions as these? I will return to look at this wider question in the remainder of this chapter.

I would now like to get into some detail about the problems which ensue in the 'symptomatic' reading of subculture offered as germane to McRobbie's critique. I think her ambition to rescue subcultural theory is thwarted precisely because in attending to the reading across she has obscured the necessity of reading beneath

Paul Willis's work attracts her attention principally because it

duplicates her own researches - both her text, 'Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity' (Note 11) and his study of 12 working class boys - 'Learning to Labour' (subtitled misleadingly as How working class kids get working class jobs) concentrates upon the reproduction of class positions via the appropriation and celebration of class inflected gender appropriate behaviour and practices. In the respective texts, femininity and masculinity are seen as the raw materials of a resistant and subversive counter-school culture, providing oppositional possibilities for boys and girls to sexualize and undermine the authority relations in which they are placed. Thus :

'...a class instinct then finds expression at the level of jettisoning the official ideology for girls in the school (neatness, diligence, appliance, femininity, passivity etc) and replacing it with a more feminine, even sexual one.'

A. McRobbie (1978) p104

The details of this 'culture of femininity' are elaborated :

'The girls took great pleasure in wearing make up to school, spent vast amounts of time discussing boy-friends in loud voices in the class room and used these interests to disrupt the class'

A. McRobbie ibid

She then goes on to argue that this militant femininity is aided and abetted by the girls' commitment to their best friendships and to their immersion in the ideology of romantic love. These elements combining to produce an antagonistic/defensive class resistance to bourgeois and competitive values as personified in the school : the consequences of which are to actually ensure working class girls' allocation to the menial and poorly paid jobs which their original disaffiliation had been designed to postpone.

'I have argued that class and sex impose on the girls in such a way as to force them into contradictory positions : in the school they express their class identity by and large in female and feminine terms....'

A. McRobbie (1978) p106

The results of which paradoxically ensures that it is their own cultural dissent which most effectively polices their transition from school into monogamous dependent marriage and domesticity.

If McRobbie is interested in mapping the creation of working class girls' identities both within and against the institutional ethos of school and family - Willis's book aims to focus upon the similar problem of the recursive production of the 'lads' acceptance of exploitative working situations and delimited job 'choices'. He explains his concerns in the introduction :

'The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves'

P.Willis (1977) p1.

His work therefore attempts to examine the 'relation for a group of "lads" between working class youth cultural "gestures" and the places to which they are allocated in production' (ibid McRobbie)

Identifying several related school practices such as : disregarding school uniform, and rules over hair length, smoking and being seen to smoke, drinking and boasting of this as well as the taking on of part-time work to ^{di}subsize the above anti-authoritarian pleasures - Willis aims to show how these 'gestures' serve to simultaneously differentiate these 'lads' from the despised 'ear'oles'. This repertoire of visible/vocal subordination in which distinct class destinies are acted out only serves however to lock the 'lads' into their own subordination as unskilled super-exploited labour. He argues that in taking up certain elements from the crude masculinism of their fathers and reproducing a differentiated culture of 'schoolboy machismo' particular cultural dispositions are set in motion which inscribe the continuance of brutalizing work situations and brutalized workers.

Just as the girls resist their class allocation into docile, poorly paid sectors of the service/manual sector by transforming

the bourgeois 'nice' girl ideology so working class boys block their possible self-advancement by working over their 'destiny' into the expression of a preferred virile masculinism.

Interestingly both 'conformist' groups against whom such identifications are antagonistically defined are deemed deficient in their respective gender identifications by the non-conforming girls and 'lads' viz.

'They wear horrible clothes, I mean they don't know what fashion is. They're not like us at all. They don't wear platform shoes and skirts - mid-calf length. They always wear uniform proper-like'

'Sally' quoted in McRobbie (1978) p103 (Note 12)

and :

'..when there's all the heavy music, and you see the kids with their hair long, scruffy clothes (....) jeans and everything....'

'Fuzz' quoted in Willis (1977) p38 cited in a discussion about ^{the}

'poufs, ear'oles, do-gooders, weirdos, nancies.'

Both commentators read these statements as the projection of class differences onto the detectable visible differences of style, fashion, appearance and music and indeed given the problematic of

their studies it would be surprising if such accounts had produced otherwise. (Note 13) →

However, what is obliterated in these accounts is the recognition of the equal (and in some cases determining) power of gender relations themselves in the structuring of antagonism. Because we sit with the writers on the class differentiated trajectory viz: non-conforming/conforming, we situate ourselves as actually behind the non-conformists (as both the theoretical and methodological protocols compel us to do) we can too easily become the victim of the categories operated by the subjects whose subculture we have decided to study.

I want to argue that subcultural writers 'necessary' insertion into the field (and the debate) frequently and crucially prevents them from asking questions about the despised 'other' ie the assumption being shared by subject and ethnographer alike, that once an 'ear'ole', always an 'ear'ole' The results of such an analysis which prioritises class, are that there is an insufficient account given of how other antagonisms intersect/fragment/dominate social relations. We also lose sight of the continuities in practices across class divisions particularly with respect to the patriarchal dimension.

I think that these specific criticisms apply both to the McRobbie critique of Willis's work, and to her own work which similarly operates with an unbalanced, insufficiently tenacious articulation of the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression. To the extent that she,

like him, misreads or pays partial attention to the structuration of gender - it is because they both share a common intellectual and political point of departure. I hope this case will be made with reference to the value of her critique as well as to its' shortcomings.

McRobbie quite rightly attacks Willis for his failure to engage with the sexual violence that underscores a great deal of the imagery and stylistic poses of his 'lads' but her own way of showing her concern is also revealing :

'He does not comment on the extreme cruelty of the 'lads' sexual double standard or tease out in sufficient detail how images of power and domination are used as a kind of last defensive resort'

A. McRobbie (1980) p41. My emphasis

I have some difficulty in accepting this as an 'explanation' of working class boys' practice, for I think it reduces the operation of male power down to a localised content of anti-authoritarian resistance. That it might function in that way should not obscure the availability of misogynistic sexual abuse as a first resort let alone a last one!

For example, the detailed citation of some classroom scenarios :

'One teacher's authority is undermined by her being labelled

a "cunt". Boredom in the classroom is alleviated by the mimed masturbating of a giant penis and by replacing the teacher's official language with a litany of sexual "obscenities"

Quoted in A. McRobbie (1980) p41.

This surely owes more to the commonality of the availability of sexist discourse to all men and to the vulnerability of all women to its' interpellations. As the following extract demonstrates, only this time its' in the voices of 3 and 4 year old boys addressing their female peer and female infant teacher!

'The sequence begins when Annie takes a piece of lego to add to a construction that she is building. Terry tries to take it away from her to use herself and she resists. He says -

Terry : You're a stupid cunt, Annie.

The teacher tells him to stop and Sean tries to mess up another child's construction. The teacher tells him to stop. Then Sean says :

Sean : Get out of it Miss Baxter Paxter

Terry : Get out of it knickers Miss Baxter.....

Terry : Get out of it Miss Baxter, the knickers paxter,
knickers. bum.

Sean : Knickers. Shit. bum.....

Sean : Take all your clothes off, your bra off. "

Quoted in V. Walkerdine 'Sex, Power and
Pedagogy' Screen Education 38 p14-21.

As Valerie Walkerdine comments.....'It is only because
of the ways in which "woman" signifies that we can understand the
specific nature of the struggle' (Note 14)

Note also the tendency of the discourse to fragment women's bodies
(a similar example of which is picked up on in the work of Julian
Woods already cited see Note 6 and Woods (1984) p56-58 and 82
notes 1 and 2) : a tendency which is one of the principal
organizing characteristics of the pornographic regime of
representation - a male discourse par excellence and one which,
despite its' multivarious outlets from Esquire to Sunday Sport
all share the obsessive production of femininity as split
and supine. (Note 15)

I think that it is this privileging of the local which is
dislocating of a wider and more comprehensive recognition about
the operational effectivities of a patriarchal discourse which

mobilises around women's different/desired but despised bodies.

Ros Coward underwrites the crucial significance attached to the facts of anatomical womanhood in this culture by arguing for a recognition of the material importance of this difference in seeking to remind discourse theorists that no matter how contradictory the discourses produced they are all predicated upon fixing gender upon biological maleness and femaleness.

As she puts it :

'Once we recognise that discourse and practices do not take place in isolation from one another but are constituted in their inter-relation a striking factor appears. While various discourses and practices interpellate men and women differently, all discourses in our society nevertheless construct "man" and "woman" as significant differences "

R. Coward 'Socialism, Feminism and Socialist
Feminism' in No Turning Back : Writings
From the Women's Liberation Movement
1975-80 ed. Feminist Anthology Collective
The Women's Press (1981) p104.

As part of her critical deconstruction McRobbie links the public degradation of girls/women to an awareness of the impact of that collective disregard in the private/individualised matrix of family

personal relationships in which the boys live - pointing out that Willis's concentration upon the collective and leisure based aspects of their lives has the tendency to obscure the personal lives of the individual men who compose it. Such an account she argues has little to say about :

'...the family (which is) the obverse face of hard working class culture, the softer space in which fathers, sons and boyfriends expect to be, and are, emotionally serviced '

A. McRobbie (1980) p41

In the absence of any information McRobbie provides her own gloss on these alienating effects, when male 'resilience' becomes transferred into a logic of physical intimidation towards wives and girlfriends. The powerful truth of this statement, at least for me, is undercut by concealing as much as it reveals. In one sense it is obviously true that that working class men are involved in domestic violence (See Chapter 6 this thesis) and it is certainly true that they are the male workforce more likely to be found in the most dehumanising working conditions but to move from these facts to a position which reduces the cause of the first to a consequence of the second leaves far more questions unanswered about the meanings of masculinity.

However, this slippage is not an accident since it is predicated on the underlying problematic of both Willis's work and McRobbie's

original research and critique. To put the case very crudely and schematically : if you start from a level of social analysis which poses Capitalism as the motor to the engine of all relations of domination/subordination you run the risk of producing an equation which reads Capitalism as both 'needing' and 'causing' particular types of masculinity ie. working class men are brutish, nasty and short (tempered) because Capital demands it! It is only one more step from this position to reducing women's/race oppression solely to an effect of Capitalism. Thus the logistics of subcultural accounts invite us to situate women's oppression as an almost accidental fall out from the divisions endemic in Capitalism - which is inevitably posed as the 'higher' oppression both in terms of its' privileged theoretical and explanatory status and as (over)determining empirical/experiential reality.

That there are obviously complex and contradictory connections and determinations linking gender, race, class and age differentiated relations to the system of extraction of surplus value is not the same as saying that gender ideologies and practices can be totally explicated as functionally necessary for the maintenance of that economic system.

I would want to argue that it is both theoretically and politically vital to understand the social formation as constituted by a network of structures codified for brevity's sake as Capital - Labour relations and the Sex - Gender system and that these two motors of power and the ensuing power relations which they produce (in the various race/age differentiated forms) cannot always be understood as

necessarily corresepondent or causally connected. For example, domestic violence is not the sole prerogative of super-exploited working class men, nor is the social construction of femininity within and through the social institutions of 'best-friends' and romantic ideology confined to working class girls - yet both of these implications find expression in McRobbie's critique and research. (Note 16)

I would like to draw together some of these arguments in the pursuit of my resistance to subcultural accounts. I want to look more closely at the impact of the subordinated theoretical status of Patriarchy upon the ability of the subcultural project to instantiate the realities of female oppression.

I want to suggest that one of the most transparent effects of this theoretical weakness lies within McRobbie's own research account and by returning to this I hope that the inevitable repetition will be helpful in elucidating this point. According to her account adolescent girls : '...are both saved by and locked within the culture of femininity' (McRobbie 1978 p108) The point I'd like to focus upon here is the changing valency of this 'pre-existent culture of femininity' into which we are all born by virtue of being females in a patriarchal society.

This 'culture' is simultaneously presented as both a universal value and as the contents of specific working class femininity. We are told that : →

'A class instinct then finds expression at the level of jettisoning the official ideology for girls in the school (neatness, diligence, appliance, femininity, passivity etc) and replacing it with a more feminine, even sexual one.

A. McRobbie (1978) p104.

In this description the autonomy granted to the operational ideologies/practices of femininity is invoked only to be revoked. It is initially shown in quoting the existence of the pre-existing feminine realm and yet the structurings of this culture are seen to be dominated by the girls' class consciousness. The transmission of this patriarchal femininity is said to rest upon the agencies of family and community control and it is presumably through these mediations that it becomes class inflected. Just as in Willis, generational class imprinting is said to ensure the contradictory recursive location of working class lads in 'work's least favourite term'

I have some difficulty again with this model where the pre-existent culture of subordinated femininity suddenly shrinks to become the content of working class girls gender-appropriate behaviour.

(Note 17) I've already mentioned that the 'culture of romance' speaks volumes to all women and as Stuart Frith claims, popular music probably appeals as much to boys/men because it is the only public form they have access to which offers any sort of script about romance/heterosexuality/dating and girls. The lyrics of love speaks to males too! (Note 18)

I'd go further and say that romance and romantic fantasies form part of a complex ideological/social structuring which have effectivities way beyond their functional value as the 'imaginary or magic resolutions' of working class girls. The phenomenal 'success' of Princess Diana - as sexual/maternal icon - reveals an appeal which both draws upon and feeds cross class/nation/race conceptualisations of white femininity.

The Royal Show is produced as some sort of revamped, regenerated modern epic soap opera in which beautiful princess rescues ugly prince from impending celibacy thus ensuring the continuance of ; the House of Windsor (the royal couplet becoming a foursome in rapid time) ; the English monarchy and by implication the British way of life.

A friend of mine told me of a woman she knew who played the royal wedding video over and over again. Michele Barrett too notes that the feminist 'Don't do it Di!' campaign lacked a certain conviction, as these same feminists tuned in to watch the 'big day' to enjoy the illicit pleasures afforded. (Note 19)

At one part of her paper McRobbie summarises the situation as she sees it for working class girls :

'I have argued that class and sex impose on the girls in such a way as to force them into contradictory positions...in the school they express their class

identity by and large in female and feminine terms

A. McRobbie (1978) p106

My emphasis

This description, produced out of her analytical overdependence on using class to explicate the experiences of girls demonstrates : one, how successful gender ideologies are in disguising their own articulation and two, how she has to perform her own 'magic resolution' by making the specificity of femininity to disappear only to reappear again as class identification. And this, despite the discoveries of her own work, which as she admits in a later confessional, shows quite clearly the over-determination of gender in girls' lives.

In this 'recantation' entitled 'The Politics of Feminist Research : Between Talk, Text and Action' (Feminist Review 12 1982), she talks candidly about the (career ?) imperatives of the early 70's to theorize women's oppression as the equal responsibilities of Capitalism and Patriarchy (both capitalized!) as definitively linked in the reproduction of women's subordination. I've already suggested how unequal the resultant theorisation was, an outcome which she acknowledges as stemming from putting together the highly developed precisely formulated science of Marxism with the imprecise, rawer concept of Patriarchy. (See the same article) (Note 20)

She goes on to claim that many feminists (I suspect she chiefly

refers to those based at CCCS) had to cut their teeth on these mega-concepts as if to prove their intellectual stamina. She insists on just how pressing such pressures were, despite her own clarity on recognising the importance of class :

'At the same time I did tend to pull in class where ever I could in this study (ie. Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity) often when it simply wasn't relevant. Perhaps I was operating with an inadequate notion of class, but there certainly was a disparity between my "wheedling in" class in my report and its' complete absence from the girls' talk and general discourse.....being working class meant little or nothing to these girls - but being a girl overdetermined their every moment.'

A. McRobbie (1982) p48.

Instead of this disjunction causing her to question her own theory, she made sure class did count in her descriptions. This is particularly ironic, given the attributed value of qualitative sociology, ethnography especially, to render the lived reality, the 'history from below' in Thompson's phrase. In this case it looks rather as if such history had been hi-jacked by the weight of 'history from above'

In my view, still rightly committed to seeing class as a central key in unlocking cultural meanings, McRobbie has called for a

more fragmented, less monolithic conceptualisation of class and she proposes that if asked to recompose her original research she would now investigate :

'...how relations of power and powerlessness permeated the girls' lives - in the context of school, authority, language, job opportunities, the family, the community and sexuality '

A. McRobbie (ibid.)

Class could in this way be thought through these more localised and fragmented enquiries.

This preference for a more decentred analysis is clearly pre-figured in her 'settling accounts' particularly seen in her 'adding in' of more theoretical concerns to a re-designed subcultural format. The new version would include the themes of populism, leisure and pleasure, sex, race and class.

I don't at this juncture want to take issue with this revamped paradigm, aspects of which will form the substance of the next section but I want instead to leave part one with a consideration of one of the major underlying assumptions of all formulations of youth subcultures namely that they are intrinsically 'political' which seems to me to be too partial and unproven an assertion. An assertion which also stems from the privileging of class and class stylists as the authentic voices of a dissenting culture.

For not only does this marginalise girls, it confines those who don't happen to live a stone's throw from the King's Road to cultural oblivion, leaving the streets and progressive politics to metropolitan smarties. This reading of style as inevitably political (usually abstracted from any consideration of the material bases for its' production - see Hebdige's account principally) (Note 21) invariably prejudges the excluded categories ; the 'ear'oles', the 'despised Nolans', the 'faces' as the representations of the incorporated working class whose chain store fashions mirror a conservative positioning. I introduce this argument here to provide a context to the following interpretation of McRobbie's reading of Hebdige's classic text on non-classic style.

I pose it here because I think it is one of the important ways into an understanding of the attractions of his work to her.

It also reveals I think, one of the intractable inadequacies with regard to the feminist use of subcultural models regardless of their nuanced appreciation of the subtleties of style (Hebdige) in preference to the certainties of class (Willis) viz. the fact principally that female experience refuses to fit these repective codings of cultural behaviour. As the rest of this thesis will reveal, neither the theoretical abstractions of class or style take us very far in addressing the general mechanisms, nor the specific practices of girls' cultures. Before this expansion though I'd like to extract from Hebdige's and McRobbie's work

some more of their preoccupations.

2. 'Semiotic Guerillas or Faces' : Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie and the Politics of Style.

Though clearly more sympathetic to Hebdige's work - McRobbie positively endorses his attempt to cut subcultures adrift from any automaticity of class explanations - yet she also warns how his relocation of determination to race relations produces another set of 'silences' on issues of gender; on male sexuality and on the sexual ambiguities of style.

In brief, Hebdige as summarised in McRobbie's critique, holds :

'...that it is on the concrete and symbolic meeting ground of black and white (implicitly male) youth that we have to understand the emergence and form of subcultural style, its' syncopations and cadences.'

A. McRobbie (1980) p41.

Hebdige's using of race as the signifier is attributed to his modelling his work on the positions codified in 'Resistance Through Rituals' in which he makes explicit references to his debt to John Clarke's essay on Style. He acknowledges as well the wider theoretical debates produced as part of the CCCS intellectual

project, seeing his own work as equally informed by their detailed engagement with the work of Althusser and Gramsci (cited earlier)

The concept of hegemony, for example, is central to his rationale for the reading of style as an attack on the 'naturalizing myths' of ideology with which hegemony works as part of its' agenda to establish consent. He sees spectacular subcultures as fracturing the visual and ideological consensus presenting an 'oblique challenge to hegemony' in their re-deployment of objects wrenched from their normal contexts and meanings and placed now in new signifying practices. Genet, his particular working class hero, (doubly tabooed) is invoked very soon on into his text by virtue of his defiant and deviant sexuality - which was represented in his ownership of a tube of vaseline, confiscated by the police in a raid, which became for him : 'the sign of a secret grace which was soon to save me from contempt' - it was this puny object which signified difference, revolt, which would 'hold its' own against themby its' mere presence it would be able to exasperate all the police in the world, it would draw down upon itself contempt, hatred, white and dumb rages.' (Genet quoted in Hebdige 1979 p2)

For Hebdige, the true inheritors of Genet, in their capacity to draw down upon themselves 'white and dumb rages' are the punks, whose messy presence represents the signifier of difference providing for its' adherents 'signs of forbidden identity and sources of value.' His and McRobbie's fascination with what he terms, 'the loaded surfaces of life' is predicated

upon the belief that these signs are part of ideological class warfare :

'For, just as the conflict between Genet's "unnatural" sexuality and the policeman's "legitimate" outrage can be encapsulated in a single object, so the tensions between dominant and subordinated groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture - in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning.'

D. Hebdige (1979) p2

The disruptive presence of subcultural styles however, are not to be read as the deliberate unfolding of a conscious, coherent revolutionary project. He comments :

'..unless one is prepared to see some essentialist paradigm of the working classes as the inexorable bearers of an absolute transhistorical truth.'

Therefore one should not read their cultural productions as an unmediated laying bare of the 'real relations' underpinning Capitalism.

He reminds the reader of Phil Cohen's work on spectacular subcultures, (to which he gives his qualified support) as expressing 'What is by definition an imaginary set of relations' constituted as 'solutions' to contradictions and problems experienced as internal

to youth cultural forms and as existing inter-generationally between the engendering parent culture and its' offspring.

Hebdige's draws heavily upon Cohen's theorisation of class as 'lived reality' rather than as 'an abstract set of external determinations' which he showed 'as a material force, dressed up as it were, in experience and exhibited in style' - a form and a content reflective of the compromises extracted out of managing two contradictory impulses ; namely the need to create and express autonomy from parents intersected by the desire to maintain parental identifications. (Hebdige 1979 p77)

Thus, according to Cohen, not only are subcultural styles produced out of these tensions they also serve a 'latent function' which is to 'express and resolve albeit magically, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture'

In this way :

'The raw materials of history could be seen refracted, held and "handled" in the line of a mod's jacket, in the soles of a teddy boy's shoes. Anxieties concerning class and sexuality, the tension between conformity and deviance, family and school, work and leisure, were all frozen there in a form which was at once visible and opaque....'

D. Hebdige (1979) p78

Hebdige's important recognition (amplified by McRobbie) that the nuances of subcultural style may have no necessary relation to the area of presumed working class life from which it is drawn appeals to their joint interests in opening up style for what it might say about other equally compelling themes. He states his position in the following terms :

'One should not expect the subcultural response to be even necessarily in touch, in any immediate sense, with the material position in the capitalist system'

and he dramatises the crucial role of ideology in its' production of restricted and amputated and historically specific class codes. McRobbie summarises the relation :

'Working class self images are just as constricted by the limitations and historical specificities of available codes as youth culture'

A. McRobbie (1980) p42.

It is from Hebdige's insistence on theorising style as taking place 'several steps away from the material condition of its followers existence' (McRobbie 1980 p38) - and therefore as deeply resistant to precise historical analysis - which shows him positing the ideological as determining of the subculture itself :

'Briefly, he (averrrs) that the youth subculture is the

sum of those attempts to define it, explain it away,
vilify it, romanticise it and penalize it'

A. McRobbie (ibid.)

He thus gives different operational effectivity to the moral panics and smear campaigns (mentioned before in the discussion of the formative context to the whole 'youth as a problem' debate) Instead he attributes to them the status of material effects, part of the grammar coded into the subcultural stylistic responses.

A position which as McRobbie points out, runs diametrically against that held by the theoretical overview in 'Resistance Through Rituals' because - the latter text was operating with a phenomenal forms/real relations model which sought precisely to 'get at' this ideological debris. Proposing as it did to establish a more adequately theorised account which would have relegated the concepts at play in Hebdige's account to the sphere of the contaminated 'ideological' or even worse have consigned them to the realm of the despised 'idealist'.

For 'Resistance....' the logical attempts to rescue youth cultures from their designation as the mindless hedonism of working class 'yobs' meant attributing such descriptions to the superstructural level of superimposed obfuscation :

'a dramatisation of the class fears of the dominant class as displaced onto sectors of working class youth'

The fluidity of Hebdige's appropriation of CCCS work owes more to the newer theorisation of ideology as discourse and to the associated developments in the field of post-structuralism - semiotics in particular. Indeed he makes plain his own interest in the deconstructivism of Kristeva. It is this latter influence I believe, which excites McRobbie for what it might deliver in terms of a more detailed gendered reading of style. Yet the promise of this project is betrayed, for as McRobbie pertinently recognises, Hebdige's use of style as a male prerogative, structurally excludes women.

What is obvious, as she could hardly fail to observe, is the extent to which Hebdige is infatuated with style (Note 22) : for him, it is the 'desirable mode of narcissistic differentiation' and disaffiliation. A description which elaborates the notion of style as a male prerogative - the focus of McRobbie's critique of Hebdige's work. For in concurring with her I'd also like to add to an understanding as to why this free-floating conceptualisation of style marginalises women. One of the major weaknesses of his notion is that this celebration of style is ungendered - it is thus left to drift above a partially theorised (ie. a race specified) concept of the Other. A partiality which is very ironic given the comprehensively endorsed view that it is women who are deemed the carriers of narcissistic adornment. They are the look and the looked at - (See Christine Griffin's comments earlier). Theirs is the body that is dressed and sexualised and undressed and sexualised - (Underneath they're all Lovable).

Whilst according to Hebdige's account, these former meanings are overlooked and excluded in the replacing of women and the substitution of style as male 'refusal'.

I would indeed argue that it is because women are already the 'Other' that subcultural options (style/life-style) are psychologically less available anyway - what is the point of staking a claim in a disruptive visual discourse if one's mere presence in a safe little number, by virtue of one's identity as female - is sufficiently disruptive in itself and experienced as such ?

Ros Coward describes the relationship between women and their own bodies as a 'relation of narcissistic damage' (Note 23) : when we discover that it is our body that is scrutinised, found wanting. For we are the sex, constructed as a passivity for male consumption.

Indeed there is strong evidence that this process is happening at an increasingly early age :

'Not only do adverts, catalogues (Mothercare) and media images sexualize children at an increasingly early age, they do so in the visual codes of soft porn'

Michele Barrett and Rosalind Coward : 'Don't Talk to Strangers' New Socialist Nov. 1985 p21-23

(Note 24)

No wonder the derring-do of subcultural forms are less available to women who've been encouraged to advertise themselves as sexually attractive according to the demands of male defined ^scontracts of the same. Further, given the impossibly complex and contradictory structurings of 'acceptable' female sexual self-display, described with immense clarity in the work of a great number of feminists (See Sue Lees and Celia Cowie : 'Slags or Drags' Feminist Review 9) and note the same processes articulated in Christine Griffin's research (Note 25), managing the 'normal' is exhausting enough!

Griffin, for example, cites one particular male fantasy construct of the adolescent girl as the virginal nymphet - a sort of Lolita with 0' levels - if you think I fantasise read the full description of a sister representation as scolding waitresses/cum schoolgirls in the theme restaurant known as 'School Dinners'. A place where according to Stuart Weir, city gents indulge their Trianianesque musings by paying for the services of fantasy femme fatales :

'All the waitresses there apparently wore gymslips with black stockings and suspenders (and where) the rule of the house is that men can look but not touch , though the "school-girls" incorporate a controlling maternal bossiness (which incites the) idea of naughtiness which is central to the atmosphere, (for) it gives the men the licence to misbehave, to stare, to grab, to touch without fear of embarrassment or rejection - they are just being naughty!'

Stuart Weir 'School Dinners, yum
yum ?' New Socialist No 19.

This perfect packaged fantasy appeals precisely because men are protected from the damaging complicit^t_{ies} of their own power - they can have their cake and eat it too! 'Mummy or matron might smack them, but she'll be jolly again in an instant.' (Note 26)

As Weir rightly comments, all men of whatever class are implicated in Peter Byfield (the proprietor's) commercial dream :

'There can scarcely be a man in Britain whose sexuality has not been abused and brutalised by the experience of growing up within the complicities of male sexual power, and who is not vulnerable to the idea of young and good-looking women fleshing out one of the most potent images of men's sexual fantasy.'

S. Weir (ibid) p21.

Thus whilst I would support McRobbie's insistence on unpacking style for what it might say on issues of sexual ambiguity and male sexuality I don't think she sufficiently acknowledges all of the dimensions packed into his deployment of style which is said to structurally exclude women.

I want to argue that this is not just a theoretical consequence of his conceptualisation but is a fundamental and associated

failure to confront aspects of the sex-gender system such as ;
male voyeurism and the male control of female sexuality.

What is especially paradoxical about this inattention to women's
prime and prior positioning as different/sexual/other is the primacy
attributed to the status of blackness as 'Other' in Hebdige's
argument.

His whole project rests upon a reading of subcultural fluctuations
as responses to the social/cultural presence of black men and black
musical and aesthetic forms on the part of white, principally
working class men : viz.

'In the midst of all this frantic activity (ie. the social
infrastructure of a mod life style), the Black Man was a
constant, serving symbolically as a dark passage down
into an imagined "underworld.....situated beneath the
familiar surfaces of life" where order was disclosed : a
beautifully intricate system in which values, norms and
conventions of the "straight" world were inverted.'

D. Hebdige (1979) p54.

Later in the same passage he references the 'more furtive and
ambiguous sense of masculinity' practiced by the Black Man (though
as McRobbie reminds us 'Machismo suffuses the rebel archetype in
Jamaican culture') however, he does not prise open the
potentiality within this insight for what it might have to say to

the construction of more experimental forms of masculinity within subcultural formations.

It is McRobbie who insists that sexual ambiguity in relation to style is 'a central feature right across the subcultural spectrum' and as such requires our attention - for what it has to show about the spaces these subcultures offer to males for evolving different forms of masculinity. (Note 27)

Given the apparent (if temporary) sexual self-sufficiency of most subcultural forms it's hard to see why this obvious male inspired retreat from the pressures of heterosexuality draws no commentary.

Interestingly too, in respect of Hebdige's allegiance to Genet, whose own homosexuality he lionises, why he should then avoid what McRobbie terms as the important 'questions about sexual identity' which keep being raised in the expressivity and stylistic nuances of all subcultural forms. Not that (she notes) subcultures are to be seen as transparently homosocial/homosexual collectivities but Hebdige's refusal to engender the analysis fails to follow through what are for her the most pertinent politics of style.

She proposes instead a re-reading of his text to find 'a phantom history' of gender relations so that his work could deliver some answers to questions over the make-up of the various masculine identities in process.

In an enthusiastic ^sre_Λponse to the same text, Kathy Myers, however

claims that this is exactly what Hebdige has achieved. (Note 28)
In an eccentric interpretation of 'Subculture', she reads his book as telling the story of masculinity's disguises as disaffiliating resistances to capitalist restructurings with the attendant creation of mass youth unemployment.

For just as Willis, saw machismo as an ideological protection for young male manual workers against Capital's subordination, Myer's takes up this interpretation in her understanding of Hebdige's analysis.

But, to read him in this way seems almost wilful in the light of his own avowed disengagement with taking style as an economic sedimentation. In fact, he explicitly counters this reductionism by proposing the relative autonomy of ideology in his developing theorisation of style as bricolage, homology and finally as signifying practice.

It is therefore intriguing to note that which Myer's claims as explicated in Hebdige, McRobbie unearths as the unacknowledged and untheorised subtext. A question of politics being in the eye of the beholder ?

I would concur with McRobbie's view that at no time in Hebdige's work is masculinity problematised as such, let alone prioritised as the key to unlocking subcultures.

As I noted before, he calls his readers' notice to his own agenda

thus :

'We can watch, played out on the loaded surfaces of British working class youth cultures, a phantom history of race relations since the war.'

D. Hebdige (1979) p45 My emphasis.

It was rather McRobbie who sought to show just how partial a reading that produced in her attempt to reconnect the politics of style to gender and in so doing hoping to make conscious the consequences of his silence on style, as masculinity in action. His authorised version shows up as :

'Subculture's best kept secret, its claiming of style as a male but never unambiguously masculine prerogative.'

Myer's capricious celebration of the same text suffers from what I take as the contaminating consequences of failing to articulate just how double-edged is the resistant masculinity at play within subcultural style and I would argue that this failure is based upon a reductive reading of Hebdige reminiscent of the limitations of McRobbie's own response to Willis.

Namely, that in merely reading subculture as defensive masculinity in relation to the attributed higher oppression of Capital - working class men are produced primarily as victims and heroes simultaneously thus allowing women's specific



oppression to be rendered (if at all) as an accidental consequence of that process.

I would want to agree with McRobbie's increasing sense of dissatisfaction with the explanatory primacy given to class in cultural readings whilst recognising the indispensability of class in understanding the multiplicitous power relations which permeate social relations. This tension between disavowal and an acknowledgment, plays across her most recent work in which she tries to place a critical retrospective upon her intellectual and political debt to Marxist social theorising.

This tension is perhaps best codified in the shift in her critical position from that of echoing Willis's functionalism in her endorsement of his work (cf. Myer's position) and in her rejection of that literalism in her subtle teasing out of the hidden agenda in Hebdige's work.

Before finally breaking with McRobbie's intervention in the field I'd like to offer a gloss on the role of punk as supplying the token women in feminist appropriations. I've already alluded to the concept of female (in)visibility in the discourse and to a lesser extent within the empirical reality of subcultural life.

I would now like to turn to how they are actively constructed in the language of the subcultural ethnographies. I want to suggest that their status is one of icon owing more to the demands of the methodological framework and political sympathies of the

commentators than to their alleged pre-figurative power as exemplars of a more assertive form of femininity.

In making this claim I want to draw attention to the efficacy, desirability and practicality of her closing recommendation, ie. that of invoking the need for subcultural refuges for girls, safe havens away from the imperatives of too early domesticity and maternity. She expresses it in the following terms :

'To the extent that all-girl subcultures, where the commitment to the gang comes first, might forestall these processes and provide their members with a collective confidence which could transcend the need for "boys", they could well signal an important progression in the politics of youth culture.'

A. McRobbie (1980) p49.

And they could signal feminist wish fulfilment too! After all, her own devastating critique of the patriarchal meanings, processes and practices of subcultural forms reveals the extent of the difficulties confronting girls : viz.

'Women are so obviously inscribed (marginalised, abused) within subcultures as static objects (girl-friends, whores, or "fag-heaps") that access to its thrills, to hard fast rock music, to drugs, alcohol and "style" would hardly be compensation for even the most adventurous teenage

girl.'

A. McRobbie (1980) p43.

As she has ably demonstrated the expressivity of subcultural responses is mediated through the material and ideological practices which recursively produce male domination and female subordination.

To propose a female version of the classic male subculture sits uneasily amidst her own recognition that 'its different for girls' and that to want to propose a collectivization of girls' more individualized 'solutions'/resistances/responses under the rubric of a model designed to address male behaviour suggests an impatience with the girls, rather than with the intransigence of their situation.

After all there have been no mass popular woman-only subcultures except the feminist inspired ones (and even these have not been capable (yet) of mobilising on a substantial scale for sustained struggles, neither have they generally transcended the need for men, though this failure of erotic will is viewed with dismay by some feminists as a political misdemeanour on the scale of sex-collaboration. (Note 29)

I want therefore to place McRobbie's unrealistic evocation in the context of the tendency in most subcultural literature to codify the stylistic outfits of working class men as self-evidently radical political statements. I think that despite explicit

denials to the contrary, (See McRobbie 1980 and Hebdige 1979 p81), there is a discernible promotion of these 'solutions' as proto-socialist responses. (Note 30)

As Gary Clarke pointedly remarks, the recovery of the working class in these terms represents the exact opposite to the left's own earlier position : thus

'Rather than being seen as a diversion from the "historic destiny" of the working class (or as expressions of "false consciousness") youth subcultures have been seen as the expression of the working class in struggle."

Gary Clarke (1982) p20.

Something of this valorisation has I believe, travelled over to McRobbie in her invocation of the subcultural solution. For just as the attractions of male subcultures speaks to radical men - 'semiotic guerillas' in Hebdige's telling phrase, so the desirability of proposing and reading all girl subcultures as proto-feminist possibilities presents itself as the politically acceptable rationalization for being fascinated by style.

It is in this connection that one can begin to understand the necessarily heroic deployment of subculture's most useful face for feminists ie. the punk girl - who seems to function as a sort of alternative pin-up! A sign of subcultural promise. Indeed my own sightings of her remain mostly at the level of the image imprinted

on the text since there is little material about her material
existence that I am aware of. (Note 31) →

According to McRobbie, reviewing Berman's post-modernist text :
'All That Is Solid Melts Into Air' (Feminist Review 18 1984 p132)
- this subcultural super star ie, the punk heroine.....

'....was encouraged to stride across the city, with an
air of conquest and fearlessness'

and that by participating in punk, girls travelled in directions
they wouldn't normally have gone ; into art college, music,
photography : '...or even simply (into) the social sciences and all
those women's studies courses we have put so much effort into
setting up'

This indeed was true and I would certainly agree that punk offered
more space for women as a direct result of the opening up of
questions of gender in mainstream society but to construct a case
for the usefulness of subculture as the strategy for contesting
young girls' oppression needs more than the token of punk's city
street wise women.

Elizabeth Wilson strikes a warning note in the midst of style
enthusiasms :

'Even the bizarre can be fashionable and attempts to
outrage or (as often happens) to be overtly sexual or

sexual in some different way, may nevertheless remain within stylistic boundaries of clothes that still express submissiveness to a boyfriend, even if they spell rebellion at home.'

E. Wilson 'All the Rage'

New Socialist No.14 Nov/Dec 83

Of course McRobbie herself also acknowledges how highly sex-differentiated 'style' is : '...It's punk girls who wear the suspenders after all!' and her trenchant remark on how the 'mess' of punk was itself 'thoroughly ordered' out of the illicit discourse of pornography, which she sees as '..the male-defined discourse par excellence!' reveals her alertness to the sedimentation of oppressive meanings yet she still insists on seeing punk and feminism in a symbiotic relationship on the basis of dissenting style, in a way which I think over-romanticises the connection.

Maybe the problem is one of emphasis and can be explicated with reference to her attraction towards appearances, to 'sartorial terrorism' a dialectic which runs throughout her own intellectual work. However, if one locates political disaffiliation as primarily manifested in visual terms, I think there is an unavoidable tendency to substitute politics as style and vice versa. And that within this interchange there is a disguising of the fact that although clothes may be in Elizabeth Wilson's phrase : '..the poster for one's act' (Wilson 1985 p242) - this

may not necessarily be the case and that looking wild is no more a guarantee of anti-authoritarian rumblings than buying your clothes from Chelsea Girl marks your card as inevitably middle of the road.

After all the use of cartoon skinheads to sell Weetabix ought to tell us something! (Note 32)

Integral to this reassessment is the demand to know what subcultures do rather than what they look like. I'd like to know more about the art colleges punk woman entered, the courses she took etc.

More fundamental than this though is the need to recompose research into youth that displaces the concentration on the spectacular (in all its' meanings) and which replaces the centrality of the ; 'lads', 'the semiotic guerillas', 'the mess of punk' with a recognition of the rest whose silencing within the discourse as constituted by CCCS is profound.

It is within this opening out that sexual politics and the experience of girls presents itself as essential to the project.

Not so much the limited question of 'What do subcultures do ?' but 'What do girls do ?'. To indicate the revitalised agenda I'd propose questions concerning ; girls' relations to each other, to body image and sexuality, clothes and fashion and to the compelling processes of homosociality/heterosociality (heterosexuality) in which the former are all heavily and differentially implicated.

It has been argued and demonstrated how subcultural reality offers boys/men temporary escape from the sexual market place of heterosexuality yet it is important to remember that their escape is temporary. And as McRobbie recalls they don't spend all their time out on the streets, though you would think so from the literature!

We need to know about their shared resistances/compulsions to heterosexuality. Even more urgently we need to understand girls' negotiations with the representation of femininity as heterosexuality. Furthermore whilst we may fantasise that such resistance would be more successful if conducted at the level of a larger collectivity, we have to re-recognise the structures of commitments which nearly all girls have to their same sex best-friend as offering us important evidence into the inappropriateness of a subcultural (and hence minority) model to generate theories and information about where girls actually are. It's after all, only a few who out striding the streets, most are round at their mates!

I would want to assert that it is from girls' relationship to each other that they develop simultaneously a desire to reproduce its' intensities and pleasures within the socially controlled institution of heterosexuality whilst these same investments also establish an effective measure against which they can set the perils and disappointments of relating to boys.

Therefore I would want to suggest that girls inhabit the most elaborate subcultural system already (Note 33) This complex

network of girls' friendship is of such paramount importance that it offers itself as the crucial area for the understanding of girls' school and social experiences. (See the methodology chapter 1 for an account of this emergence of friendship as the focus of this research)

Finally, however my prioritising of friendship as girls' particular cultural production, forces me to come to some accord with the debate around the culturalist versus post-structuralist accounts (alluded to already in Note 30)

Whilst being highly sympathetic to Coward's insistence on recognising the complexly contradictory nature of human subjectivity, I cannot fully support her position, since the logics of Coward's (early ?) rendition of linguistic structuralism, committed as it is to ousting any claim for the absolute determinacy of the economic, leads to its' substitution by the primacy of the ideological - whose discursive hold is as all-embracing as any form of the economism which she persistently attacks.

Furthermore, whilst I've already indicated the range of deep reservations I and other commentators have with subcultural studies as practiced and described, I would not want to deny their usefulness in reminding us of the collective nature of cultural production (and reproduction). It is this particular aspect which first attracted me, both in terms of the influences upon the ethnographic accounts of gender produced by McRobbie and in a more generalizable sense - as a possible paradigm for

understanding the social construction of femininity via the articulation of female (best) friendship as an active and shared process.

Indeed my own methodology as an ethnographer situated in different networks of girls, testifies to my own conviction that the ideologies and practices of femininity are not only experienced as individual interpellations (and not in any simple deterministic way either) but are managed/negotiated at a collective level, by 'subjects in history' acting back upon class, gender, race and age specific discourses as well.

Certainly my reading of girls (best) friendship points to its' cultural and institutional similarities to heterosexual marriage (and yet there is nowhere near the amount of attention. literature and investigation into this domain) - and goes on to suggest how girls' taking up of these intense commitments works both as a continuity of their identities as people-centred thus prefiguring their 'commitment' to heterosexual monogamy as well as indicating a discontinuity - an achieved and valued solidarity with the same sex and as such, opposed to/in contradiction with their positioning as always available for boys/men on patriarchal terms.

In arguing as I have done that we need a sociology of female friendship rather than a redesigned set of subcultural excursions I hope to show how these friendships work within the lives of a variety of predominantly white, working class and middle class girls and in so doing substantiate the claim for its' centrality

in their lives. The very banality of the claim is all the more remarkable given its' neglect and mis-reading in their lives and in the literature.

This is to anticipate the next chapter 'The Company She Keeps' when I introduce my discussion of girls' homosocial attachments in the light of my field work and in the initial context of a reconsideration of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's work 'The Female World of Love and Ritual.'

The remainder of this thesis will be an attempt to render the case for the taking seriously of female friendship which has been established in this chapter as the counter to the hagiography which has dominated the exploration of the cultural. The proceeding pages will progress that case.

Chapter 2

Notes

1. I am unhappy with the imprecision about these terms but I use them with that knowledge and as shorthand for a range of experiences which are generalizable in the above way. The principal difficulty lies of course with the definition of the sexual in a patriarchal society as penetration by the penis. Plenty of the girls' homosocial experiences seem as erotic as the so called proto-sexual pre-fucking scenarios engaged in with boy-friends. Working with a more diffuse definition of the sexual would avoid this reductionism but would not be able to specify the social/interpretational differentiations which the girls, the schools, their families and the community makes. (See the relevance of this tension in my account of Carol's relationships Chapter 5)
2. Amelia explicitly had an extra section in her personal year diary which she called her 'Feelings Diary' subtitled - 'This page is for when at school I feel horrible.' And she also had another code * to indicate 'no bad feelings'. Amelia's concern over her feelings exemplifies these issues. She will

be discussed again in the Chapter 4 in the context of her anxiety over sexuality.

3. Gayle Rubin in her exigetical reading of Freud and Levi-Straus touches upon the same issue of the 'theoretical' status of women within discourses - she is specifically refering to their use as 'exchange' objects. Citing Monique Wittig in 'Les Guerilleres' (1973) as rejecting those discourses which position women so :

'Has he not indeed written, power and the possession of women, leisure and the enjoyment of women ? He writes that you are currency, an item of exchange. He writes barter, barter, possession and acquisition of women and merchandise. Better for you to see your guts in the sun and utter the death rattle than to live a life that anyone can appropriate.....'

M. Wittig (1973) p115-116 quoted in G. Rubin. ' The Traffic in Women : Notes on the "Political Economy" Of Sex.' in Towards an Anthropology of Women edited Reiter, R. Monthly Review Press(1975)

4. At a different level of analysis this is precisely what Wendy Hollway identifies as the 'have hold discourse' which she specifies as operating in the personal practice and narrative of both 'Sam' and 'Martin' - two subjects whose experience

she comments upon in an account of her research which forms the basis to Chapter 5 'Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity' in Changing the Subject : Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity. Henriques, J et al. ed. Methuen (1984)

5. Certainly the 'moral panic' discourse can be mobilised at any time, if only because it is a god-sent narrative for lazy journalists. The Daily Mirror for example, ran a series on what it termed 'The Savage Generation' -focussing in part 2 on 'Where The Rot Sets In' - blaming 'crumbling discipline' on the materialism of wage-earning parents (ie. mothers), television violence and the resulting moral confusion (ie. moral plurality) Daily Mirror (Sept. 20th 1977 p23)

Interesting to note that it is male anti-social behaviour that is particularly of concern - 'Roughwood Boot Boys Rule' The only girl mentioned is cited as defying the full majesty of the paper's finely tuned sensibilities by swearing. Just as McRobbie argues, I would draw attention to the gender differentiated (and racially specified) nature of the moral panics. For girls/women the rhetoric mobilises around fears over female sexuality. (See in this context two fascinating quotes which open Chapter 4 'Music and Leisure' by Simon Frith in The Sociology Of Rock (1981). He cites both Robert Blatchford writing in the Labour Prophet 1894 and Paul Johnson The New Statesman 1964.) However in so doing he does not

draw out the point, (which for me is the most salient) that it is the girls' appearance/ sexuality which causes both moral censors to decry the commercialism to which they attribute it :

'...(girls) sickly, murky complexions and harsh loud voices' (Blatchford) or 'The huge faces, bloated with cheap confectionery and smeared with chain store make up' (Johnson)

I suspect both critiques tell you more about the sexual peccadilloes of both men than the leisure of girls.

6. I need to hint at why the brackets have been retained here.

I want to suggest that there is a need to hold onto a multi-layered conceptualisation of the word 'identification' - I don't simply want it to mean the vicariously produced compensatory recognition of dissenting male groups, nor conversely, do I want to relegate all points of identification to the relative safety of the unconscious, where these pleasures of collusion remain in contradiction to rationally produced ideological positions. By seeking to suggest both meanings I want to indicate as well the mystificatory possibilities of a position which does not recognise the material benefits accruing to all men in male bonding rituals in a way which cuts across class differences. In fact one way to examine the texts aforementioned is to read them for what they might deliver about middle class men's displaced social practices.

In what appears as a direct reponse to McRobbie's invitation that men insert the personal into their ethnographic work, Julian Wood's in a confessional gloss on his observations about the sexist culture of a school disruptive unit, documents the continuity of the sexual objectification he had witnessed by offering the following story :

'When I was about thirteen (in a totally middle class, private day school) we had a school gang hideout. It was a mixed gang but the girls were relegated to the subordinate role of "gangsters molls". Around this age (and in the swinging sixties) we were developing the normal attitude to girls : a mixture of pursuit, disinterest, patronisation, fear and fixation! One day the moronic leader ordered his "moll" to expose her breasts. When she of course refused, he pinned her against a tree and ripped her blouse open. We all revelled in his power over her and laughed as she ran crying from the camp'

'The Middle Class and Sexism - An Autobiographical Note'
J. Woods Groping Towards Sexism : Boys Sex Talk' from
McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. eds. Gender and Generation
Macmillan (1984)

For a further discussion of these processes of
'identification' see Valerie Hey 'Patriarchy and Pubculture'

Tavistock (1986) especially chapters 3 and 4.

And finally for a particularly grotesque example of collusive mysogyny, almost gothic in proportion, which will stand as emblematic of the above argument, see the story told in Sara Evan's text 'Personal Politics : The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Right's Movement'

It concerns a student meeting in which a male activist boasted that after a teaching session with one of his own 'students' (This was the era of open colleges) the two of them would put aside work and 'go and ball a chick together' - the politico claiming it as very good for his student's consciousness ! As an enraged woman in the meeting asked : 'And what did it do for the consciousness of the "chick" ?'

7. Dick Hebdige has a useful summary of cultural studies historical origins in Chapter 1 of 'Subculture : The Meaning of Style' (p5-19) Methuen (1979)

Gary Clarke in 'Defending Ski-Jumpers : A critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures' CCCS Occasional Paper SP No 71 (June 1982) similarly provides a condensed account of the particular genesis of 'Resistance Through Rituals' in which he argues that the 'defining moment' overdetermined the authors approach. (See p1-4 in particular)

8. See Ien Ang 'Watching Dallas : Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination' Methuen (1985) especially the introduction p11 for her description of this practice.
9. In so doing I take the risk of producing a reified account of what is a rich and highly sophisticated analysis, however there needs to be some indication of the CCCS problematic otherwise the ensuing critique(s) remain unlocated.
10. See Michele Barrett's summary of this debate in Chapter 1 of her book 'Women's Oppression Today : Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis' Verso (1980)
11. Published in 'Women Take Issue : Aspects of Women's Subordination' Hutchinson (1978)
12. Cf. Chapter 7 this thesis.
13. I will return to this point later in part 2 during a discussion of Hebdige's work.
14. See Valerie Hey (1985) for an argument which substantiates the existence of the complex positioning of women teachers published in 'Alice in Genderland' under the title : 'Innocence and Experience : the Politics of Sexual Harassment' NATE publication.
15. For a fuller discussion fo the 'pornographic continuum' see

Susanne Kappeler's article 'Censored - The Porn Debate'
New Socialist No. 36 March (1986) p19-21. And for instances
when the 'pornographic regime' speaks to men in the socially
constructed, racially differentiated representations of
'oriental' females sexual/commercial 'compliance' read Hazel
V. Carby's overview 'White Women Listen! : Black Feminism and
the Boundaries of Sisterhood' in *The Empire Strikes Back :
Race and Racism in 70's Britain*. CCCS/Hutchinson (1982)
Note particularly her comments on the advertising of alleged
inter-personal exotic solicitude to Western businessmen. Or
alternatively see the Cathay Pacific ads.

16. For an elaboration of this proposition see *the remainder of
this thesis*.
17. In part this overtly mechanistic process is created by the
logic of a subcultural paradigmatic reliance upon too close
an affinity between generations. Gary Clarke makes the
same point and I try later to re-express this with reference
to the more abstract concerns of Rosalind Coward's criticism.
18. Gary Clarke also notices how men are interpellated in
romantic discourse as 'chivalrous protectors' 'the
breadwinner' etc. Frith goes as far as to suggest that
pop music's principal utility is that of meeting male needs
about what might constitute appropriate male dating behaviour.
19. Michele Barrett : 'The Royal Wedding : All Channels' Spare Rib

No 110 Sept. (1981)

20. For an example of this mismatch see the baroque theorising of women's oppression in the Domestic Labour Debate and for a beautifully lucid interpretation of the evolution of these excesses see 'Wiping The Floor with Theory : a Survey of Writngs on Housework' by Eva Kaluzynska Feminist Review 6 (1980) p27-54.
21. Judith Williamson in typical fashion confronts what she sees as the irony of the left's theorisation of consumption/style etc as 'semi-autonomous' activity with reference to the need to assuage the guilty pleasures of left-consumerism 'ie. that you too can dye your hair red, read The Face, and no longer feel guilty about all those ideologically unsound records and that Habitat furniture', coupled with what she describes as the illusion of autonomy, which makes consumerism such an effective diversion from the lack of other kinds of power in people's lives'

J. Williamson 'The Politics of Consumption' in Consuming Passions. Marion Boyars p229-233.

Essay first appeared in New Socialist (1985)

22. An infatuation McRobbie shares as suggested earlier - see her own confessional account of the impact of sseeing two Felliniesque punks amidst severely suited German businessmen.
- A. McRobbie 'Settling Accounts with Subculture' : Screen

Spring (1980)

23. 'Female Desire : Women's Sexuality Today' p80. Paladin (1984)
The Look

24. See for example the visuals supporting this article and any recent Mothercare catalogue. In them you will find ample evidence of representational images of young girls as seductive/street-wise/enticing/resistant/pouting etc.
Cf Ros Coward's similar observation about the 'meanings' of this pose in 'Pouts and Scowls' in Female Desire p55+ Paladin (1984)

25. Griffin C. 'The Good, The Bad, The Ugly' CCCS Women Series 70 in which she traces the crucial determining connections between forms of sexuality and their role in the experience and positioning of young women making the transition from school to work/unemployment.

26. It has been argued, incidentally, that part of Mrs Thatcher's appeal can be explained by her capacity to mobilise class specific memories of 'Nanny knows best' amongst her male colleagues - it could also be true that some women identify with the surrogate mother figure and the echoes of their own localised power, vicariously enjoying her bossy, no-nonsense public persona. For an altogether more sophisticated and highly informative examination of the 'Thatcher factor'
See Ros Brunt 'Thatcher Uses her Woman's Touch' Marxism Today

(June 1987) p22-24.

27. For a more metaphysical description of the imagery of the 'underworld' and its' mediation in the form of modern 'shamans' like David Bowie, see Rogan Taylor 'It's Magic' New Society 14th March (1985)

28. Kathy Myers 'The New Women's Question ; Power, Patriarchy and Privilege' New Socialist No. 11 May/June 1983.

29. See the highly contentious debate around political lesbianism which ensued after the publication by Leeds Radical Feminists 'Love Your Enemy ? The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism' Leeds Revolutionary Feminists ONLYwoman Press 1981.

Recent years have seen the eruption of other points of difference namely around the politics of race and racism and the re-assertion of the importance of class in the light of ~~light of~~ the apparent irreversibility of the radical right.

30. See Ros Coward for her complex invective against this tendency and for her outright rejection of the position of Resistance Through Rituals in her piece : 'Class, Culture, and the Social Formation' in Screen : Vol 18 No. 1 Spring (1977) Her argument is substantially a helpful exposition on what Gary Clarke sees as the static quality in the ethnography of subcultural forms - the way they are rendered in the literature as 'frozen bits of history' For Coward,

this particular weakness is best understood with reference to what she identifies as the fundamentally flawed assumption of a humanist subject which she sees as underpinning the whole culturalist problematic : a theorisation of unified subjectivity which is simply untenable, she argues, given the dislocating impact of economic and ideological forces upon traditional class identities.

31. Gary Clarke makes a similar assertion about the whole genre of subculture as more metaphysical than material ie. in its' decoding of appearances rather than concentrating on what subcultures actually do.

32. In a general survey of oppositional dress Elizabeth Wilson cites Walter Benjamin's critique of this trend, which he termed :

'...this aestheticization of politics (as) fascist in tendency'

'Adorned in Dreams' p204. Virago (1985)

She places this tendency to deny the meaning of events by focussing on style as detectable in post-modernist culture generally, and reconnects Benjamin's concern within the tradition of the Frankfurt's School's wholesale suspicion and rejection of popular mass culture. See her Chapter 9 for a fuller exposition of the left's split thinking on fashion.

33. Maybe in pushing this claim one makes useless the designation of its' status as sub - I hold onto it here to show both its' obviousness and its' disregarding compared to the over-attention to male public self-displays. The contrast couldn't be more extreme ie. female is to invisible relationships as male is to visible narcissism. In the subcultural narrative boys relations to each other all but disappear as do the experiences of girls, the 'normals' and the submerged nature of male desire. Part of the ambition of this thesis is to reverse some of these imbalances.

CHAPTER 3

'IT'S THE COMPANY SHE KEEPS'

'Make friends, make friends,
Never, never break friends.'

Children's chant.

Contents.

1. Introduction.
2. Fragments of a Friendship
 - a. Making Friends.
 - b. Alarums and Excursions.
 - c. Breaking Friends.

1. Introduction.

The intense attachments girls feel for their friends are pre-figured much earlier in their junior schools. (Note 1) One of the girls I came to know, remembers writing : 'Will you be my friend ? - tick in the box yes or no' (Judith. Tape 13 B school)

Tamara, observed by me and her form teacher, as rather semi-detached from her group, writes fondly and somewhat whistfully of her junior school days, under the title 'The Best Day of My Life'.....:

'...was the day I made friends with Alexia. This is only one of the many good days I remember, but this was one of the best because everyone wanted to be her friend, and I was sort of chosen. She was pretty and good natured, she never got angry and she was the only person I have known, other than maybe Samantha, who was like this.....'

However, if girls recognise the importance and value of having friends and especially the value of 'best' friends and the subsequent pains of 'loosing' or 'breaking' friends, spending a vast amount of time nurturing, managing, repairing and re-constituting their friendships - teachers (and others) are

singularly prone to pathologize this institution. And the more the teacher is in authority over the girls the likelier it is that these relationships are seen as negative experiences, causing 'discipline' problems in the smooth running of institutional life. Robert Meyenn, inadvertently touched upon the same phenomena in his paper 'School Girls Peers Groups' when in discussing girls' experiences through the peer group frame (but he is distracted I believe from recognising their similar if not identical investments in female friendship, in the pursuit of attributed 'differences') : in opening his paper he remarks :

'Parents and teachers continually acknowledge the importance and influence that a child's peers have in their orientation to and interpretation of school experience. A teacher in the school where this research was conducted illustrates this point when he is talking about a girl with whom he is spending a considerable amount of time counselling. "I'm convinced it's not her, though, it's the company she keeps, particularly that - Do you remember her ? That's where the trouble lies "'

A teacher quoted in article from 'School Girl's Peer Group' in Pupil Strategies.

In this rationale the girl's behaviour is so aberrant that it is

not even seen as being her own doing. (Note 2)

A relatively bland question I put to a pastoral year head at C school elicited a totally devaluing account of the problems which she equated with girls' friendships :

V. What impact do friendship groups have on girls' performances and behaviour ?

CB. A lot. There are a lot of instabilities, bitching and changing around. I have to move people from groups.

FN a. 1985

Characteristically it is the management problems of girls' fallouts which 'permit' the reduction of these rich, if hotly contested relationships, to 'bitching'. We seem therefore to have a situation in which 'common sense' understandings about girls needs for each other are seen at best, as problematic and at worst, as pathological.

It could actually be argued that my question prompted the uncritical reaction to the word 'behaviour', which in school contexts seems to be the permanent pre-occupation, but I would insist that girls' networks are consistently represented in the discourses of authority (Teachers, family, boys, men,) as

troublesome, opportunistic, competitive, deviant and dangerous.

Condemnation ranges from dismissal as 'just a bunch of girls' or 'silly giggling girls' through to Michelle Stanworth's remark about girls' construction as 'that faceless bunch at the back' (Stanworth *) as well as covering the more deviant category of 'bitch'. A deputy head at C school put it this way :

'You were more likely to find boys who were either brilliant or duffers, than girls who are more like each other'

FN a 1985

This stigmatization as either deviant or mediocre is reproduced time and time again and is not only indicative of sexist ideology which encourages girls academic/social compliance but is confusingly a distortion of the actual social processes in which girls do indeed try to constitute themselves as like each other for each other as a necessary pre-condition for the establishment of essential girl-girl bonds.

Boys conversely, have far less need to copy/mirror other boys, indeed the taboo on male homosexual bonding makes it almost imperative that distance between boys is maintained as a pre-requisite of friendship. In this context, I think young males have very real difficulties in knowing just what friendship

with each other might be about. Boys' disconnectedness from individual boys is facilitated in part by the ambiguities in their relations and by the ways masculinity is allowed a more extravagant expression in public and institutional life.

Thus whilst no class I observed, unreservedly allowed each and every boy who wanted, scope for joke-telling, showing off or other forms of controlling behaviour - as a general rule, their 'disruptions' were far more tolerantly viewed than girls' interruptions into the classroom life.

Boys operate with a more separated sense of self and this finds representation I think in a more individualistic/competitive form of subjectivity. Therefore whilst both genders are controlled by the application of the term 'boffin' -it is also the case that girls are policed by other attacks upon their visibility too. It is not surprising then that a lot of girls actively work to be invisible. One of the principal ways they do this is to simultaneously make themselves ultra-visible to their friends privately. And one of the principal means whereby they manage to achieve this recognition is through the interesting phenomenon of note writing, circulation and distribution.

If there is, as I've tried to suggest, a massive disparity between girls' commitment to friendship and its' designation by those in authority as negative viz. bitchy, lesbians, facelessness - there is a similar disjunction between their perceptions on note-making and its description by their teachers as 'garbage' as one of them

graphically expressed it.

To the girls I studied, note making allowed their 'invisibility' to take shape in the silent discussion of their own priorities, which whilst it played little or no public part in the official curriculum, nevertheless flourished in the secret 'dialogue' written down and exchanged between individual girls in various lessons. These unofficial pieces of writing often ran throughout a whole week with items of correspondence pages long in which the various correspondents and their allies batted back and forth across various classrooms the issues before them.

Issues to do with ; the managing of their own pleasure in each others' company, resentment when parents 'mess up' carefully laid social plans, jealousy if one's 'best-friend' is showing favour to another girl, desire in planning and anticipating future social events. Even disclosing in some of these 'notes' the more indiscreet admittance of sexual desire for these close female friends : though this is so taboo →

that it surfaces in these utterances as embodied in 'disgusting' imagery associated with menstruation and then displaced onto the two correspondents' enemies (B school N2a) or maternalised in another case, where the irritations of dependency as well as its' copious pleasures find expression in the discourse of mother/baby talk (C school N2b)

Both of these repressed voices will be the subject of further discussion later in the next chapter.

Of all the note writing routines which I monitored (in so far as one can monitor so subversive, silent and collectively managed and non-disruptive a social act) - they amount to 50 approximately : I deducted from observation, prior knowledge, participant observation in more informal settings and direct questioning of the respondents (most of whom were a group of ten 1st year (2nd year) girls that the main narratives of these notes were girl-centred concerns of friendship management (33) Only a small fraction consisted of 'fancying' boys (7) and the remainder involved a mix of homosocial and heterosocial concerns.

It is characteristic of this social practice that it has been almost totally overlooked by commentators almost as successfully as it has been ignored by teachers. And yet so ordinary and obvious as to pass unnoticed (like the notes themselves ?) - hence its' success as a cultural strategy. Of all the literature on school ethnography which I've consulted (see bibliography) only one mentions them in passing!
(Note 3)

For the girls it represented one of the only spaces in which they could control the social situation and extract pleasure from doing so. This is what they said about the business :

4. Erin Well if we say things out loud people will hear that we are having arguments and start picking on us.

5. Sam. ...or the teacher will tell us off 'cos we're
talking in lesson....

6. Saskia ..and it's safer to write notes sometimes.
this morning we were writing notes (cos we
want to go on a hack, a horse riding hack)
'em.....

19. VH And they weren't spotted ?

20. Saskia No.

21. Erin (Disagrees) Yes...the teacher came round, she
looked at it Saskia, but she didn't say anything.

22. VH Have you seen...do boys pass notes ?

23. Erin/
Saskia/ No.
Sam.

24. VH Why not ?

25. Erin They shout.

33. Saskia Yeh...but we enjoy doing it more this way.

Tape 9 (21st Nov. 1985)

Retrieving them from dustbins, from those teachers vigilant enough to confiscate them or simply by asking the girls themselves elicited a rich stock from both schools and from different ages with there prime content, that of girl to girl 'friendship' matters, and the corresponding tone of the communications were precisely on a range of emotional intimacy through to emotional estrangement. The major polarity was that of the friend/non-friend status. Thus the tones of intimacy, celebration, solidarity and inclusion formed one side of the homosocial frame whilst the other voice was that of rejection, hostility, blame and rejection usually underwritten by sexual insult to punish a girl or to secure the expulsion of the girl from the dyad or group.

Girls have quite precise terms for friends, non-friends and ex-friends and equally clear expectations of each other in terms of the duties of friendship. These expectations are firmly rooted in an egalitarian ethos structured around the obligations enjoined upon one in terms of reliability, trustworthiness, being a 'laugh', identicalness and other-identification. Girls who 'fail' the friendship test are severely punished : being designated a 'snide' or a 'skank' or a 'user' was not something they could take lightly : it involved them in a judgement as unreliable and basically unworthy for friendship. To be judged in this way could

lead at best to a temporary exclusion or at worst to permanent exile.

These terms are the ones which feature predominantly in the negotiating relations notes and they will form the evidence for insights in to the micro political manoeuvres which structure the domain of femininity amongst a predominantly middle class network of 1/2 year girls.

However it is important to realize that these small scale social relations are instructive at other levels too since they contain, I have discovered, many elements corroborated in my research into older girls. The more I have discussed their importance as giving me clues about girls' individual lives, the more they offer a way into the general parameters of the specific world of femininity inside an institution (best-friendship) within an institutions (friendship) within another institution (school).

Like Carroll Smith Rosenberg (Note 4) therefore, I think it is necessary to place these letters (the word notes is diminishing - some of these correspondences contain 39 items of communication!) within a cultural context. Thus, whilst I wouldn't want to make any simplistic comparison between her research into the elaborately sophisticated long term correspondence of 19th century, educated middle class American women and my findings about the urgently spontaneous messages of English secondary schoolgirls, I would suggest that the practices are usefully understood within the same model.

However at the outset I want to make clear one major point of difference, namely I would not want to preclude a discussion of these 'notes' in terms of indicating something about the correspondents' sensual/sexual relations for each other. Indeed part of my later deconstruction is rooted in the examination of that hidden discourse of lesbian desire. (already alluded to).

I would want to argue that it is important to hold onto the 'sexual' in these notes precisely because it constitutes a crucial aspect of the 'cultural and social setting'. Smith Rosenberg wants to specifically protect the women from a simple reductive 'reading' of their letters as evidence of a psycho-sexual 'pathology', however her preremptory dismissal of the 'sexual' as only 'individual' in its' manifestation obscures the evidence of its' social construction as a shared practice within specific sites and expressed in specific practices.

To rescue 19th century American women from descriptions which place them as psycho-pathological is obviously a credible intellectual and political aim but to leave them and their correspondence to the realms of the 'platonic' denies the existence of the intensity of the homoerotic if not actively homosexual relations within these same texts.

As Martin Bauml Duberman has argued in the context of his introductory remarks on his equally fascinating material (Note 5) : →

'I have never been entirely convinced that all the relationships Smith Rosenberg describes in her article were, as she insists, sensual without being sexual - that is, intensely emotional (and to some extent physical) but never genital.'

He goes on to comment upon the shifting deployment of the terms 'sensual' and 'physical' in her conclusions as well as observing that the evidence offered could be interpreted to produce the opposite conclusion. What is also of particular interest to me is that he too has discovered material which shows a subculture of lesbian feelings amongst working class women. The fragmentary account he offers directly echoes the sedimented nuances of the same desires within the letters of some of the girls who allowed me into their lives.

But by retaining this, I don't want to see them as only girls' 'love letters', instead I want to see them as sources of information about a range of girls' investments in their complex social worlds of which relations within the family, with boyfriends as well as their own relations with each other forms an integral part.

I also want to trace styles of writing as continuous across a range of different practices especially as shown in the use of the confessional form in the diary and the confrontational form so characteristic of elements within the spoken discourse of working class girls.

To hold together in one explanatory framework a span of historical and epistemological data is ambitious, being fraught with intellectual and analytical dangers. For example, the debate about the status of sexual identity and sexual practices in terms of historical specificity not to mention bodily specificity ie. the Weeks/Ferguson position versus the Rich position - pertinently springs to mind here. (Note 6)

However, I'd like to refrain from substantively engaging with these arguments at this juncture because the empirical evidence needs to be both situated and contextualised and seen as a persistent phenomena which crosses historical and cultural boundaries as well.

Indeed I would argue that so much of female culture is operating in conditions of subordination that its' material/ideological positioning keeps reproducing female 'resistance' in forms and within practices which echo, repeat earlier/submerged responses.

For example, how richly suggestive to me, is the discovery recently commented upon in 'The Guardian' (19th May 86) of the existence of 'Secret Women's Writing' and as Audrey Minolin writes :

'Restricted to the home and school barred to them, women would weave and read women-writing to each other. There was no mystery about reading, girls learned it from their mothers ; but writing was limited to a few experts who were "highly" respected and who would do the writing for

others.'

Spare Rib No.168

July 1986

She goes on to describe the contexts and content of these secret writings :

'Young girls would form these sisterhoods and document the bond in woman characters. After marriage they would communicate in writing. Widowed women would have experts write of their distress in woman characters, and others would ^ahve entreaties written to a goddess to bless them with a good husband or a pregnancy'

To show other evidence of this sort of continuity in this 'female world of love and ritual', I'd like to quote one extensive extract and in demonstrating the salience of the Smith Rosenberg's sources to an elaboration of an explanation of my own data, I hope to plot the case for historical continuity (and) historical specificity. I'd like to do this with reference to the 'texture' as much as anything else in the correspondence which Smith Rosenberg discusses : here she is situating the sequence between Sarah Butler Whistler and Jeannie Field Musgrave. Both young women adopted complimentary non de plumes - Jeannie's was a female name and Sarah's a masculine one. They originally met in the summer of

1849 when in their early youth, Jeannie was then 16 and Sarah 14.

During the two subsequent years spent together in boarding school, they formed a deep and intimate friendship. Sarah began to keep a bunch of flowers before Jeannie's portrait and wrote complaining of the intensity and anguish of her affection :

"If the day should come," Sarah wrote Jeannie in the Spring of 1861. "when you should fail me either through your fault or my own, I would forswear all human friendship, henceforth"

Sarah later wrote to Jeannie in 1864 when 29, married and a mother :

"I shall be entirely alone (this coming week) I can give you no idea how desperately I shall want you."

That the longing was mutual is evidenced in the equal intensity of Jeannie's imploring tones to her friend after one of her visits.

"I want you to tell me in your next letter, to assure me, that I am your dearest....I do not doubt you and I am not jealous but I long to hear you say it once more and it seems already a long time since your voice fell on my ear. So just fill a quarter page with caresses and expressions of endearment. Your silly Angelina."

Cited in Smith Rosenberg
(1975) p45

Even allowing for Victorian sentimentalism these and other items reveal a remarkable intensity of feelings : 'a passion for friends' in Janice Raymond's term (Note 7) which occurs time and time again in the notes of young girls.

From a clandestine retrieval at C school, a teacher sympathetic both to the girls and to my research work, handed me a piece of paper found after one of her lessons. She identified the two girls concerned as best-friends and her interest in the communication centred on what she called the 'desperation' of one of the girls as expressed in the highly coded talk contained within. For a full transcript of the note see Appendix B 'The Two Katys Note' and for a detailed interpretation ^{see} this in conjunction with section 1 Chapter 4). There are many references in the letter which remain mysterious - (Who is the 'he' in Line 3 correspondence item 2 ?), a boy in the class ?, a pop star in a magazine ?

Despite the inconclusiveness of the content, it does speak to the core aspects of girls heavily involved ties to the world of the emotions and sentiments. Indeed a few fascinating clues emerge (albeit very heavily disguised) about the particular bond between the two writers.

In taking their 'scribbles' seriously I have to go right against the

grain of their production. The tone of this particular text is self-parodying, which I see as itself revealing of deeply felt but ambiguous/irksome dependencies which invokes in the writers a defensive regression to a more familiar/familial and hence 'permissible' form of dependency, expressed in the discourse of mother-baby talk. Inside this bond both girls can act out the double-edged nature of such intimacy, enjoy it, resist it, admit it and legitimate it without privileging its' homosexual/social overtones.

This form of 'being silly' as another girl described her own note writing to me, needs understanding as a tactic of interpersonal relations between girls ^{wh- ch} allows them the luxury of professing /confessing their strong commitment to each other in safe ways in which the 'intimacy' is shifted around by the girls, in a variety of ways that keep its 'sexual' and hence lesbian 'contaminations' at a distance. For as Carroll Smith Rosenberg notes the girls and women from the pre-Freudian milieu, paradoxically enjoyed more space to articulate women's desired inter-dependencies.

It is also important to recall the similarities in content too, even if the historical changes have impacted upon details of the form of its' expression. In outlining the parameters of the 19th century female world as concerned with a culture of induction into the female rites of passage : of marriage, childbirth, miscarriage, family bereavement and so on, these contemporary notes show evidence of fulfilling something of the same purpose for girls now : in the role they play as mediating and communicating the values which

underlie girls own immersion into the complex world of strong emotions and strange people ie. adults and males.

For, as I've already suggested, like Smith Rosenberg, I am also interested in understanding these communications as culturally/socially produced and as revealing, (in her words), of 'one aspect of women's overall relations with one another'. I similarly endorse her concern to detect the cultural definitional processes which set up the possibilities in which such relations flourish (or not).

I've already alluded to the inadvisability of throwing out the pre-Freudian sexual with the post-Freudian psycho-pathological.

However, I too am keen to 'read' these discourses of friendship as telling us something about the social makeup of femininity and by implication of masculinity. I don't for one moment therefore, see anything unusual in the 'desperation' expressed in the two Katy's letter, it is consistent with the texture of a great deal of the written and spoken exchanges of girls when they are doing friendship or discussing their friendship caucuses.

And I want to explicitly insist at this point, if it is not clear from my previous argument, that if one is interested in exploring the cultures of femininity, then one has no choice but to recognise that the prime unit of explicit emotional and social value and identification relevant to all girls is their identity as someone's 'best friend' within the female friendship network - that even holds for girls who haven't got one particular friend!

It is not the subculture, form group, nor academic sub-set, nor deviant caucus, or a peer group but best-friendship embedded usually in a wider female support system. This unit provides an 'obvious' but under-described support system that is specific to girls both in terms of its' crucial contribution to mediating and constituting femininity. Why is female bonding ignored so much given its' ferocious passions ? Why is male bonding over-exaggerated, glamourised and visible in popular imagination and culture ? And yet I would argue, and have argued in another context, (See Hey 1986) that it is infinitely more unstable, uncommitted, ^rinstrumental and insufficiently nourishing.

It seems to me that the arguments/tears/rows and acrimony characteristic (or said to be characteristic) of girls particularly in the first years at secondary school, are precisely because they matter so much. They indicate not that they are being 'silly' or producing 'garbage', but that they are already being schooled by their own cultures into doing the sort of relational work of caring/commitment that school and community equally describe as actually defining a mature girl!

Barbara Hudson's work (Note 8) makes a similar point. Girls are doubly damned as they say : 'Whatever we do, its' always wrong.' In her work she examines the discourses available and situationally deployed by social workers and teachers. She demonstrates just how hemmed in girls are by these adult definitions of gender appropriate behaviour. She goes on to further depict the gender specific nature

of the discourse of adolescence as essentially male in its' character - with its' emphasis within its' construction as an experimental period of 'sturm und stress', disputation with authority and rapidly shifting allegiances. A discourse which is profoundly disputed by the evidence which runs counter to this model.

For not only is this representation as a result differentially available to boys and girls (See McRobbie 1980 on just exactly who gets to sew wild oats!) but it is also predicated upon an inversion of all those capacities which girls are supposed to be good at already or to be seen as aspiring to :

'Skill in making lasting friendship, with the ability to care deeply for very few people'

Teacher quoted in B. Hudson. (1982)

Teachers' views on the trials and tribulations of the 'company girls keep' echo with the double censure of criticising girls for taking seriously relationships in which they are developing those commitments, identities and skills which are supposed to ensure their acceptance as both mature and successfully feminine.

The point is how do you acquire the ability to relate unless you actually do it ?

Boys' more prohibited/impermissible 'closeness' to other boys means

quite simply they are less trouble in terms of the management of their interpersonal lives (They are quite enough trouble in other respects though!) but it is when girls 'dare' to care enough, that is when they fetch up against another double standard in which it is their visibility which is penalized.

In seeking to argue that female friendship is as rich as I am claiming, I need to indicate some of the ways in which it works to bolster girls' self esteem by protecting them from some of the worst excesses of patriarchal subordination/parental and school authoritarianism and the many other relations of power in which they are differentially situated by virtue of their age, race or class position. As I indicate elsewhere the female formation within friendship is not merely defensive but also deeply complicit with the reproduction of these power relations too, this needs to be borne in mind whilst I draw out the more attractive features of the female landscape. I will return to their inescapable and indivisible negative themes throughout the rest of this chapter and the remainder of this thesis.

Smith Rosenberg writes extremely convincingly of the positive and essentially renewing aspects of the female bonds disclosed in the histories of the women whose letters she reviews. Their sisterly solicitations about would-be suitors, their shared jokes at the male expense, and their sense of men being so 'other' as to constitute almost another species. What is as fascinating to me is the reverberations of that split universe within the current discourse of girls and certainly evidenced in their social

practices.

For the few commentators who have taken female friendship seriously all seem agreed that it thrives despite the assumptions of its' insignificance, and the subordination of its' protagonists because it meets needs unmet in other aspects of females, private and public life. Smith Rosenberg, for example, shows the dispensability of men in women's lives (their frequent absences, their exclusion from the female rites of passage etc) cf to the absolute dependency exhibited by some of the women on their female networks.

Fern L. Johnson and Elizabeth J. Aries in their thought- provoking review of the accounts of female talk within friendship similarly elaborate a different realm in which these values of intimacy, non-critical support, enhancement of self-worth, mutual support, relationship exclusiveness, personal growth and self discovery flourish in ways which would prove impossible in other contexts. As they argue :

'..we are now redefining this closeness as a primary social relationship holding unique values for women that are elsewhere unattainable'

F.Johnson and E. Aries, 'The Talk of Women Friends'

WSIF Vol. 6 No. 4 p353-361

My emphasis

It is also the case that I too, am compelled to show that it is from within the institution of female friendship, particularly as it is revealed in the forms of best friendship, that girls active making of their identity of self-valuation, confirmed in their being and acting a best friend, also provides them with a model of intimacy and caring which provides a potential (and actualised) resource for mounting a critique of their relations with boys/men.

But it is one thing to begin to re-evaluate the merits and strength of feeling girls display for each other and quite another to show this as giving them the wherewithal to transcend the need for male approval. As many other commentators before me have noted, the very things which make girls invest so heavily in each other, to make their friendships 'havens in a heartless world' (to use Christopher Lasch's phrase) are not thereby absolutely overcome.

Boys views still matter and they matter sometimes more than your best friend. For example, it is no good your best telling you that you are are pretty if the boy of your dreams makes you feel invisible!

Therefore, as the social relations of gender are presently acted out, girls' sense of self-worth is only rarely realized fully within their own gender bonds (even if it is sustained therein) - it is boys who confer the full attribution of a successfully achieved acceptable (hetero) femininity. Being good and looking good can only be

properly confirmed by the 'opposite' sex.

This is hardly an original insight, but one which also needs to be remembered throughout the discussion. As a powerful constraint upon the effectiveness of female friendship it actually gets taken up as part of its' practice, for one of the ways in which some of these young girls revoked their former friends is done through the same terms, in which it is ultimately the critique of the 'enemy' as insufficiently feminine, as 'unsexy', which decouples the girl from them.

I allude to the ambivalences of female friendship early on to begin part of that process of clarifying for the reader both the plus and minus sides of its' equation. In so doing, I hope to discover the strengths and weaknesses of it as a social institution. I don't want to over-romanticise it, since that renders invisible the divisions within female culture. As Madonna sings 'We're living in a material world and I am a material girl.'

The girls I met were certainly all 'material girls' just as they were fully cognisant of the necessarily ambivalent pleasures/pains of negotiating the identity of a girl's girl friend and a boy's girl friend. And they were as aware of the complex issue of loyalties involved in managing both sets of relations, frequently experiencing the pull of the one and the other as a real struggle.

I would go further, (and although this thesis cannot include a comprehensive analysis of the material I obtained on girls'

involvement in heterosexuality), it is vital to remember that female friendship and boy friendship (as in a dating sense) are held to be occurrences which are going on simultaneously. Not in the sense of literal simultaneity, but in the manner of girl's juggling their time, their emotions and their resources. Most girls do not just 'drop' their female best friend, once Mr Right comes onto the scene. I will say more of this in some detail later, when chapter 5, in my discussions about Carol will carry something of the weight of disclosing the omitted but parallel narrative of hetero/sociality/sexuality.

In this same vein I would like also to note that boys get 'included' into the strongly established girls' networks. As infinitely more committed and less equivocal than boys 'gangs', girls' can and do use this to control boys, who although able to withhold the all-important inscription of 'proper' femininity, can not be absolute masters, no matter however hard they may try.

Boys are aware of the limitations on their power : one only has to look at the way they comprehensively try to discredit female solidarity, to realize that their depictions of girls as 'lesbians' whilst it aims to police, also shows how the intimacy is seen as a both sexually and socially threatening. They are wary of this disruptive intimacy even if they persist in 'pathologizing' its' domain. This stigmatization I take as indicative of the power and visibility of girls' networks, rather than the obverse.

To return to the more particularised role of notes in the making of this culture of femininity, I should like to consider them as responses to the context of authority to which their particular form gives some shape. They are reactions not only to the internal worlds of girls' social manoeuvrings but also to the external realities of classroom life in which the girls are especially subjected to male and adult authority. It is the latter which sets the problem for the fuller expression of the former. Note writing is a partial resolution to this dilemma.

It functions as a solution, enabling girls to pursue their concerns without drawing attention to oneself. To do this would, as the girls comment, risk being separated from each other - a real punishment for girls. It conversely also allows girls to re-negotiate relations with those girls with whom they have fallen out. As a strategy it is closely allied to lip-reading, miming, whispering, (behind books) all of which formed part of the classroom communication repertoire of girls. I cannot recall a time when I saw boys use these 'subversive' means. In contrast, their interventions were exactly that - interventions - designed to relocate power away from the teacher. Girls rarely, if at all, took up this public position voluntarily. (Note 9) Instead they were involved in managing the 'private' in the 'public'.

Whereas boys, and this is especially true for highly popular boys, were much more concerned with occupying the public.

Looking at it as a strategy consistent with girls positioning, it

is highly effective. Out of 50 note transactions I witnessed only 2 broke down because of teacher intervention, and one of these was an uncharacteristic exchange between a boy and a girl, in which his noise attracted the attention.

It is my understanding that these expressions of inter-girl communication indicate at one level the pragmatic necessity of managing their own 'hidden curriculum' which finds expression in the content about details of social arrangements, anxieties over each others commitment to the friendship 'Are you still my best friend or not?', and the other insecurities of same and opposite sex relations. This culture of note making makes it very manifest just how crucial it is to a girl's sense of her self inside femininity to have become for another girl a best friend.

An identity which I will show as building upon her interpellation in the family as a 'good daughter', which is also related to her future positioning in monogamy as a 'good, little wife' and as 'a good, little mother'. All definitions which stand in counter ideological terms to the 'wayward daughter', 'the nagging wife' and 'the inadequate mother'. It is important for my argument to note just how germane to the poles of positive/negative is the notion of female relational prowess or incompetence.

Incidentally I am not arguing that masculinity is some free loading, unlocated and thus transcendent concept, it is after all also rooted in familial/domestic terms (though as my earlier argument suggests this is a much looser identity) but it does nevertheless

exist eg. the term 'breadwinner' with all that that implies.

However when you indicate that a girl will make someone a 'good wife' you are alluding to and drawing upon meanings which refer to her ability to service relationships, whereas when you say that a boy will make someone a 'good husband' you are remarking upon his steadiness as wage earner.

Being a 'slag' in the final resort, is all about being described as a girl who doesn't relate and it is, I would propose, this anxiety (predicated upon the fear of female sexuality) which accounts for the persistence of the sexual double standard as a major element (if not the major element in school cultures anyway) in the ideological and material domination of girls.

I would emphasise from the outset therefore, the multi-layered investments which girls bring to the practices of girls' friendship.

Such 'secret writing' as a contribution to the making (and breaking) of female friendship, legitimates and contributes towards the production and reproduction of girls identity as the 'caring' gender, the people who do the 'emotional' if you want to put it in charicatured form. And to the extent that the processes are understood, used and facilitated by them they represent an interesting attempt to solve some of the problems of being feminine in a social space in which the masculine is the privileged norm.

It is implicitly as a result of this, also a place where self publicity of academic competence (ie. the boffin syndrome) is more

generally available to boys than girls, though it is of course, also mediated by other factors than gender, class and race factors are determinant here too.

It is at this point in the argument that I think it necessary to re-assert the notion that I am not arguing for the existence of pure social phenomenon here. →

Willis's work, after all, reminds us of the fluidity of definitions of gender. In particular he sought to show how the 'lads' detached the attribution of masculinity from the 'despised pen pushers' by both exaggerating their own masculinity through 'feminising' any less robust or more school centred versions of maleness amongst boys. In this particular context therefore, academic equates with femininity.

So rather than being a masculinity in tune with the meritocratic and highly competitive ethos - it is a combative focus, opposed to the system, not another form of its' expression. In either case though dominant males were still in charge.

Obviously in the light of these qualifications it is important to express the ideological plasticity of gender at the same time as still recalling the persistence of those ideologies to attach themselves, via the naturalising effects of physically different bodies to account for other material differences between the genders. This is not the same as arguing a belief in the biological basis of gender differences as a continuing legitimation for female subordination, nor is it the same as collapsing together the lived realities of men and women into their different bodies and different life experiences. We need to hold out against biological determinism whilst retaining an awareness that bodily difference is the basis of gender.

Thus, as a truism, I would claim girls do not take up public space in the manner of boys, and as Valerie Walkerdine has claimed the pedagogic discourse is one which is more consonant with male identity structures. (I discuss this reference in more detail in the concluding part of Chapter 8)

Nothing I saw at C school controverted these assertions. Indeed the following description by Janet French will stand as a contextualising representation of C school classroom culture :

'In some top classes which I observed as part of an earlier study, groups of perhaps four or five boys had established themselves as the dominant pupils. They were described to me by teachers as "real characters" As well as calling out witty or topical comments on the lesson and what other children had to say, they had developed a keen sense of "news value" '

J. French, 'Gender and the Classroom'
New Society : 7th March 1986

She particularises the 'characters' by citing the case of Tom who seems to have mastered the art of the eccentric to a high degree. He positively thrived on painting himself as different, a strategy which allowed him lots of opportunities to captivate the classroom auditorium.

By secondary school, Tom would have had to develop more entertaining skills still, since the threat of being labelled a 'boffin' would prove more effective as a silencing tactic.

Nevertheless, it is ~~an~~ interesting not to say important to contrast the 'undifferentiated' tendencies within girls' cultures with this 'individualism' and I would argue that both 'personality' traits are predicated upon the social bases of male forms of 'bonding' and female practices of intimacy.

In an anthropologically focussed investigation into American middle class school culture, Joyce Canaan (Note 10) describes the homogenizing tendencies of girls' groups as predicated upon the surveillance enjoined upon them by their male peers constructs of appropriate 'sexiness' ; leading them into what she terms as relations which are 'mechanically solidary'. In this I think she is guilty of being the victim both of the Foucauldian theoretic account of ideological relations which she is using and of the uniform awfulness of so many female adolescent styles which do look like the self evident take up of subordinated femininity. I want to argue, as I think I have made clear before, that cultures of girls are more than appearances (in all senses of that word) and most certainly, whilst they do operate to police gender (and race, class) norms they also critique, reformulate, and resist the very excesses which relations of power would work to extract from them. By just producing them in her text thus :
As one of her subjects expresses it :

'(the girls in the top social group) do the same thing, wear the same things, and act the same way. And the way they act, and the stuff they wear is different from, say um the average person.....a lot of make up, and wear tight clothes.....make them seem more sexy'

She falls into the dangerous position of merely seeing girls as the passive victim of consumerism/boys in a way which is highly reminiscent of the earlier critiques (see my commentary upon the moral panic discourse of Robert Blatchford and Paul Johnson in Chapter 2 Note 5)

Expressed from the outside this 'homogenizing' tendency, shows nothing of the positive results for girls of this practice ; namely of the formidable resilience which such 'similarity' can evince.

This is however, not to say I view girls' strong bonding as intrinsically and uniformly progressive, I hope to have already hinted at the complexity of these affiliations which will provide the opening contexts to detailed discussions to follow, of girls' racist and class(ist) processes. But I also think it is important to critically engage with the explicitly negative characterisation of girls : to work towards a more sophisticated understanding about the reasons for the social phenomenon of the gender differentiated nature of female friendship.

I therefore want to go on to show how certain elements in the making of these network bonds and best-friend bonds substantiate a case for calling these alliances, a form of solidarity, which is neither 'mechanical', nor purely defensive (though it does contain these elements) but is best viewed as a social practice generating female centred intelligence about the social world.

I will go on to show how vital is the identity and role of friend to a girl and how this importance is achieved because of the encouragement to its' expression (the assumptions about the proper nature of femininity as nurturant/othercentredness) and despite blocks to its articulation (adult control/the devaluing of the personal/emotional in schools as 'problems', as well as boys attacks on girls' availability for other girls through the insult of 'lesbian')

In examining the wider culture of female friendship with specific reference to a group of 1st and 2nd year pupils I will also be looking at the particular patterns and meanings attached to the role of best friend, since as a feature of female relations it does seem to condense in dramatic form the features found more diffusely in the wider networks.

I would [^]tentatively characterise best friendship intensities as reminiscent of an idealized form of marriage, having witnessed them, they remind me of nothing so much as monogamy. Their possessiveness, their intimacy, ethics of sharing, recip~~ro~~city, negotiated

inter-dependencies, attendant jealousies and insecurities, commitment/pleasure.

I am not of course arguing that monogamy is necessarily experienced in some of the positive ways outlined above : ie. as the place where desire is appeased. From my work at B school in particular, the girls' comprehensive, not to say almost universal personal experience of male violence, sexual and material exploitation revealed them as disabused of fanciful notions of inherent male wonderfulness, even if ^{they} continued to rationalize their investments in romance by hoping to find a 'nice one'.

After all as most pro - feminist and feminist accounts note, female sexuality is only given validation in a patriarchal culture in the 'fragrant' relationship of monogamous marriage. No wonder it persists in the fantasy regimes which run throughout girls' cultures. (in fandom, in 'fancying the unattainable boy')

I want to suggest that this fantasy of perfect unity (predicated as it is according to psycho-analytical accounts upon the relations of mother/child symbiosis and splitting) finds another form of satisfaction in the pre-figurative manifestation of romantic love called best friendship. In so many ways these female attachments resemble marriage more than most marriages do with perhaps the important proviso, that they are actually more substantive, long lasting, nourishing and reliable than either girls' relationships with boys or frequently their parents' relationships with each other. I will not forget, for example,

the rejoinder Carol made to some one who had called her a 'bastard'
- 'I'm not a bastard, I've got 3 dads'!

I'd now like to focus the remainder of this chapter on the notes which I want to see as being the means as well as the content of part of the crucial transmissions of cultural values associated with young girls. I want to say at the start that nearly every girl I spoke to, took it for granted that note making was part and parcel of the routine of friendship. Apart from the texts, semi-texts and bits and pieces I have literally had to piece together here, the rest of this chapter is written conscious of the volumes of notes stashed away in girls' cupboards, conversations with younger friends and female contemporaries all of which testifies to the significance of these issues for girls.

These introductory comments are meant to provide some locating themes before the detailed patterns of one particular class (supported by data obtained from research into other groups of girls) are uncovered. It is to the micro-economy of friendship of the I/2M class that I would now like to turn.

2. Fragments of a Friendship

a. Making Friends

By the time I began my detailed field work with the class of 1M, the girls seemed to have already patterned themselves into distinct sub divisions within the class on the basis of perceived class differences - with the latter's acute connection to the attribution and display of 'cleverness'.

The major caucuses were as follows :

1. Sonia and Iris, both working class girls from the same housing block. Both household units on state welfare provision.
Iris lived just with her mother.
Both girls seemed inseparable, even to the extent of timing their absenteeism.
2. Natalie and Laura, working class girls from Afro-Caribbean and Portuguese origin respectively.
Plus Michelle, an Afro-Caribbean girl who attached herself to the two girls for several months whilst she was temporarily

at school.

3. Erin's clan...known by their form tutor as 'the little elite group' ; including the dyad of Erin and her best friend Samantha.

Plus Anna, and her best friend Saskia.

With Tamara, Olga, Clara on the periphery not particularly or consistently attached to each other but definitely part of the group.

4. Kay who arrived later (in the second year) but whose prior affiliations were with girls from another form.

Apparently these divisions had been in place since the first term of their time at secondary school. The major exception to the present situation had been the earlier and superceded relationship which Anna had tried to establish with Natalie and Laura, but an early misdemeanour involving the three of them in truancy had resulted in Anna being 'warned off' them by the male head of year, since they were said to be a 'bad lot'. This prior involvement will be of significance later.

Within the class it was accepted by the staff and the girls alike that these constituted the main networks within 1M and these also provided the basis for the pattern of friendship in the second year. More news of which I will supply in the developing narrative.

However, if the divisions overlay the girls cultures within the class, they way the girls in the 'elite' group were each others friends provides, I believe, the most interesting point of comparison in term of opening out the cultural values underpinning the practice of good friendship. It was within this clan that most tension was displayed, continuously surfacing in the heated written exchanges which acted as a continuing conduit of the private negotiations which filled the girls' leisure time, ; in conversations, in telephone calls, outside classrooms, amounting to a hundred and one passionate exchanges which make the cultural currency of a great deal of the girls stolen moments. It was the quality and status of the girls' own relations to each other which was the principal agenda item.

The chief correspondent of this network was Saskia, whose professed 'best' friendship for Anna, acted as something of a distraction from her real ambitions which was to become central to the network by focussing upon a relationship with Erin, who she saw as both a rival and as a potential best friend.

I was totally puzzled by Saskia's strategy and behaviour initially. I thought her initiating energies - she seemed to be the one to hold parties, organise outings, manage arrangements etc showed her centrality to the group - indicating popularity. However, it became increasingly clear that her notes reveal someone on the outside wanting to get into the inside and yet her tactics of trying to manage the rest in part through her private income

(ie. she was the girl with the most pocket money) were in large measure totally counter-productive since it was resisted by the group as a form of patronage and control and interpreted negatively as 'trying to buy friendship'

Thus her very tangible desires for power through friendship were seen to be at odds with the ethical rules of girls friendship which are premised on the exact opposite of self-aggrandisement - as I mentioned before the dynamics of female friendship tend to produce a power implosion, which nevertheless (I would argue) provides the girls with the subjective feeling of power, even if the practice between girls is of reciprocity.

In Saskia's case, when she strove to become more indispensable to the group, she was perceived by the others as the more unreliable. Thus when she exploited Samantha's absence to try to 'take' Erin away from her or when she tried to 'protect' Samantha from Natalie, she only revealed herself as self-interested, despite her own rationale which was to be 'helpful'. I will locate these particular incidents in the detailed negotiations around them later.

The eventual outcome for her was that despite comprehensive attempts to matter, to own or to be the core of the group ; she only succeeded in being isolated from all the girls in the class, leaving her in no-girls land. A situation of isolation buttressed by perceived differences in her life style, in which the glamour of her artistic family (father, a well known actor and mother, a well known choreographer) a scenario rife for the

generation of a powerful mystique (Note 11) became the source of her friends' antagonism. An antagonism designed in part, I want to argue, to discipline girls in reciprocity.

Saskia's individualism, sustained by her 'unusual' family was both the source of her confidence and her inability to act in the ways necessary to become a true friend, through the suppression of that individualism in inter-personal rapport.

It is necessary at this moment to insert some explanations of the terms which I invoke to try to characterise the varying levels of commitment girls act out in relation to each other.

The concepts, namely that of necessary or best, and that of contingent, owe something to the vocabulary of Sartre and de Beauvoir as well as to their deployment in the school research of B. Davies.

(Note 12)

My use of them is meant to characterise what I take to be an ethical 'rule' of female friendship ie. that one cannot pretend to be a best friend if you act superficially in the practice of that friendship. An essential part of the necessity of friendship is that of reliability, reciprocity, commitment, exclusivity and a possessiveness.

As the 13 year old daughter of one of my best friends expresses it the 'best friend system hang(s) heavily at school' and she goes on to characterise this culture amongst her class in

the following terms :

'If your best friend isn't in school, you ask somebody else if you can go with them and their best friend.I think that the system of asking people is just a way of making sure that you don't invade a 'best-friend's' space.'

Eloise's diary kept on my behalf to record her account of the shifts and changes in her third year class.

This 'sense of space' is what I take to be the recognition of a principal relationship which has a prior claim on the loyalties and emotions of the girls concerned. Just as there are ordinances structuring the proper conduct of friendship there are the sanctions which come into play when these rules are broken. The direct sanctions which can be used are the simple reactions of ostracism/exclusion through the repertoire of verbal/written insults designed to denigrate your reputation and your credibility through isolation. As Eloise phrases it, in the glossary added to her piece of reportage :

' "User" probably the one most painful. It is often used in situations where one person has been popular and for some reason is made unpopular. This person then makes friends with someone outside the group'.

Certainly the innocent sounding 'sending someone to Coventry' was one of the most effective of punishments, being an absolute denial of the social relationships which girls value so much and which they experience as adding value to them!

In this context I think the social control policy of splitting 'trouble makers' from each other, particularly vindictive in terms of female values and survival strategies.

The role of other differentiations too, plays an important part in the mechanisms and meanings of female friendship. I've already codified the material forces lying beneath the establishment of the 1M networks, a pre-disposition generating the necessarily helpful similarities in outlooks and values which make bonding that much easier to negotiate. However, I wouldn't want to over-emphasise this point, one should not overlook the fact that girl-friends can and do make relationships across ethnic and class and cultural divides. But when friendship breaks these differences can become lethal insults which become in themselves the represented as the reason why the friendship broke in the first place. In the abstract it might be possible to split a reason from a rationalisation, (reality is seldom that accomodating) but I make the distinction to note the way that the cause of friendship breakdown is principally failure to deliver in terms of the protocols of friendship rather than the transparent issue of difference being the self-evident reason.

I think this is what lies behind an unexplored but interesting observation in a piece of school ethnography (the exact location of which I cannot recollect) containing a reference to the fact that a white girl is in her physical fight with her black friend, in the course of the encounter, does not invoke race at all despite the plethora of other abuse. To me this suggest that the white girl was fighting for the friendship rather than to end it.

I will allude in passing to other differences which were taken up by the girls retrospectively to discount a previous relationship : and whilst space constrains an explication of the situations in which girls deployed these 'differences' I think there is some purpose in merely listing them for what they reveal about the elements of female homosocial culture. Thus in the course of my study I heard of and overheard the following points of differentiation being articulated to justify/explain or seal a split relationship or on a general level to account for the boundaries that had been drawn by groups.

1. Bodily immaturity and lack of mature female control ie. Girls were insulted as 'allowing' themselves to 'flood' Or seen to be dismissed as flat-chested and baby-like. (Note 13)

Conversely, girls could also have their menstruation 'used against them' by other girls seeing their advertising their bodily state in the avoidance of showers (sic) as evidence of their 'condition' and could and did report this to boys, if they had a grievance against

the girl! (See Appendix C for another way in which this female difference is exploited directly by boys to intimidate girls.)

2. Age/intelligence combinations, girls 'oddness' as both clever (boffin) and younger than her peers is cited as sources of antagonism. (Note 14)
3. Race/ethnic identity invoked to explain in the racist positioning of white supremacy - black girls as either totally conformist (usually applied to girls from India/Pakistan/Bangladesh cultures) and alternatively demonstrated in the racist/sexist projection of a rampant female sexuality onto Afro-Caribbean girls.
4. 'Style' as signifier to some girls of class differences and seen by other girls as 'reputation' sexual availability signifiers. (This is discussed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7)

This is not an exhaustive taxonomy but I hope it sets out something of the characteristic parameters which girls actively construct and reconstruct in the course of their personal and inter-personal relations.

I will flesh out more of the detail on this outline in the ensuing pages.

These contextualising remarks provide a necessary introduction into the narratives of friendship - as reconstructed from both the fragments of recovered notes and elaborated upon by field notes, interviews with the correspondents and supported by their own talk and diary journals.

By setting out one groups networks into 3 major and one minor division I only mean to assist analytic and descriptive clarity. The relations between certain of the groups members were much more substantive than is supposed by setting out the boundaries as if they were borders.

However, having said that, there is something of prime importance in accepting these as separate girls' units for the most part with their own shared but unique character. I should like to continue to specify these relations below.

Both the relation of Iris/Sonia and that of Natalie/Laura were very firmly rooted in comparison to the more contested allegiances of the girls in Erin's group. In a common sense way this was because their stability had been assured on the grounds of their having chosen each other (after a struggle through the same process of testing out) whereas it was these same tensions and conflicts which were unresolved in the larger group. Apart from the temporary dislocation caused by the addition of Michelle to Natalie/Laura (resulting in a fight between the two best-friends), the relations seemed characterised by solidity - in rock-steady best friend relationships.

Therefore I was not aware that best friends ever wrote each other negotiating sort of notes, they were simply redundant in the context of a settled and harmonious relationship. (Note 15)

Nearly all of the notes I collected in this regime were those of an anticipatory kind, involving the planning of future pleasures to liven up a dull day.

For example, Judith's crowd in B school, once spent a whole double lesson in stereo ie. they did the manifest course work and planned the illicit delights they were going to impart to a geography field work trip ; the clothes they were going to wear, the cigarettes they would 'smuggle in', ditto alcohol and their 'escape' from the dormitory once evening fell. This was all done in the medium of whispers and collective notes. (No wonder the school girl story is intractably popular!)

In these terms the best-friend dyad was settled and if it was an uncontested part of a wider network as it was in the case of Judith/Gina cf to the Erin/Samantha/Saskia/ (Anna) struggle then their notes celebrated the level of understanding about those alliances rather than challenged it.

Just as qualifications have to be expressed about the plasticity of reality versus the ossifying tendency of accounts of that reality : so allowances have to be made for the same fluidity of narrative within the girls communications. Thus by a concentration on their homosocial identities I don't for a moment want to forget

their location and investments in heterosexuality.

And these twin social and cultural experiences were similarly reflected within their own discourses and positionings. Though, as I've already remarked, the predominant theme was homosocial. Interestingly the only times that I saw the best friends, Laura and Natalie write notes were in attempts to manage heterosocial/heterosexual relationships. (Note 16)

Having established something of the territory of the young girls' world of 'love and ritual' I should now like to get down to a significant level of detail in the account of one particular friendship network's rhythms. By focussing upon the patterns of relationships within the class 1M over 3 terms and two academic years and in particular by highlighting the friendship ecology of Erin's clan, I hope to be able to materialise the cultural generalities with which this chapter and this thesis is primarily concerned. In examining the dynamics of friendship in this concentrated way, I will also invite extension of my arguments with reference to material drawn from observations on other girls at C school and from Crossfil's B school. →

This elasticity of discourse was greatly facilitated by the wide spread 'common sense' knowledge about notes which I have already mentioned. In practice it meant that all girls I have spoken to know to what I am referring when I talk to them about it. The older girls tending to see it more as a junior practice despite contradictory evidence that it was still fairly prevalent in their own year groups.

At the risk of breaking up the narrative before progressing the ethnographic account further I consider it important to state something of the 'methodological' agenda involved in gaining this material.

I tried initially to be as unobtrusive as possible in monitoring the girls' behaviour, so much of their lives seems to be about surveillance already - from ; adults (family/school) and boys and other girls that to add to that burden without at first proving my reliability/trustworthiness, and sensitivity would have been unacceptable to me in terms of my own value system and counter-productive as an ethnographic strategy anyway.

Ironically to be a successful ethnographer of girls' cultures seems to follow directly from being tested/judged as a good friend. Other commentators have made observations on the impermeability of girls' groups (See McRobbie and Garber

1976, Lees and Cowie 1984, Griffin 1985, Griffith 1986). The position is best exemplified in the following observations by Mandy Llewellyn about her work :

'Once I had entered the field I encountered a mass of problems and dilemmas, some of the generally related to this style of research, others more specifically concerned with the focus of my study. These latter involved the difficulties of gaining some sort of purchase on the privatized, fairly excluding spheres inhabited by adolescent girls.'

'Studying Girls at School :
the Implications of Confusion'

Certainly my experience was of this order, though I wouldn't want to overestimate this, since apart from the shrieking rejection of Sandra J, I was welcomed very warmly by Judith and her clan and by most of the other girls at C school, However there also was a sense that in the short term I had to 'Pass the test' of friendship, coincidentally involving the same cultural requirements of reliability, supportiveness, 'being a laugh' - that I began to see as the crucial items on the check list of female friendship.

This strange status, as a 38 year old pre-pubescent/pubescent and adolescent young girl was a fiction that was of course unsustainable, I could after all not be 11 year old -

even if C school staff sometimes tried to treat me like one !

Nevertheless, as I have already claimed in Chapter 1, my marginality in this environment produced in me a need for a fairly elastic identity to keep hold of, my precarious relationship to the school establishment. A fluidity of operation also necessitated by the logistical difficulties of tracking through a consistent group of girls in a complex curricular arrangement. Thus I had explained myself rather vaguely to different groups of girls according to the age and ability level of the group, I didn't specify my interests in their notes for example, until quite near the end of my time on the various school sites.

Part of me, I now realize was actually relishing the secrecy and subversion of what they were doing. I liked playing the detective, piecing together literally and metaphorically the fragments I trawled up after each lesson. It was the same sort of excitement which the girls knew about as well. (See the beginning to this chapter)

I felt on the one hand like a forensic sociologist, deciphering the hieroglyphics of friendship, and if you could see these texts, grafitti, embellishments and all you would soon see what I mean!

This absorption in the recovery process undoubtedly distracted me from things occurring at other levels. Certainly their notes codification and re-assemblage into intelligible sequences,

(without the advantage of direct post-correspondence de-briefings so to speak) took an inordinate amount of time and perseverance.

I opted to keep my counsel on this aspect of their friendship culture initially because I didn't want to freeze up their circulation. I therefore only raised my interest in them after several terms elapsed and then only at the level of generalities as a rule. As a consequence of these decisions I had to begin my 'reading' of them from my own interpretational framework which took shape from the sense I was making of looking in on the girls' lives.

In one sense I read these notes as the narrative whereby the girls are telling their own story of their values and priorities via the expression of friendship - as the essential echo to all the other evidence I have tried to orchestrate together in the pursuit of this project. I see their notes as the story within the story therefore.

Given my outsider/insider status I have obviously only partial access to the full 'facts' of the issues which they reveal. By virtue of the difficulty of working with an 'unofficial' form I have 'lost' items, missed chains in sequence of correspondences, overlooked them (just like the boys and the teachers!) But I have tried to find out the surrounding circumstances provoking the items as well as detecting patterns and investigating outcomes.

The mosaic of 1M/2M social and interpersonal life is recomposed with its' characteristic 'flavour'. Undoubtedly there are gaps, but I want to indicate how these fragments once reconstituted render a

substantive practice exposing the girls' making/unmaking of the identities and cultures of female relationships. It is to this central aspect of girls' homosocial concerns that I should now like to elaborate.

b. 'Alarums and Excursions'

Saskia, the 'elite' groups most inveterate correspondent was pivotal not only to the dynamics of rivalry within Erin's clan but as the personification of the process whereby 'popularity' is reconverted to 'unpopularity'. (See Eloise's acute observations earlier)

Of the 50 or more correspondence chains I witnessed between June 1985 and March 1986, she was the initiator of 30 of them. Some were addressed solely to her putative 'best' friend Anna, some were from them both to others in the 'elite' gang. But what ever the target, most of the content focussed upon Saskia's assumed, presumed and contested status/desire to establish herself as the king-pin within the group. A struggle which was ambiguously resisted by all the girls in that group.

Piecing together the pieces show that she had a contentious relationship to Anna locally as well, in fact the two sets of difficulties are but parts of the larger narrative of her quest for popularity/power. A struggle which lead eventually after many false alarms to ; her profound fall out with Anna, a fight with Erin, a period of pyschosomatic illness and absenteeism and her eventual withdrawal to another school.

In compressing her rise and fall in such dramatic terms, I am not

claiming any simple relationship between such causes and such effects. That there was a relationship I am absolutely convinced about however.

To return to Saskia's story. Her ambitious plans and patronage were financed as has already been confirmed, by her having large amounts of pocket money. She usually translated this into the medium of exchange beloved of school pupils, ie. sweets/crips/soft drinks and the hundred and one forms of 'junkie' food. Being in charge of such largesse though, whilst it brought superficial rewards in terms of 'popularity', also paradoxically provoked resentment. If reciprocity and sharing were coterminous with proving your worth as a friend, then having too much was as difficult as having too little.

If you traded too little, as Olga was accused of doing, then you were accused of being 'mean and moany'. Conversely, if you acted like the last of the big spenders you were equally guilty of breaking the ground rules. In this light, Saskia's initiatives, both in terms of buying her friends presents were viewed by them as manipulative, whilst her mania for arranging outings and events construed as being 'bossy'.

Her overtness in both regards seems to not only have been resented personally by Erin and Samantha, the 'truly' popular girls in the network but to be generally disliked by all the girls in the class as evidence of Saskia's 'showing off'. This is, I believe, a crucial insight into how girls' policing of their own cultures of friendship, also polices girls' wider ambitions as explicitly powerful

individuals.

It follows from this I think that girls' try to keep their power confined to the personal realm where it functions almost invisibly in reciprocity within the remit of friendship. That they don't do this unaided, follows on from the problematic I have argued within, from the inception of this work.

By going into Saskia's plans in detail I think this argument can be concretised in interesting ways. One of the real pleasures of note making (as I have shown) stems from the rehearsal of future events. (Note 17) Inside the usual staleness of a classroom, girls can create spaces which are 'disruptive' at the level of the imagination wherein they can transport themselves elsewhere.

Other things are going on in Saskia's case however, and it is helpful, (indeed it is necessary) to see her correspondence as a double narrative in which the manifest intention of coining prestige/power/pleasure from her active sponsorship of social outings overlays her latent action plan of securing a much stronger hold over the 'elite' nexus in general through her domination/contestation of Erin.

Hence we have Saskia writing to Erin :

Note 1 (C school)

item 1. → 182

I can invite one person to come to lunch because it's only my brother in and he might not be in. Would you like to come for lunch. That way you can see the note that my dad left, saying yes or no to (my) going with you.

PS I am looking forward to this weekend.

Will I be staying the night at your dads ?

An innocent enough sounding opening, which in the ~~event~~ turned out to be a thinly disguised negotiation on Saskia's part to detach Erin from Samantha and to re-attach her to herself.

Saskia's 'use' of the parental injunction on numbers. places Erin in the deliberately engineered position of having to make a choice between her best-friend Samantha and Saskia, an unen~~ev~~iable dilemma for her, despite welcoming the competitive interests of Saskia, she also knew she was playing a risky game. Simultaneously, as Erin read this as the chance to increase her power : Anna, Saskia's 'best' felt slighted not to say 'put out' by her disinvitation.

By excluding both Samantha and Anna, Saskia and Erin were involved in a collusive pact which on the surface made them co-jointly more powerful. It is interesting to note that the 'slight' felt by the two best-friends is in proportion to the gravity of the offence. In other words it is far worse of Saskia to fail to invite her

'best' Anna, than it is of Erin to accept at the cost of leaving out her 'best' Samantha.

It is worth noting at the outset that this correspondence chain, engaged the girls concerned ; Erin, Saskia, Samantha and Anna for 4 consecutive double lessons, including in the last lesson a temporary truce which cracked apart the following day.

Elements in this sequence with the accompanying commentary as fact-filler and context are enclosed as Appendix D 'Fragmenting Friendship'.

It is important to note that this labyrinthine negotiation and power struggle, characteristically for girls carried out and conducted in the 'hidden' interpersonal realm, remained totally undetected by their teachers, mostly because it did not seem to prevent their working on the 'official' curriculum.

Thus in the course of a history lesson, in which they were ostensibly de-briefing an exam paper, the group conducted a 15 item communication. After break, in lessons 3/4 General Science, they wrote a 13 item chain. In the first two lessons of the afternoon, 5/6 Anna, separated from Saskia ; the physical distance meant that such negotiations were impossible to sustain.

In the preceding break time, a truce was struck ('Anna and Saskia back together again'. FN 3 C school p61) But the ructions continued the next day, requiring the continuing negotiation

through more notes.

As a sequence it seems to encapsulate the investments of both power and contestations which all the correspondents shared in their complex affective relations and as such it is an exemplary instance of girl-girl dependencies - showing the indivisible mechanisms of girls' bonding and splitting in very clear ways.

As Appendix D shows, the double handed consequences of being outside a dyad mean that you can operate with more flexibility, as Erin's 'testing' out of her 'popularity' indicates. Being without Samantha, through a row or through absence, gives her 'permission' to elaborate more complex alliances. However it is one thing to 'practice' power through promiscuous friendships it is quite another thing to never experience yourself as someone's 'special' friend. (18)

To be seen as swoopping about as a matter of course is liable to bring reproof, as well as not providing you with the necessary continuity, consistency and intimacy of one other relationship - the very ingrediants of best-friendship. You are without the cultural experience of exclusivity thought indispensable to the status.

These struggles around friendship evidence I believe, girls' positioning in exclusively oriented relationships beginning much earlier than is suggested by the literature, as well as demonstrating that girls actively construct this monogamy.

An exclusivity which needs understanding in the following contexts ; (This list is not comprehensive and will be added to in the course of the continuing narratives, as other relations of power are explored) :

1. Heterosexual familial domesticity.
2. Dyadic pragmatism, ie. the functional value of the relative ease of maintaining a balanced reciprocity with only two.
3. The cultural space girls have to be intimate compared to young males. (Note 19)

What these contexts produce in the institutional form of female best friendship testifies to its two sides ; namely the values they place upon, and enact within the opportunities given and integral to that, the vulnerability attendant upon self-disclosure.

If my argument about this 'passion for friends' in girls' cultures is correct, one would expect to see as a corollary an equal attention to the identification and provenance of 'enemies'. Indeed this is the case, predominantly because the 'worst' enemies are usually ex-best friends.

Hence Saskia's marginalisation is secured on the same ground as her thwarted homosocial desires. For it is here that she paints herself into the corner to become in so doing her 'own worst enemy'

as well as Anna's.

I want to look at the denouement between the two of them in general in the next section.

c. Breaking Friends.

I was angry with my friend
I told my wrath, my wrath did end
I was angry with my foe
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

William Blake : A Poison Tree.

This piece of ethnographic material will express the construction of Saskia's estrangement, in which those points of difference ; about loyalty, about money and interpretations over her motives, force the recognition of her continual disobeying of the house rules of female friendship.

These last scenes in the drama of her second year at C school were in retrospect conceptualised by herself as her decision that

'...you don't really need best friends when you can have good friends'

instead of what it was, a punitive rejection by the girls involved

of her!

It is a typical piece of Saskia-speak, to re-package her rejection as her 'choice', just as it is a characteristic of her, and of girls in general I believe, to convert the quest for public power into the manipulation of private feelings.

But first a few necessary background details. When IM reconvened in September 1985, (as 2M) they did so with a few changes of personnel. 'Troublemaking' Laura and Troy, had been demoted, whilst the class had secured 4 new boys and 1 new girl : Kay.

Later in the next term Clara joined. The removal of Natalie's best friend, posed real difficulties for her in terms of who to sit next to, who to talk to, and to share with in many of the lessons. She could and did meet up with Laura at break, and they did share a long bus journey home once each week to music lessons in the same vicinity, but within the major part of the working week, the former best mates were split from each other.

At first, it looked highly likely that Natalie would make a move to join Anna, whose fractious relations with Saskia, were common classroom knowledge. (You may recall that they had in the past been friends until, Anna was 'dissuaded' from maintaining the connection.)

After all, Saskia's cool 'contingent' treatment, meant that Anna was pre-disposed for better friendships. In this light it

was probably highly fortuitous that Natalie was now 'free'. Anna, no doubt, compromised by the fear of loneliness before, took the earliest opportunity (in the first term of the new academic year) to demonstrate her attachment to Natalie. (Note 20)

However, it is interesting to speculate, if the fact of her dealing with Saskia taught her to modify or trim her investments in friendship. Having found herself wanting to be Saskia's best friend and failing that she seems determined in the new bond with Natalie to keep her distance, ie. to be 'cool', to put the other girl into the subordinated role in respects to needs. (Note 21)

For example, when I asked them if they were now best friends - the simultaneous replies were :

[Anna No! We're just going around together.

[Natalie Yes.

A discrepancy produced out of the differentiated 'needs' at stake here for both girls. Natalie's intense attachment to Laura, left a gap which 'needed' to be filled, at least in class time, whilst paradoxically Ann's less monogamously intense bond to Saskia made her much less dependent upon one in class person and probably less interested in trying to replicate the ideal. Sets of emotional patternings which explain why Anna has more power now.

She is after all now wanted, in a way she wanted to be wanted before. She still has, as the data later will show, the space to utilise her connections to the rest of Erin's group, even if she has broken with Saskia.

It was within this wider network, that Anna aided and abetted by Natalie 'paid Saskia back'.

The presenting circumstances, the teachers' action, provided the chance, yet again, for Saskia to exercise her discretionary role as group mentor - she intervened to exclude Anna from the co-joint arrangement. (See Note 22 for the details)

This 'exclusionary tactic' offered a golden chance for Natalie to 'show' herself as Anna's 'minder' ; as a fairly combative girl, she embraced the challenge with great gusto. The final showdown between Saskia and Anna began immediately they got back into school. It began in English lessons 5/6, immediately after, (1st October 1985 FN 5 C school p6-20) and was 'complete' by (7th October FN 6 p1-20).

The principal means for 'handling' Saskia's punishment was a series of notes which lasted the space of the week, the narratives of which read like a highly ritualised act taking the documentary form of an exchange between the 'accused' (Saskia) and her 'accusers' (Anna and Natalie).

Space considerations prevents the full reconstruction of this 'courtroom drama' - a sequence of events which included -

shouted insults between the protagonists, physical withdrawal to signify hostility, the use of other girls as go-betweens to pass on provocative messages etc. The whole set piece was rounded off with the delivery of the 'verdict' leading I claim to Saskia's absenteeism.

If I can't recreate the full text of the case, I want to suggest something of what is at stake here, by concentrating instead, upon the finale. It tells a powerful story about her disempowerment - a process secured finally through a patriarchal discourse which is seen as setting the final seal upon her homosocial inadequacies. (cf. the way these patriarchal insults such as flat chested etc were mentioned earlier as part of this regime). It is almost as if, telling a girl she is inadequate as your girl-friend is best done by heterosexualising her, and adopting a male parameter yourself!

All through the correspondence the plaintiff wants some affirmation that Anna and Natalie are her friends. Their escalating invective as a rejoinder to this enquiry moves from her being characterised as a 'snide' (a term consonant with the homosocial abuse term 'user' see Eloise's glossary), a 'skank' (as above) through to the ubiquitous insult of 'slag' , incorporating along the way references to her baby-like immaturity, her disgusting body habits, her inability to control bodily fluids (one of the main themes of the vocabulary of American middle class students, Joyce Canaan 1986)

Saskia's resilience in the face of this onslaught is quite

remarkable - persevering to resist these attributions by a set of continually shifting counter positions :

She appeals to reason and individual rights (a very strong value of middle class girls. See my allusion to this in Chapter 7)

'I'm allowed to say what I want to, its a free world'

Note 10 item 7

She tries denial :

'I'm not a slag'

Note 10 item 9

Proffers a restatement of her friendly intention :

'PS. I still like you Natalie.'

Note 9 item 1

She attempts another denial of the effects of their rebuff :

'Anyway I don't care what you say because words don't hurt'

Note 10 item 4

She wilfully misunderstands in an attempt to relocate their argument - but at one crucial point she is so busy resisting their plans to position her as the enemy that she, far more effectively than they can, completes the process for them.

This is how the 'judge's summing up goes :

Note 10

Saskia	Is Natalie my friend ?
Natalie	NO!
Saskia	If NO you don't like me Then I don't have to do anything you say. If you were my friend then I would but you're not, so I wont.

In defence of herself from insult, Sophie takes herself out side of the remit of friendship, which is exactly the place the girls had tried to place her inⁱⁿ the first place. She has therefore 'accepted', even if she doesn't fully realize it, her identity as their 'enemy' :

'If you were my friend then I would
but you're not, so I wont'

Nothing for me sums up more accurately the culture of the feminine relational universe than this - for within its tautological loop lies the major ingrediants of the young girls/adolescent girls' 'world of love and ritual' predicated upon the underworld of ritualised 'hate' - the place to which one is banished like some spurned lover if you are declared to be 'outside the pale'

One final point before I leave this material. I think it is interesting to emphasise the way in which Saskia's dismissal is underlined (it is literally drawn!) in a fashion to end the correspondence. Anna executes a crude drawing of Saskia as 'flat as a pancake'. (Note 23)

Here in this image is the culmination of all those attempts to discredit her, to make her a member of the 'out' group - in which her homosocial unacceptability as a 'user' is overlaid by her heterosexual unacceptability as 'slag' and sexually unattractive as 'uncurvy'.

This multiple rejection, unsurprisingly, impacted upon Saskia. She took several days of 'unofficial' leave, both myself and her form tutor registered this 'illness' as a self-protective necessity. No wonder that her later talk was of her parents' plans for moving her to another (private) school. (Note 24)

In some senses it could be argued that Saskia represents a resistance to exclusivity/possessiveness as well as the desire to hold onto her own individuality within a culture which is grounded in the pressures to conform to its' demands. And yet I am reluctant to simply read her as a victim, (in other words to go against the judgements of her erstwhile friends) partly because I judge that she seemed to want power without responsibility, ie. in unscrupulously 'ditching' a friend when she thought someone 'better' was available, and partly because she fundamentally did not seem to comprehend the ethical status of her own actions. Thus her manipulations on balance were read as that, and her self-assertion taken as the 'buying' of friendship. This is the working definition of 'skankiness'

After all, female friendship and solidarity is precisely predicated upon the reciprocal subordination of individual difference for the attainment of supportive and substantiating nourishing intimacy - in the context of female subordination - two heads are indeed better than one!

Saskia's bohemian background, her material solvency could all have been managed differently if had she not sought in such obvious ways to demonstrate the privileges which money brings. And it is this free-booting style which fetches up against the culture of female friendship in general, and the specialised form it takes in best-friendship.

In having articulated what I take to be the manifestation of a

historically rooted, socially and psychologically produced preference for female mutuality, I hope to have clarified what I take to be shared understandings about the social and interpersonal world inhabited by girls. One of the ways in which this has been exposed is in showing also the processes of Saskia's exclusion/disempowerment because she didn't share it enough.

Identifying these 'passions of friendship' leads me as I hope the rest of the argument suggests to raise general questions about the many investments for girls in this process. I would like to conclude this section with a proposition that the interpersonal bonds of best friendship are empowering for girls precisely because it feeds into the continuities in girls predispositional identities as only fully realised/legitimated in relational contexts.

The corollary to this is that 'doing' power as an individuated project is disallowed for girls in a way which it is not for boys. One of the ways girls compensate for this is through the mechanism of friendship. For inside the ethos of girls' bonding routines are strict boundaries of control over individual difference/ambitions and self-centredness. The most 'successful' resolution for an individual girl operating 'happily' with a sense of her own power is within the regime of monogamous commitment to a 'best' ; where this 'individualism' is dissolved in the joint activity of 'sharing', 'having a laugh', secrets, advice and counsel, intimacy and understanding.

Building upon this base can be, and is, experienced by the girls as very powerful once established. Indeed being in such an arrangement provides girls with one of the few legitimated sources of pleasurable power, no wonder they spend so much of their energies concentrating on these delicate (and not so delicate!) shifts within their network(s).

Finally, with respect to the ethnography under discussion, I hope that the evidence gleaned from one group of young girls, has in its orchestration of the rhythms of friendship ; making, alarums ie. tensions, through to breaking friends, given conclusive material evidence to show just what can be learned about the making of femininity from the communication(s) of friendship. It is from sifting through this 'garbage' which provides some of the most [^]int[^]iguing aspects of girls' lives. The next chapter will I believe consolidate this assertion.

Chapter 3 'It's the Company She Keeps'

Notes

1. One colleague of mine who worked in an junior school, asked her mixed, lower junior class to keep a journal. Whilst it is true that the status of friends is of vital interest to both genders, she drew my attention to the way girls 'take it more personally' if there is a dispute. The important implication being that boys have learnt by that age to 'take it like a man!'. Something of these differences is given form in ext[^]acts from ' The Lore and Language of School Children' by Opie, I and Opie, P. Oxford University Press (1959) cited in the int[^]roduction to B. Davies's work 'Friends and Fights' (cited earlier) see page 256 especially.
2. In an identical scenario described to me by Judith a B school the following account stands :

'And another thing about Sunila right, when we were in the first year and we had bad exam results I'd get the blame

wouldn't I! From her mum - I'd always get the blame...'

And Gina, Judith's best friend corroborates this.

'Sunila got her mum to tell the teacher to move her away from Judith',

Judith however insists that it was the other way around.

'No to move me away from Sunila!'

3. The rare example is from A. Pollard 'Goodies, Jokers and Gangs' from Life in the School : the Sociology of Pupil Culture. Hammersley, M. and Woods, B. Open University (1984)

'There was also a great deal of talking in lessons and note writing about school work and other interests' (sic)

p242.

4. 'The Female World of Love and Ritual : Relations Between Women in 19th Century America.' Signs Autumn 1975 p1-29.
5. Martin Bauml Duberman, commenting on some fascinating archival material : 'I Am Not Contented' : Female Masochism and Lesbianism in Early 20th Century New England.' Signs Summer 1980 Vol.5 No 4. Note 5 p831 makes the extended

and effective case for the 'taking seriously' of the 'crush business', as not simply confined to upper middle class women. ie he is specifically referencing the work of Smith-Rosenberg for example.

It is also important to recollect this archival article and perhaps to consult his article when reading the following chapter, which has excavated the 'lesbian' potential/ expression of erotic interest in similarly obscure/hidden forms and amongst working class girls. cf his commentary on pages 831-833 of his review of the correspondence and therapeutic notes between Honora Downey and her therapist.

6. Adrienne Rich 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' Signs Vol.5 No.4 Summer 1980 p631-60.
Michel Foucault 'The History of Sexuality Vol.1 : An Introduction' Penguin (1980).
Jeffrey Weeks 'Coming Out : Homosexual Politics in Britain from the 19th Century to ^{the} Present' Quartet (1979)
Ann Ferguson, Jacqueline N. Zita and Kathryn Pyne Addelson : 'On "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" : Defining the Issues'. Signs Vol.7 No.1 Autumn 1981 p158-199.
7. Janice Raymond's 'A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Friendship' The Women's Press (1986)
8. Barbara Hudson 'Femininity and Adolescence' in Gender and

Generation edited by McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. Macmillan
(1984)

9. Girls who shouted out (inappropriately) in class were much more likely to receive the attribution of 'badness'.

10. Joyce Canaan 'Building Muscles and Getting Curves : Gender Differences in Rpresentations of the Body and Sexuality among American Teenagers.'
Paper presented to the 1984 AAA.

11. It is intriguing, not to say depressing, to compare the resentful treatment of Saskia's 'differences' which are often I think reactions to her 'innocent' reportage of her slightly unusual/privileged life events with the contrasting lionisation of the 'odd' boys quoted in Jane French's work.

'One boy in particular used every possible opportunity to promote an image of himself as 'different'. While rest of the class enjoyed the afternoon at the local sports centre, Tom did not. While most of the children got up between seven and eight in the morning, Tom got up at four thirty. While the pupils had one of two pets, Tom had what amounted to a private zoo.'

Quoted in J. French 'Gender and the Classroom'
New Society 7th March 1985.

12. 'Friends and Fights' : Brian Davies from Life in School :
The Sociology of Pupil Culture. eds. by Hammersley, M. and
Woods, P.

Davies's account is one of the few papers I have come across
which takes friendship as seriously as the pupils take it,
however whilst he has interesting concepts at play in his
description, he does not however, address the differential
nature of friendship in terms of gender.

13. See the comments within Note 10 on Canaan's insight into
the somatic discourse constructing femininity as 'curvy'
and another associated paper 'Sleazy Slang' : Functions
of Bodily Dirt in American Middle Class Teenage Slang.
BSA. 1986.

In this latter paper the author examines the way in which
the argot focusses upon the adolescent need to mark
boundaries upon the body in terms of 'in control' and 'out
of control' and as she notes these concerns over the
management of bodily fluids take gender-differentiated
forms whilst the appellations donated stem from dominant groups
to subordinated groups, both within and across genders, races
and classes.

14. In this respect we can understand the particular focus of
Suzy's ex-friends critique, which is invoked by her when
Suzy elected to have other friends. The fact that she was

10, and the rest of the class were 12, only becomes of significance as a difference to exploit after a stress is placed upon the loyalty demanded by monogamy.

'.....And I think there was one girl who I was very good friends with at one point and then she just ^ftuned on me, she still does it, in a way. She always just likes to have one friend and when I tried to have other friends she wouldn't take it and she started to give me absolute hell for being ten.....and for being clever at the same time and I remember...this is the only time I've ever really regretted it....' (Tape 2b C School)

15. Intriguingly, this very 'lack' of tension showed up in the contents of notes between best friends as revealing fears about the possibly 'suspect' nature of their interpersonal rapport. See the section 'Coming out a Lesbian' Chapter 4 especially the communication between Sally and Judith.
16. The only samples I obtained between Natalie and Laura were not dialogues between themselves when they were best friends in 1M, but featured their joint composition/copying of a letter to Laura's boyfriend, Jim in which Laura is defending herself against the ascribed reputation of sexual casualness. The other sample is exactly the same thing with regard to another boy's identical rumour-mongering.

Both texts showing what was obvious to the eye, ie. that

both girls were be^coming much more inc^corporated into heterosexual practices, with Laura suffering the brutalising and negative consequences.

17. Cf. Judith to her then best friend Sally :

'Dear Sally,

Thanks for letting me have tea and that round your house tomorrow night. It should be good.

Is it okayed with your mum ? What did she say ?

Luv Judith.

18. It is also true that being a single friend when your best is away is no fun at all. It is the social equivalent of being a single woman at a couples' dinner party - a sort of social pariah.

Erin seems to understand these relational politics :

'I think if Saskia invites me and Olga to her house on Saturday ,then you can share me, but Saskia, it's up to you but you'd better invite someone else or 2 people will go off with each other and the other will be alone'

→

Item 10

Communication 6.

19. I would propose that it is boys' counter construction as 'one of the lads', with far less emphasis on best friends which constitutes masculinity as less rooted in relational intimacy, and competence in self disclosure, paradoxically leading them to need girls more than girls need them. I would argue that girls' well developed practices of inter-dependency render them better able to understand the processes of other-centredness. Boys as a consequence of their emotional impoverishment in this regard are likely to experience far greater insecurity within a dyadic bond, than girls who've been 'practicing' reciprocity/trust and sharing for a long time.

At another level of analysis this correlates with Wendy Hollway's work on challenging the conceptualisation of heterosexual masculinity as always about the experience as power. She is as interested in disclosing it as predicated on vulnerability as well. See Wendy Hollway : 'Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity' in Henriques, J. et al. 'Changing the Subject' : Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity' Methuen (1984) especially the section 'Misrecognition of Men' p248.

20. There were many other notes in circulation precipitated

by Samantha's end of term absence, all of them indicating Saskia's carelessness in respect of Anna - she is definitely second best, a contingent friend.

21. This denial of best friendship might have a racist motivation.

22. The 'elite' troupe were arranging to go to the Samantha's flat at lunchtime. However, Saskia had taken it upon herself to tell Anna that Sam's mum was on the premises and that she, (Anna) wouldn't be able to go. When I tried to check out the situation with Samantha, she said that she had not wanted to contradict Saskia, 'Cos she seemed in an arguing mood'.
Saskia's version of her intervention was that she read Samantha's anxiety about entertaining Anna and elected to fabricate the story to help Samantha out. Anna's exclusion hit her particularly hard, since Natalie had made alternative arrangements and she had been unable to go to her own home having forgotten the key. Being 'vanquished' meant temporary isolation : a very big event for a girl.

23. Judith at B school told me of an identical scenario in which she finally broke with her ex-friend Sunila by sending her what she terms a 'rude drawing'

24. Significantly she spoke to me of this prospective move with incessant references to the 'friendliness' of the girls :

'They were very warm towards us. They were very nice.

→

So I am looking forward to it.' (Tape 11)

CHAPTER 4.

GIRLS' SECRET WRITING : FORBIDDEN DESIRES

Contents.

1. Desiring Girls
 - a. 'Coming Out a Lesbian'
 - b. Talking Dirty : Denial, Degradation, and Displacement.
 - c. Talking Clean : 'Mum's the Word'.
2. Desiring Boys : The Naming of Parts.

1. Desiring Girls

a. 'Coming Out a Lesbian'

Gabbie phoned nearly every day. I'm really glad we gotI've got a best mate like her. I don't know what I'd do without her, when she phoned and says she misses me and it's boring without me I get a warm glow over me. I'm really glad, she's my best mate (I'm not a lezzy or anything but it's just Gabbie is my best mate and if anything happened to her I'd cry myself to death. we argue sometimes and she makes me mad sometimes but she's stuck with me and if she likes it or not I'm stuck with her)

Diary entry 31st Dec 1985

Amelia 4th yr C school.

'I was meant to go to a girls' school right and
I changed it to Eastfax's C school in case I come out
a lesbian.....(giggles)

Gabbie Tape 7 C School.

Girls' proximity and commitment to each other via their intimate friendship, especially in the form of best friendship : 'stuck with her' - leave them open to allegations of homoeroticism., and it is not only boys who police these bonds through 'sexualizing' these close relations. Girls too, well aware of the penalties of being labelled a sexual deviant, have to constantly resist in themselves any potential flowering of same sex desire (the 'crush business') as well as resist interpersonally the designation of their interdependence as sexual in nature - 'lesbians' are therefore always other girls ; (as indeed are 'slags' etc). In doing this girls are colluding with processes which are inescapable, even if their respite is seen to be assured. (Note 1)

The displacement onto other girls of either inappropriate homosexual or heterosexual desire reveals how hard girls have to struggle to even acknowledge the right to feel desire - I will demonstrate this with reference to heterosexuality in the next section of this chapter. I want in this chapter to look instead at how the repressed in discourse finds fragmented and fissured shape in the subculture of 'illicit' notes which girls circulate to each other.

If ~~top~~ even feel heterosexual desire is considered bad ,(See the story told by Amelia to follow), leaving you open to the charge of 'slag' how much more difficult is the suggestion of an even more problematic, (because even more independent ?) form of sexuality ie. lesbianism.

In this context, no wonder girls cannot even talk about female homosexuality, they have no language for talking about a sexuality outside of male definitions : outside of the 'exchange of women by men ' in Gayle Rubin's terms. This section examines those struggles to manage the impossible in their relations with each other and their fear that feelings of closeness may have sexual overtones dangerous to acknowledge. It will not be about directly interrogating their 'lesbianism' as if it existed as a coherent identity for them ; it will be about the ways in which they either experience the threat of their own feelings as oppression - whilst arguing that it is not so much the 'truth' of their feelings which matters but the sense in which they respond to these forces and feelings. Two [^]contadictory forces, which on the one hand, insist upon the creation of the opportunity for intimacy within the existant practice of female best-friendship, opportunities which girls demand and which do, (I would argue provoke sensual/erotic/antagonistic desires), but desires which on the other hand are absolutely taboo. The model of intimacy in a heterosexist culture is the monopoly one of heterosexuality.

Given the facts of strong female bonding in the midst of a

heterosexist culture where such female centred closeness is devalued/ignored/misread : no wonder boys constant source of critique of girls best friendships is the resort to the label 'lesbian'. And this is universally true in all sectors of the school. (I am obviously speaking of C school here)

I would want to argue that the reasons boys use these terms is a complex business which cannot be reduced to crude power techniques.

It is, I would argue, based upon an accurate perception that girls can be self-sufficient as well as sustained within their homosocial bonding - enjoying both intimacy and support in ways unfamiliar to boys own experiences of the more competitive/ambiguous and ritualised intimacies of male groups.

Boys' envy girls networks, so that their exclusion from them is double-edged. They would want the support but find the intimacy deeply problematic in a social relationship structured around self-revelation. What boys attack in girls' groups is actually what they feel they have a right to in heterosexual liasons : understanding, (un)critical support, attention and emotional servicing. It's arguable, as I said earlier, that boys need girls in these terms more than girls need them. They have already experienced the 'marriage of true minds' in best friendship : (See my earlier description of friendship within girls' cultures as resembling monogamy in Chapter 3 Introduction)

As Angela McRobbie and Eve Brooke note : →

'Faced with these difficulties (viz. the sexual double standard - attribution of easy lay etc - flaunting-flirting - showing off) a girl's most important relationship is not with a boy but with a best friend. The best friend twosome has many characteristics of boy girl romance, it's fraught with the same kind of tensions and tends to be long lasting '

'A Girls Best Friend is her Best Friend'
Spare Rib No 58 May 1977.

And they go onto comment upon a story of an interloper into a female friendship who caused much grief and emotional turmoil until the original dyad were re-formed, cutting out completely the female intruder - in language steeped in the familiar rhetoric of heterosexual jealousy - the stock theme of classic soap operas.

As they observe :

'It wasn't easy to untangle the genuine emotional turmoil from the exciting melodrama'

I would go further, however and argue that such an attempt is fundamentally misguided - since it evades the more pertinent question as to why girls present their emotional lives in such forms. I am tempted to see this Soap Opera discourse as one of

the only popular cultural spaces in which the centrality of the emotions is acknowledged, no wonder it is the female form par excellence. From my observations in schools, the drama of girls' relations offered many girls the only chance of visibility and self-esteem. It is in this light that they make the meal of them! (It is interesting to understand some of Carol's stylistics through this frame See Chapter 5)

As I mentioned earlier, in the context of the severe injunctions operating to police female sexuality into a dependent position, as heterosexual, domestic and monogamous, the handling of desire which leaks out of these structures and strictures presents girls with intense contradictions. I've suggested also in my taxonomy of the notes that there is evidence that girls are aware of these complexities of feeling, they can be read from the sedimented meanings inscribed in these 'lesbian' subtexts.

But it is essential to register that the form of its expression is embedded in stigmatized/tabooed imagery or alternatively disguised and 'laundered' in the language of the maternal voice.

I do not wish to imply that the girls acknowledge their own sexuality as containing lesbian elements - indeed the few times when I explicitly excavated what I took to be a pre-lesbian scenario - my sharing this risky perspective totally silenced the two girls concerned. One of the very few times these highly articulate and highly educated girls were stuck for words.

It was as if I'd broken into Mandarin Chinese by even talking
about the lesbian option : so inscribed in girls' values
is this form of sexuality as 'other' (Note 2)

This is how the exchanges between me and the two best friends
went :

VH I've got this great solution to this tension between
you.....(about boys)
(my giggles)
You should go out with each other.....(more
giggles)

5 seconds silence.....

Suzy (Bemused) What do you mean ?

It is transparently obvious to me now listening to the tape that
I too, was as burdened by heterosexist norms, probably more so
than the girls. My 'giggling' indicates unease, whilst Suzy's
bemusement is multi-layered - in that she already 'goes out' with
Barbara as her best friend. The silence is about their resisting
my attempt (through misunderstanding/fear/incomprehension to
extend the meaning of 'go out with' to register the erotic
undertones. I then respond to our mutual embarrassment by
discoursing on the Adrienne Rich thesis about the compulsory

nature of heterosexuality!

VH Well, I don't know - there just seems to be an inevitability in all my observations.....about girls.....the assumptions about heterosexuality and I mean there's just.....all the pressures are there to be heterosexual and to relate to boys and if you're not relating to them why aren't you relating to them ?you know.....

S/B (mm, concurring with nods)

5 seconds pause

VH The actual choice of a different choice of sexuality or celibacy (nb. the heterosexist assumption that sees celibacy as identical with non-sexual) which is what you (Suzy) seem to be.....well in this society...there is not the possibility of a different.....well there is the possibility but you've got to be very brave to make it.

Suzy (Quietly) mm.....

5 seconds pause

Suzy There are all those pressures and everything and then I think to myself 'Come on you are still at school and you're only 15, it doesn't really matter what you do'.....I mean it does matter what you do in the eyes of others but when it comes down to it, it doesn't matter if I have ten boy-friends or no boyfriends at all because what I want for myself is what I should have and I know I've got what I want at the moment basically.....

The word 'basically' in this sentence as well as what I heard in her tone of voice couldn't have been more telling. Its semantic meaning is in total contradiction to Suzy's use of it here.

It isn't appropriate to unpack all of the items on the heterosexual agenda behind her comments, except to say that she was fiercely resistant to her own desires for a certain boy and equally insistent upon her 'rights' to 'what I should have'. A position which in practice meant her ambitions to do well in exams, to retain a close bond with Barbara and Lara and to wilfully avoid the heterosexual imperative. (Note 3) In routing the conversation this way all of us also avoided discussing the desiring relations which might exist between girls, so there is no discussion about lesbian sexuality and the silencing about even 'discussing' it is secured by the tentativeness we all feel in the face of the penalization and the pathologizing of this forbidden form of sexual desire.

For the purposes of this set of arguments it is enlightening to recollect that the only time the concept of 'lesbian' was mentioned before was when they told me that it had been 'used against them'.

We were at the time discussing some of the field notes I'd made on them and I was asking them to comment upon my observations.

Suzy (Looking at my text) Why does it say here Zoe rumour ?

VH Oh Zoe, the third year girl, do you remember she came across, we were all in the playground I think... near the wall....you know near the wall where you used to stand, near the wall with the marks.

Suzy Yes.

VH Jamie was there at the time, sort of hanging around and Zoe came across and said something
'Do you know there's a rumour going around the sixth form about you two.....about lezzies or something..?' And I don't know if Suzy or you Barbara said 'Oh it's alright we've talked to somebody about it' Do you remember the reference ?

There followed a very exhaustive checking out by the girls as to the identity of this 'Zoe' and an uncertainty about the accuracy of my recall, during the course of the ensuing discussion Barbara offered this insight into her particular difficulty with my memory of the 'Zoe rumour'.

B I think I know who you mean (referring to Zoe)
because there was a Liz rumour, because I thought
you'd got mixed up with Liz.

VH Another rumour!

B Cos you know.....told you....remember I was telling
you Liz had come up to us in the corridor once
when I first went around with those two (ie. Suzy
and Lara and (she) said 'Do you know that people
in the sixth form think you're dykes!'

S (inaudible)

VH So the same rumour but different sources.

B Yes

VH Or that.....

S I don't remember that girl coming up to us

at all

VH Do you remember that Barbara ? (ie the Zoe rumour)

B No, not really

S (Insistently) I don't really remember it one bit

VH (Pedantically!) I do....'cos it's very interesting to me. 'Cos my other observations are that it's a way to try and control girls' solidarity is to make that 'accusation' about lesbianism. In fact when I told some of the girls that I was going to Crossfil's all girl school, they all said 'It's full of lezzies!' You know....just the fact that there weren't boys there.

S Oh!

B I think that's really interesting.....

VH I mean.....that.....do you remember last week when we were talking about heterosexuality, how all those pressures reinforced (it) - that's one way to do it I think. So there's been another rumour as well, from Liz at the same time or later ?

B Yes...about the same time or maybe slightly earlier. Roughly the same yeh....that made me really angry.

S I remember not one of us knew what a dyke was.

VH (Loud giggles) So you wouldn't realize it was an 'insult' anyway ?

S 'Some people think you lot are dykes'.....
I remember we went....'Oh! Oh! do they'

[all of us giggle]

B So I went home and I said to my mum, 'What's a dyke mum ?'

S Did you ?

VH What did your mum say ?

B My mum said they are sort of butch (or) lesbians

VH What did your mother say Suzy ?

S She just said 'lesbian'

Part of the original failure to recollect the 'Zoe rumour' is partly to do with both girls contrasting confusions as to the identity of Zoe. Barabara thought I had simply transposed Zoe for Liz and Suzy couldn't work out why Zoe (a third year at the time) would have any access to a sixth form rumour. And since one of the major divisions structuring schools at an organisational level is age, she had a point. Also if you can't place a girl you cannot track her down to try to resolve the problem of stigmatization. (cf. Sue Lees (1986) on the same process of tracking down the perpetrators of sexual insult through the rumour grape-vine in a vain damage limitation exercise)

'A reputation cannot be clearly and unambiguously redeemed even by physical victory in the same way as it can either by a boy proving his "bravery" or for that matter, a clear competition between girls for boyfriends. But, ultimately the very vacuity and ambiguity of the term "'slag" is, as I have argued, a reflection of its' role in the control, by males of girls' freedom'

And if this is read as controlling girls' sexual identity as well then the only acceptable safeguard available for them is the same as that posed as the 'solution' to the attribution

of sexual 'looseness' ie. a steady boyfriend.

In reconstructing our 'memories' of this incident (from my practice of sharing my perspectives with the girls on occasions) our contradictory versions of the author of the 'rumour' generated fresh information about the ubiquitous nature of the heterosexual pressures upon these girls. Thus 'lesbian labelling' is not an isolated incidental but forms part of a set of ideological definitional means whereby girls are controlled.

It doesn't have to be 'true' to work as a mechanism but girls feel the need to protect themselves from it if only because empirically their 'passion for friendship' does take such tangible form ; from kissing each other, holding hands, walking arm in arm, rendezvous, sending notes, swapping clothes and gifts, feeling jealousies, and experiencing betrayals. It is from out of these intense bonding/unbonding activities that the fear is incited about their 'dubious' nature because the only other equivalent form of social connection of so violent a nature is heterosexual.

Furthermore, as Rosalind Coward has argued, the cultural neglect of this form of female connection has lead to a belated and unhelpful attempt to recompose women's friendships as idealized, unproblematic solidarity in the tradition of radical feminist accounts. In citing Janice Raymond, she attacks what she sees as the simplicities of the non-contradictory representations of female bonding : →

'The idealization of female friendship as being somehow outside the intensity and conflict characteristic of sexual relations, actually glosses over the most interesting aspect of female friendships. Far more than men, women bring emotions to friendship very like those in sexual relations'

'The Company She Chooses' :

A review of 'The Passion for Friends'

The Guardian May 20th 1986. My emphasis.

And it is because boys and girls recognise this truth which legitimates and strengthens the process whereby these emotions can, in a male reading of it, be construed as erotic in origin and intention - and it could also explain girls own vehemence in denying the truth of their own complex feelings for each other as having anything of the sexual in them.

I want to averr that it is precisely because they also recognise the continuities of emotional need and dependency expressed in their own relations with each other which is carried over into their heterosexual relations, that they are prone to police themselves in an effort to re-establish the boundaries between the two sexual-definitional worlds. I think there is some evidence to show girls actively engaged in this territorial task, as actively pursuing the strategies of fracturing a knowledge of their own eroticism through the compulsions to deny, displace or contaminate

any suspect emotions.

I will return later to look at this in practice when I discuss 'The Two Katys Note, (featured as Appendix B) as well as the note given to me by a girl at B school (Communication 2a) and another interview with Suzy and Barbara.

Before then I will return to the interview which initiated this understanding about the 'role' of the word 'lesbian'. Since opening up the sexual 'can of worms' so to speak, the girls themselves began to make other connections about the way their sexual identity is monitored.

B.That's another thing...I've just realized my mum says to me don't wear that because you lookyou look really butch.

S (Shocked) Really!

VH Does she ?

B Yes.....and she says....

S Like what ?

B Like.....like..

S I like your suit.

B My suit I know.....I've never actually worn it out yet because (inaudible)

VH It's quite subversive to wear a suit for a woman I think.

B But it'sI really like it, it's all pin stripe grey and I was wearing a white shirt and she said 'You shouldn't wear it like....' I was wearing flat shoes and'you shouldn't wear flat shoes with that suit because you look.....you look butch and people will think you're butch. *You should wear shoes with heels otherwise.....'*

S Did she ?

VH Did she ?

B No.....no I didn't wear it because I haven't worn it yet.

Tape 19 February 1986

Further on in the transcript, Barbara acknowledges as well, her

mother's continuing injunctions on the gender ambiguities of some of her clothes which make her as she says '...think twice before wearing it.'

It is generally known that struggles girls have with school over uniform amount to their resistance to the institutional attempt to eradicate opportunities for sexual self-display. (Note 4)

However we know far less about familial definitions of appropriate femininity, Barbara's story is a fascinating glimpse into how a mother's intervention works to undermine her daughter's sense of self confidence precisely because it focuses upon a critique of her as insufficiently heterosexual - and it is only because femininity is heterosexual that these doubts can be experienced by her as so corrosive. For an insight into the impact of her mother's views on her, it is important to know that she is a very confident girl with a strong sense of her own autonomy (and desirability See Note 5) and we need to bear this in mind in homing in on this continuation of the earlier dialogue.

VH You've bought one.....but

B A friend eh, ...a friend of my mums gave it to me

S I think a suit looks horrible with high heels.

B Yes.....

S I think it looks very tacky. (Note 6)

B Yes but other things she says....do this to that
or you look too butch otherwise.....

S Really ? (Surprised)

VH Interesting.....

S You've never told me that before.

VH What's your reaction to that ?

Bit sc.... it upsets and scares me because I
like how it ^oloks but I'm scared that people will
think I'm butch but then I get angry does it really
matter?

S Why, it doesn't matter at all.

B But it does matter.

Despite going on to try to resist her fears about it, Barbara still ends up in the position of 'thinking twice' about it and despite Suzy telling her 'You looked really nice in it' she lets the subject drop '.....I can't.....'

The power of this for me is not so much over the details of the particular concern over clothes and their meanings, though I think this is fascinating in itself, but it resides more in the sense of these alarms looped back to all the other orchestrations of anxiety over girls 'coming out a lesbian' in Gabbie's unwittingly funny phrase. And it is important to notify the reader that at one time in the context of these two girls closeness, it was Barbara's mother who had warned her daughter about becoming 'too dependent' on Suzy.

I intimated right at the outset of this chapter that I would not be investigating the nature or content of girls' 'actual' sexual identity. Therefore this chapter is not about my wishing to join in the 'labelling'. I took a decision at the start of my field work proposal to keep girls' sexual histories out of the framework of my investigations, at least in terms of direct questioning. This was not only out of consideration for the 'privacy' of the girls (an intractable dilemma as is the related issue of voyeurism, etc, etc. in this form of social research), but was a practical necessity in terms of managing access to them in the first place. No school in the country would have welcomed a researcher who was publically prioritising an investigation into the sexual practices of school pupils.

However, it is one thing to keep out sex in theory, institutional life is predicated upon that fiction (Note 7) and another to research femininity without also researching

the making of form(s) of sexuality too. And draft research proposals are also one thing and existential reality another.

Indeed the very nature of ethnography leaves one available to be 'pulled into' parts other research procedures cannot reach!

And unquestionably one such area that I was 'pulled into' was the tension I witnessed between the girls' fascination with, and absorption into, female relations and their co-existing subordination inside the terms of patriarchal forms of heterosexuality. At this stage I want to assert my right not to pronounce upon the virtues of the cases put by the talented protagonists in the debates around what constitutes a sexual identity ie. as either historical (Weeks and Ferguson), or as genital and erotically specific (Wilson) as opposed to its' description as political resistance and subversion (Rich' use of the term 'lesbian continuum'). See Note 8.

I want instead to consider that although there are significant theoretical problems with the too literal take up of the term 'lesbian continuum', I also think that to pose a female sexuality as either one thing or the other - as purely lesbian or purely heterosexual on the sole basis of genital contact, omits what I think is so important to hold onto ie. that sense of a potentiality in all of us for an eroticism, a sensual existence which is about the 'polymorphously perverse' nature of these desiring feelings.

It is in that sense that I want to suggest they are residually present and can be invoked in close relationships, of which female friendship is a classic case.

Indeed, I would actually radically extend this, to speculate that desiring relations exist between men too. You can recall the Myer's quote about what men do with this. (See Chapter 2 section 2)

Furthermore I want to claim that one unconscious element in choosing friends, particularly true for women I think, is their mutual physical attraction to each other. Brian Davies in a throw away allusion to the work of the Opies on children's folk culture cites the following :

'(The Opies) state that boys are definately realists. The characteristics they most want in a friend is that "he should like playing the same games that they do." They note that girls are more concerned with "presents, birthday cards, lending things, and sharing sweets." and are "highly conscious of their friends' appearance" '

Quoted in B. Davies 'Friends and Fights' (1984)

This is not to simplistically assert any one reading of girls' attention to each others' looks as some self-evident piece of 'sexual' predation, (that would be to copy the worst spirit of

heterosexual/ist reductionism), but it does show that one possible source of this interest is the pleasure which having a 'pretty friend' brings. And given the emotional commitments girls bring to each other it's hard not to see this as carrying/covering some form of erotic compulsion.

If it were not the case why would the girls (as well as others) feel the need to so consistently patrol their intimacy so stridently? Why would parents not warn them off each other as becoming 'too dependent'? Why are the negative images of female relationships so prevalent? Why are the girls taught to universally undervalue their own inter-relations and overvalue their relations to the opposite sex?

It is not that I am saying all females are born lesbian(s) (though this is indeed what Freud claims in his account of the convoluted twists which female sexuality has to take in its journey through to heterosexuality) but I am noting that the characteristic female emotional openness to other females is structured from the experience of being born to, raised by, nurtured by another woman a set of experiences, of which erotic and other dependencies (as well as antagonisms) forms a central core.

I believe that it is these competing feelings (attaching themselves to social expectations of gender appropriate behaviour) which profoundly effect girls orientations to reproduce these intensities with each other.

This is highly speculative as yet and is balanced upon a crude, not to say exigetical simplification of Freud (Note 9) :
but even in this undeveloped state it does provide some way into reading girls' dependencies which indicates the psychological investments as explanatory of the recursive production of this phenomenon within girls' cultures and why male bonding takes such a publically different form. (Note 10)

And as Rosalind Coward expresses it, familial politics and experiences radically impact upon the way we do our own friendliness :

'Our own individual histories, the particular quality of our relationship with parents and siblings is likely to be crucial in determining exactly what we do bring to bear in a friendship just as these factors are crucial in sexual relationships.'

'Its the Company She Chooses' :

A Review of 'A Passion For Friends'

R. Coward 1986 (ibid)

This model offers a way of locating individual female histories

which itself is predicated upon our collective prior experience within a household/family structure.

Having set out some of the dimensions to the drama of female desire I would now like to show how girls themselves excise or attempt to excise these problematic ambiguities of sexual feelings.

In the course of the opening to this chapter I characterised the options which some girls took to constitute themselves as heterosexual. I now want to disclose the precise nature of some of these self-surveillance strategies : local tactics whereby girls can offload the anxieties of complex feelings which flow from social rapport and care, in such a way as to sustain their interpersonal closeness whilst minimising their doubts as to its' ulterior motivation.

- b. Talking Dirty : Denial, Degradation and
Displacement.

If the nature of lesbianism is seen as being induced merely by contact with girls, ie. you can 'catch' it rather like measles, then it follows that some girls view their own guarantees of 'normality' as volatile. Amelia puts it this way :

'If you go to a mixed school right, and you do fancy a few people like, but if you had a girls' school right, you'd have to start fancying girls 'cos all you'd see is girls, girls.'

Amelia Tape 7.

In this conceptualisation, sexual desire is driven, presumably by some extra-human inevitability, creating the frightening possibility that its' anarchic force could propel you or others into 'undesirable' desires.

It is interesting to note how similar this view about the locomotive force of sexuality is, to what Wendy Hollway terms as 'the male sex drive discourse'. (Note 11)

If this is what you think sexual desire does to you : 'sweeps you off your feet' in the romantic prose of girls preferred reading matter, then it becomes doubly imperative to safeguard yourself against these possibilities by setting limits on how your close female relationships are to be read. As Judith and Sally re-affirm : 'We all know we only like boys and that's as far as it goes' (See a more extensive discussion of this note to follow.)

I want to look at this letter between Judith and Sally for it is an amazing discourse upon the 'crush business' (Note 12) which I want to propose as existing within some girls relationships. It is of even more significance I think because the girls concerned are from working class cultures, where the constraints upon sexual diversity operate more severely. As a communication, it came to my attention when I had been telling the girls about my interest in the 'unofficial' writing they still took part in at lesson times. In response, Judith told me that she had a 'whole cupboard full' of such notes kept from her 3rd year at B school and out of this collection she gave me this one to read. It concerns her relation to Sally, who was at the time her significant other.

The whole narrative escalates quickly (in a style absolutely characteristic of young girls playfulness or antagonism) and expresses an innuendo filled dialogue between the two in a rehearsal of what I read as their awareness of the hidden agenda

of their mutuality.

They are ostensibly talking about their desires for boys :

J. OK! OK! I mean him, anyway don't get your
nickers up the cracks of your fanny

Item 31

S. They're already up there. Hold on I just
had to pull them down.

Item 32

J. Let me try

Item 33

S. Come on then!

Item 34

J. Ok, when ?

Item 35

The way this correspondence takes off from being about the

girls 'rude' talk about boys, (which will form part of the next section c), to becoming an experimental testing out of each others acknowledgement of the complexities of their mutual feelings for each other, amounts I think to the existence of a definite 'sub-culture' within girls' friendships. It is so hidden, particularly in working class groupings, that it is almost impossible to characterise but it is present, not so much as 'closet lesbianism' as a self-identified self-conscious 'choice' but as the sedimentation of desire which is not heterosexual in origin or in its object.

I am holding out for this statement in the face of very fragmentary evidence. For obvious reasons, it is a hidden desire but I think it can be detected in the way Judith and Sally present mock propositions to each other in increasing degrees of flirtation, I will comment upon the rest of this episode after :

Judith asks 'When ?' : Sally responds, in so coded a form, that it took me some time to see what was on offer here, metaphorically speaking : (ie. a suggestion of oral sex)

S. Tomorrow night while eating out cream of tomato soup.

Item 36

It took Judith the time it took her to write the reply :

J. You fucking lez dirty bitch.

Through this ascending scale of sexual explicitness (this is not quite the right word in the circumstances), Sally bounced their 'flirting' with the lesbian taboo into those other associated female bodily no-go areas - viz. menstruation, and vagina, in such rapid sequence that the visualisation of lesbian sex remains 'contaminated' by all those other self-oppressions - encouraged in girls by the way their bodies are culturally constructed as polluted. Judith immediately goes to the heart of this particular semiotic (erotic ?) chain of meaning : 'You fucking lez dirty bitch'.

The 'degradation' of female/female desire is achieved by the way its ^{has} closer association with despised/feared female bodily parts and functions ; the word 'dirty' enters the making of Judith's reaction because of her own internalisation of the hatred enjoined upon all girls especially in relation to the natural facts of menstruation. Judith had a strong hostility to heterosexual oral sex anyway, so it is not surprising to see this bodily self-contempt re-affirmed in this context. (Note 13)

The inordinate secrecy surrounding female sexual parts contrasts markedly with the public display of the female form in the regimes of cinema, television, art, advertising and in sculpture - exemplified in the illicit discourse of pornography where these 'dirty' bits are exposed in endless, timeless, historyless, pictorial reality for male consumption primarily.

It isn't to be wondered that girls' relations to their own bodies is one of the most contradictory there is. It is a source of obsessive curiosity by boys/men but a source of shame/anxiety for girls too. The fear of lesbian desires is evoked in proportion to its' literal concentration upon the female body which is one and at the same time an intimate stranger to most girls.

What Judith and Sally do next is crucial for any understanding of the oppressions which are expressed in the female domain.

Having toyed with the ambivalences of their feelings for each other : Judith defuses the sexual upping of the ante :

Anyway mate, you'd better keep away from me
because I think you're on the other side of the hill,
you know a little bent.

Item 37

Leaving Sally to insist that 'Yeh, I like a bit of both, know what I mean' (Item 38). Now Judith, positioned as the possible object of this seeks to resist this predatoriness in the distance she attempts to put between herself and Sally :

Well that's fine with me just as long as

you don't pick on me. I mean you can pick
Sunila and Jocelyn because I think they are
a bit like that, they never let go of each
other.

Sue Lees has remarked upon the 'fear' of lesbianism in her
girl subjects (Sue Lees 'Losing Out : Sexuality and Adolescent
Girls' Hutchinson 1986)

What could be more convenient for the purpose of this exercise in
self-protection than the existence of one's 'enemies' (viz. Sunila
and Jocelyn), on whom one can usefully dump these discreditable
practices. (I will be discussing these inter-relations further in
Chapter 6 in the context of a focus upon racism)

However, that resolution is only partially successful, because as
Judith has to acknowledge, in the same item of communication :

Mind you the way we go on kissing
each other on the cheek, people give us
funny looks.

Item 37

Indeed it is precisely that level of intimacy (and the
anxiety/feelings invoked ?) which actually precipitated the lesbian
sub-text between themselves

No wonder they both then have to reassure each other as to their impeccable heterosexual credentials. :

Well, there's nothing wrong with that.

We all know we only like boys and that's as far as it goes.

Sally, Item 38

Sally, thus moves to bring the correspondence to an end, by collaborating with this displacement of difficult feelings by projection onto Jocelyn and Sunila, whose usefulness in this discourse is that they are fair game to carry any uncomfortable emotions which transpires between Sally and Judith. They do this not only because they are 'other' girls but they are specifically useful and selected as Judith's arch-enemies. It's not as if any girl would do - for to secure safety for oneself in these contradictions, the boundaries already drawn between friends/ex-friends makes a 'natural' formula upon which to consolidate your own (hetero)sexual identity as good - whilst the homosexual elements ie. bad, get attached to subordinated others. ie. enemies.

As Judith concludes :

I know as long as we know that that's OK, but I'm not quite sure (about) Sunila and Jocelyn.

→

Item 39

On reflection, maybe Judith's remarks are doubly ambiguous, couldn't they also be registering some personal resistance to the protocol of absolutism in issues to do with sexual desires ?

'I'm not quite sure about Sunila and Jocelyn', could be as much about her own state as theirs, and given the way projections operate within (girls) cultures anyway - almost as an organising principle, I prefer to think of it as an ambiguity of the emotions ultimately refusing the operations of the will.

c. Talking Clean : 'Mums the Word'.

I have already reminded the reader how these 'secret writings' conspire to hide their significances : on the one hand, the business of messages are meant to be read and yet on the other hand, their messages, sc^ribbled or scrawled, in obscurantist prose defy serious attention.

As part 2 will show there does seem to be an inverse relationship between the 'acceptability' of the message and the clarity of the code, thus the 'lesbian' narrative wanders through heterosexual texts in ways that shows its subordination to the assumptions of heterosexual identity and outcomes.

I will disclose in the remaining section to this part how the narrative of a more 'acceptable' kind of female bonding : ie. mother/child surfaces to rehearse those struggles around autonomy and dependence rooted in familial relations but simultaneously occurring within girls best friendships. It is because girls have permission to nurture, that these loving relations flourish, and as such provoke the refusals of possessiveness characteristic of the demands of parenting.

If 'talking dirty' for girls inevitably links to a dismissal

of sensuous attachments through the conduit of the 'disgusting' facts of female anatomy, then there does exist a 'safer' discourse in which girls can present the longings of close homosocial bonding. It is from within the 'hygienic' (because non-sexualised) discourse of mothering that girls can act out their concern and fear about separation and loss as well as practice the conditional power of maternity, as well as pose the irksome constrictions which dependencies inevitably bring.

'Talking clean' in this way, secures space for another form of the 'legitimate' manifestation of connection.

I frequently saw girls, 'mothering' boys, as I had anticipated, but I hadn't quite expected their involvement in the rhetoric or practices of mothering each other. This was a pleasant surprise to witness and record. Girls collected each others dinners, shared money, assisted each other with class/homework, protected each other in rows with outsiders.

However a word of caution is necessary. I wouldn't, for example, want to over-sentimentalize this servicing - after all the 'Ideal Mother' is all self-abnegation and perfect self-sacrifice ie. the original Madonna. There was one girl for instance, whose servicing of her female friends involved her in getting bulk dinner orders, buying the items, conveying them like a pack horse to her friends in the toilets everyday!

A case where nurturance had crossed that thin line into skyvying.

However most best-friendships seemed to have evolved an ethic of reciprocal duties. You remember that the struggles around reciprocity could be the subtitle of the account of Saskia's action plan. These sets of obligations, even if abused in practice, provide also a measure against which exploitation could be placed.

Judith's scathing critique of Sally, which she expressed to me once in the context of a discussion about the proper loyalties of friendship hinged upon her failure to 'give as good as she got' with the implication that Sally's boyfriend 'got in the way' of proper mutuality. As Judith put it : 'There, you see she brings him into everything!'.

Other girls in my study understood the familiarities and obligations which best friendship pivots upon, familiarities which are strongly continuous of familial dependencies.

Barbara and Suzy, for example, are involved in the following exchange in addressing these tensions about their loyalties to each other in a way which links the two. In their powerful reconstruction of a fraught scenario I hope to show how the pull towards heterosexuality is expressed in the form of a family drama, allowing the girls to find some form of acknowledging their commitment to each other which keeps its other (less safe) dimensions hidden.

Wining and Dining

I have maintained before that Suzy and Barbara had opposing views about the 'surplus value' of boyfriends. It is necessary to recollect Suzy's antagonism to the routines of heterosexuality and to reflect upon Barbara's enthusiasm for the institution.

We could expect them therefore, to suffer quite considerable stress from these differences - it certainly was one of the strongest narratives running throughout their tapes with me. But it also true that they elected to 'manage' these difficulties, rather than simply 'doff' each other out' in Christine Griffin's phrase. (See Typical Girls for an account of this practice).

This next scene is recreated in an effort to indicate both the strength of their attachments to each other and the sense of a struggle against those dependencies. An added complicating dimension, is this fact of male competition with which Suzy in particular, has to strive.

This specific tension over Barbara's fancying of boys gets expressed by Suzy in her annoyance over Barbara's dilatoriness over eating a hamburger which she had paid for : (Commentary on Tape 16, will be interspersed)

S. No.....I don't think you're thriving on....
I mean dwelling on...thinking constantly
'I've got to get a boyfriend' I know, come on,
that you're not going to do that. 'Cos other
things enter your mind, but obviously...but I..
but at McArthur's last week I just felt sort of
...cos we had had a conversation about 'em...
how you wanted a boyfriend desperately and
I said 'Yes I know you do,' and then you got
really angry with me for making you eat the
hamburger. (laughs)

B. (Laughs)

S. God! I felt like we were a married couple.

VH. (laughs)

S. Cos...we were....I was paying for her, lending her
the money to pay for the hamburger.....and she
left her hamburger.

B. I thought you were more like my mother.

S. I thought you were joking when you weren't eating
.....I kept going on at you 'cos I thought she's

joking. I was trying to see your face and in the end she got really annoyed and she said :

'Look I'm not having the hamburger!'

(Mimes angry voice

Oops! You were so angry that's the angriest I've ever seen you. It was over such a poxy thing.

B. No, but I'm getting really angrier over lots of things at the moment.....I don't know why.... It's nothing.

S. And because we'd just had that discussion about you know, you wanting a boyfriend, I was really quiet and my irrational subconscious or conscience or whatever started racing away..... 'Christ, you know, she doesn't want to be here... she wantsshe'd much rather be here with a boy and all'.....(inaudible)

The drama of Suzy's imagined redundancy in her friend's affection is enacted upon the offering and rejection of food : the classic token of maternal nurturance. The work done by Susie Orbach and others on the identification of associations between food and mothering is I believe evident here in the position of Barbara whose resistance to Suzy's 'fussing' is definitive : 'I'm not

having my hamburger!'

Suzy casts them as like a married couple, and she repeats this characterisation later on in the tape :

S. Oh God, it was so horrible....Oh God (embarrassed)
I really...you've got no idea how much I felt like
the wife and you were the husband. I said :
'Eat your hamburger' (mimes nagging voice) and you
saying : 'I don't want my hamburger'
(mimes child's voice ?)

B. I didn't feel likeI did feel that you were
my mother, nor my husband or not my wife (she
corrects herself)

S. It's just really weird.....

10 seconds silence prior to next communication.

As we can hear, the voice of the powerful, dominating mother is continued within the wife identity, so in an emotional sense it is the coherence of these identifications which are striking as the girls' represent their difficulties, at second hand, as it were, in the familiar rhetoric of 'nagging' mother and 'bossy'

wife and conversely 'bullied' child and 'hen-pecked' husband.

One significant problem which beset many of the relationships I studied, was that of dealing with the inadmissible problem of 'illegitimate' jealousy. The hamburger's loaded meaning as unconsumed love is not the only symbol of rejection discernible within the passions of girls' lives. Given that girls are positively incited by the ideologies and practices of teenage consumerism to produce themselves as rivals of each other in the competition for boys. Jealousy is meant to record the disadvantage a female feels in relation to other girls inside the heterosexual market-place. (For a discussion of this see Chapter 6 section 5)

How on earth are you supposed to acknowledge, let alone deal with, the jealousy provoked by boys taking your friends away from you? Especially in the climate when 'lesbianism' is seen as some sort of virus - how can you express the emotional rejection of letting your best friend go off? : As Suzy tries to articulate the impact of Barbara's contemplating another boy relationship.

'I just feel like at lunch time and at break you're really more and more and more.....you just sort of sit there really quiet and then when Lara and I say something to you to stop you from being quiet.....you just snap at us.....and at times like that I just start thinking...
'If she want's a boyfriend, right let her fuck off and get a boyfriend and just leave me alone, because...

I get so sort of.....just.....'

Suzy's being 'lost for word' to describe this emotion is because there is no way she can acknowledge the intensity of the rejection she feels which will not be read as showing her 'rights' to Barbara as unacceptable in the first place.

In the context of the above, I would now like to turn to a specific conversation which preceded the 'hamburger' story.

Below we find both of them debating the impact of one of Barbara's boyfriend's, in the course of which, we note that Suzy is struggling with these sorts of difficulty which compel her to doubt the veracity of her own feelings, so split and ambiguous are her expressions of them.

VH. Did you feel upset by her decision to go out with David ?

S. Yes, I felt really upset and.....half of me felt 'Right! this is it, you know the end of the relationship.....never see her again'
(Melodramatically)

B. Really ? (surprised)

S. And the other half thought 'For God's sake, this is only the beginning.....you've known Barbara for almost two years, don't be so bloody stupid. It doesn't matter that she's got.....and I really like David as a person' (said in an adult/serious voice)

The girls then discourse upon the disadvantaging guilt which Barbara's decision to 'go out' with David incited in her and which Suzy reacted against, leading both girls for their own different reasons into an oppressive silence on the issue.

Part of the complexity of their interpersonal tension is the sense of their polar views on the wisdom/desirability of having 'boyfriends' at all. Suzy's resistance to dating was very well understood by her friend, as was Barbara's interest in the opposite sex.

Barbara had been heavily counselled by her two friends over her previous 'bad' experiences with young men and had vowed to 'get to know' them better before making their 'fanciability' known to them. Hence her lightning romance to this particular boy ('I'd only known David a week') made her feel particularly vulnerable to the accusation of inconsistency.

In these circumstances, no wonder they had especial problems managing his intrusion!

Barbara is rehearsing her 'supposed' new position :

B. I'd had all these discussions after Keith and
and Rod (two previous boy-friends), 'I won't
do this.....I won't say this'.

To which Suzy retorts, ironically as :

S. I know, but I'm not your master. You can do
what you like.....

It is because Barbara is her own mistress, that Suzy
feels so aggrieved of course.

Suzy, now takes the initiative, to raise the question of the
incapacitating effect which David has had on their relationship.

S. I think the thing that I found most horrible about it
was that we never actually spoke about it. I think
that we were too scared to actually say.....
I just wished you'd said to me something like....
'Are you upset ?'or something ?

B. (Interrrrupting, insisntently) I did,I did!
I did.....I asked you thousands of times...

S. (Interrupting) When ?

B. And you said 'No.'

S. You didn't ask me thousands of times...

B. I remember distinctly asking you one time at
lunch time.

The disparity between the 'thousands' and the 'one', speaks volumes about the girls problems around issues of jealousy and proprietorialness. Having been given permission to admit some of the intensity of feelings involved, Suzy confronts Barbara with the nub of the issue :

S. I also felt as if.....I never really saw you at
breaks or at lunchtimes because you were talking
to David, all the time and Lara sort of standing
around talking (to her boyfriend Patrick)
and then you were talking to him all the time,
all the time, all the time and I said...

'Are we doing anything on Saturday night ?'

And you said 'No, I'm going out with David'.....

Uh!.....No, it's just a bit of a shock apart from
anything else.....(3 seconds pause)

I think the whole thing has made me think that I should be a lot more independent.....And sort of... yes it has.....

And Barbara goes on to acknowledge :

'You're bound to look at things differently, if some one else.....I mean.....it was as if we'd got rid of Jamie, (a boy with whom the two of them had a semi-platonic, flirtacious relationship), and there was just us two, and I'd gone along and brought another boy into it'

Barbara's last comment eloquently sums up one of the principal tensions in their friendship, at this point, as such it is the common sense synopsis of the fragility and impermanence which is supposed to fully describe female friendship. But is is necessary to stress the dimensions to girls resistance to boys 'taking' their friends. Part of those dimensions with which this chapter is concerned has been to understand the power of the female ties, seen in the pain, through their disguised expression (itself though, another form of displacement) in the language of a more 'acceptable' ways to be possessive/controlling/involved. Suzy, I am sure used my services to unpack the 'meanings' of the hamburger episode, to get to the 'real meat' of the matter! It was only through outside mediation that she could 'admit' the

extent of her distress at Barbara's disloyalty. They had not managed to raise the issue before : '..we never actually spoke about it.' as Suzy phrases it. It isn't to be wondered at that the tensions when they do bubble to the surface take oblique shape.

For within patriarchal discourse, the only publically permitted expression of female investment in another female which is granted, is that of maternal servicing/nagging/bossing.

Paradoxically at the cultural level, despite the masses of evidence about the strong bonds which do exist between women, outside of the family, the imagery of self-sacrifice and examples of heroic interpersonal commitment are all male, a theme of buddiedom which even has its' own filmic genre of course in the cowboy plot.

(Note 14)

No wonder Suzy couldn't speak about her jealousy except via the fragmented and circuitous route, via McCarthur's. No wonder Barbara modified her claim to have investigated Suzy's feelings from 'thousands' to 'one'. As Rosalind Coward comments, the cultural invisibility of representations of female friendship in our culture needs urgent attention if simplicities which obscure its domain are not to stand as gospel on its processes and meanings :

'The problem is not just that women don't see the centrality they have for each other reflected anywhere, it's also that feminism has leapt in to fill the gap with

a somewhat idealised notion of friendship.'

'The Company she Choses'

The Guardian May 20th 1986

From my own researches I would also suggest, that the task of addressing this vacuum is rendered even more urgent in the face of the difficulties of creating images of strong, caring females without recourse to misogynistic archetypes. The task is two fold then, to counter the poisonous messages which devalue female power (ie. the mother in law joke) and to establish a language for identifying the complexities of female only relationships.

It is not that I am naive about the impediments to such a project but as I will argue in more detail later, this task has to commence if the business of strengthening female solidarities, is seen as somehow ^vindispensable to the job of contesting female oppression. (See Chapter 8 for this debate)

It is not so much that I see them as struggling to be 'lesbian' against the normative heterosexuality which pinions them from all sides, it is rather that I see them caught without a language in which they can place their good and bad feeling about their closeness and dependency. Their fear of any desires which they might feel for each other, I would suggest as falling outside of the categories around. It is as if their sensual attachments are neither once and for all lesbian 'signs', nor are they

satisfactorily described as 'platonic'. It is part of my argument to extend the definition of erotic to include these emotions of warmth which are created within close friendship and that is a bonding which could tell us as much about masculinity as it does about femininity.

Therefore, I would contend, that these female friendships offer a suppressed model of gendered friendship with implications for how males conduct and construct their own same sex relations from out of the same 'chora' of erotic attraction and it is only because this knowledge has to be savagely repressed within male culture that it has to be controlled within female culture as well.

What I am suggesting as a consequence, is not that female friendship in certain moments reveal in any transparent form the 'lesbian continuum', but that it is structured by and incites as well as regulates desiring relations - a position which is in tension with the assumption of a unitary identity as either heterosexual or homo-sexual or even bi-sexual.

Being a 'nagging' mother or a 'sulky child' has to carry the weight of other devalued/suspect feelings, the jilted partner being recycled as the controlling parent to protect both parties from the implications of recognising that what they might feel for each other, (or what one of them feels for the other), reveals them as having articulated 'rights' to each other which only males are 'allowed' to have in a patriarchal and heterosexually monopolistic society.

(Note 15)

Before I leave this part of this chapter I would direct the reader to Appendix B the 'Two Katy's' note which is accompanied by a commentary developing my ideas about the way this mother/child voice carries these homosocial/homosensual stigmatised intensities, under discussion in this section.

2. Desiring Boys : 'The Naming of Parts'

Along with the submerged, not to say almost buried recognition of the 'frightening' possibility that your best friend might be more than 'just good friends', is the co-existing, though much more 'acceptable' set of feelings about 'fancying boys'. Not that I am suggesting that girls' predatory style is unequivocally encouraged in this regard : it is not!

Conversely, the explicit representation of an active female (hetero)sexuality is practically tantamount to declaring yourself a prostitute in public culture. I am intrigued by the idea that one of the purposes of the Chinese 'secret writing' already mentioned was as the conduit of female desire, inside a clandestine but shared communicative form.

The only acceptable face of female 'fancying' lies firmly within the ideologies and practices of romantic love and its' expression within the confines of domestic monogamy. Along with a host of other commentators, Sue Lees (1986), cites the existence of the steady boyfriend as the only protection from the designation of 'slag'. However, the point of this section is to demonstrate, that even if the public construction of acceptable heterosexual femininity is supposed to be coterminous with passivity, modesty

and 'being ^esen but not heard' - the anarchy of female desire and curiosity spills outside of such a policing by discourse, custom, the family, males and the state.

I want to illuminate this statement with some more buried treasure, fissures in expectation which give some access to this hidden world, where girls together can express their fearful fascination at male 'otherness'. For it is within their homosocial world that that they have the space to understand the 'impermissible' - what is revealed I think is a much more assertive form of curiosity about men than 'fandom' presupposes, thus along with the dreamier fantasies of romance are the material realities, and distinctly focussed upon the signifier of sexual difference, (the phallus a la Lacan) but which despite its' psychological primacy never reaches the public domain. Inside these odd places of girls' communications, (principally diaries and notes) girls can and do make 'public' their experimental reactions to the conflicting messages they receive about the inevitability of wifedom in a culture which keeps mens' bodies well and truly out of sight.

(Note 16)

Just as the 'lesbian' subtext was so fractured as to be difficult to argue for an understanding of it, as either universal, or deep-rooted or inevitable, (though I see it as a potentiality in all those terms), so it can be claimed that the equally partial evidence of active heterosexuality undermines the substance of the case I am trying to construct about it. I would however, insist upon giving these 'fragments' serious attention, in the spirit of

'reading against' the public status of the documents ie. as idle jottings and incomplete comments. A practice encouraged in my claims for the 'reading' of girls' notes. Part of the pull of this next set of data is to promote the notion of an active heterosexuality amongst women, a somewhat friable and tendencious assertion, until recent sexual political developments in the contemporary women's movement. (Note 17)

Early on into my research at C school, I had an inconclusive discussion with two best friends, Gabbie and Amelia, with two other best mates, Aileen and Pamela, joining in. All the girls were fourth years.

I now subsequently realize that part of its' inconclusiveness concerned the actual topics we roamed over - a common theme of which was the difficulty they had in acknowledging/expressing desire itself. Part of the problem no doubt, lay in the fact that some of the 'objects' of the girls' desires were comporting themselves in the best male macho style of long-distance surveying on the adjacent piece of playground equipment. All in all their absent presence certainly added fizz to our discussions!

Amelia is talking about her 'fancying' one particular boy, the grandson of one of her neighbours. Her intervention into the conversation is triggered by Gabbie reminiscing about a ² ₁ pst 'romance' :

A. You get a lot of different - feelings like.....

VH. When you get older when you start to fancy boys ?

G. And Shane - and Earl had a girl friend....

(She is continuing her saga of her ending a relationship)

A. (Self-concerned) You get a lot of different feelings which you don't like.....

VH. What do you mean about getting feelings, some of which you don't like ? What does that mean ?

A. It just means that right - I fancy this boy, I still fancy him but...and I went round to his house because his Nan lives upstairs to me and I see him quite a lot and I went to his house right and he was in bed and I only saw him for about 5 minutes and I was really upset.

G. Really upset.....yes

A. And when I came back I started crying and that and my Mum goes 'If you're going to get this upset everytime you see him, then I'd better not (see him ?) And it was just like feeling I didn't understand and didn't like and I still get that feeling when I see

him and I just don't understand it but I know I like him a lot. I really like him but I don't know if he likes me.

'Fancying someone' from the safe confines of your day-dreams or in front of television is one thing, but to confront the object of your desire in material reality, let alone in bed of all things (!), places such pressure upon Amelia, that her reaction is not surprisingly one of 'upset'. It is this upset which hides the desire, and these erotic attractions become designated as 'bad', mostly I would surmise in the context of the problematic status of female sexuality if it is characterised as anything other than supine.

Is Amelia upset here, simply by feeling sexual towards this boy because there is no popular way in which girls can be said to own good sexual feelings except those aroused (literally and ideologically) within marriage ?

After all, in the course of the same interview both Gabbie and Amelia, demonstrate their ability to apply these patriarchal categories to 'other' girls. Gabbie raises the issue of 'having a good time' for a girl (which in Wendy Hollway's account would express a female form of the Permissive Discourse)

G. Yes, some boys think that right (but) the boy really gets serious, so when you don't want to pack

'em in and she just wants to have a good time with 'im
in (all the above spoken in embarrassed tones of
sexual innuendo)

VH. What does having a good time mean ?

G. You know what! (giggles)

VH. Oh!

G. You know! You know! (laughing)

A. Using somebody.

VH. Use him ?

G. Yeh! Use him, yeh for a bit of nitty gritty....
(giggles).....hanky panky..... (giggles)

VH. Do girls use boys for that ?

G. Yeh!slags do. I wouldn't.

VH. Slags do ?

A. Yeh

[Giggles]

G. Yeh

Further on still in our discussion, immediately after a description by them of several incidents of sexual harassment by boys on their female classmates - the two 'other' girls who'd been scapegoated as 'causing' this behaviour by their attributed incitement of boys' 'natural' predatory instincts, reappear again in this classic role to carry this burden of the patriarchal double standard. A standard which detaches boys from any responsibility, on the basis of constructing the division of good/bad within femininity. (See Sue Lees 1986 for an elaboration of this domain as 'the site of adolescent male power')

- A. Do you remember in needlework they used to come up to us and say what do you do when the sun goes down...? And we always used to pick the pins up.....and when we used to pick the pins up, they always used to pull you under the table....(giggles).....
not us, Maureen and Rachel !.....they are just disgusting, but I think they've grown out of that now.....They're still filthy (though)

If Amelia's confusion over her feelings is structured by the 'impossibility' of desire - this is not meant to suggest it

disappears, for as I want to show, girls in particular circumstances have elaborated a covert form of sexual 'explicitness' - in a written form, detailing feminine curiosity, a written discourse of feminine 'talking dirty' which Anna Pollert, uncovered within different groups of manual women workers in a tobacco factory. - ie. that in specific circumstances women create a sexually explicit argot to challenge gender power ratios. She distinguishes several occasions in which different cliques and age cohorts, utilise 'bad' language to sexualise the atmosphere, in an attempt to create some 'fun'.

She identifies the all-girl classroom like nature of an incident in the hand-packing department :

Cherry What do you think about polo ?

Ann Polo ?

Cherry (Giggling up a pitch) Yes ! the mint with the hole ! (uproar all round)

Ann Want a banana ? (shrieks)

Cherry Oh yeah - a banana!

Ann Can I have it peeled please (Fits of laughter)

'Girls, Wives : Factory Lives'

This female 'camaraderie' is seldom heard in mixed-sex classrooms in public, but it resurfaces within the intimate exchanges of best-friends where it has the opportunity to develop in byzantine fashion - :

I will give the flavour of this 'dirty talk' from two sources one is a communication between Sally and Judith, written when they were in the third year. (This is the same correspondence in which the flirted with the homoerotic only to re-assert their heterosexuality at the end see the first part to this chapter) and the second is a transcript containing a conversation between two girls from 1M Iris and Sonia.

1. Judith and Sally were in the third year, best friends, spending a great deal of time together. Subsequently upon Gina's arrival at the school, Judith split from Sally and adopted Gina as her 'best', though she was still in close touch with Sally via their co-membership of an extended female network. She later confessed to me, that it was Sally's 'obsession' with her boyfriend Sam, which started to 'bug' her and moved her to question the solidity of Sally's commitment to her.

However, for the purposes of this communication, things are well between them, and their goonery and rapport are well captured in this 'rude' letter. It purports to be about a piece of social planning but it soon slides off into a baroque elaboration

of shared female sexual speculation : which moves rapidly away from the romantic into the phallic. I reproduce the appropriate extract below to convey the texture and energy of the exchange to suggest something of the subversive pleasures which the articulation of the forbidden brings. Just as 'rude' words hold an inordinate fascination for young children, the girls' concentration on boys' genitals has the excitement of the illicit.

It is the penis in a particular phallic representation which is the object of these girls' mirth and fear. Thus it is more than just their being over-impressed with male bodily parts, as the following communication shows :

Speculating on the Privates 1.

After the social detail the two girls get down to other matters :

- 3 J. What about Paul O will he be there ?
 If he is, when you want to get off with him I'll
 distract Sam and say you've gone to the toilet.
- 4 S. I don't think he will be there but if he is thanks a
 lot. If you talk to Sam I'll go outside and get well
 away with Paul.

- 5 J. Too right I'd do the fuckin' same.
- 6 S. Well you only live once, so why don't you enjoy yourself.
- 7 J. The scientific proof shows that you can live twice, so how do you feel ? Guttled!
- 8 S. No, not really, because the scientific proof shows that you can live three times, if you like so how do you feel ? Guttled ? By the way I didn't know how to spell scientific, so I copied yours. PTO.
- 9 J. Mine is probably wrong too.
- 10 S. So why fucking write it OK!
- 11 J. Because I pissen well did, you prick with ears.
- 12 S. Jude, pissen is spelt pissing OK!
- 13 J. Well I fuck'n spell it that way okay or do you want me to write it down.
- 14 S. What are you fucking on about, you silly fucking pissing cow.

- 15 J. Suck an egg.
- 16 S. Get me an egg then.
- 17 J. Okay I'll go and ask Miss Stone.
- 18 S. Go on then and get yourself one because I've got a small mouth and it won't fit but you could fit a sink - in yours.
- 19 J. Well you could fit a bath with a shower in yours.
- 20 S. Well you could fit the whole world plus the universe in yours, so there Buster.
- 21 J. Well, you could fit all the planets in the world that's Mars, Venus, Mercury, Pluto, Saturn, and the moon and the Sun.
- 22 S. I was going to write that but I didn't know how to spell it anyway they are in the universe and they would (fit) in your mouth, not mine so shut up. Anyway I know what would fit in your mouth and that is a nice juicy prick.
- 23 J. But how do you know ?

- 24 S. Well that day I saw him, it's the first thing you look at. Although I haven't seen it in the flesh yet. I can still tell.
- 25 J. Well I've never looked myself but now you come to think of it. I just might have a peep when I see him.
- 26 S. Well I don't mind as long as it's only a peep and not a fuckin' hard stare.
- 27 J. Well you never know it might even be in the flesh.
- 28 S. Fuck off!
- 29 J. Who with ? Paul ? Ok then.
- 30 S. With Paul O, yes no(t) any other Paul.
- 31 J. Ok ! Ok ! I meant him anyway don't get your knickers up the cracks of your fanny.

At this point in the game, the girls deviate into the even more taboo realm of female sexuality (already discussed). In many ways this excursion into the illicit underworld of heterosexuality builds upon from the classic childhood taunts and teases, each boast trying to outdo the earlier one, each girl positioning herself in a

mock competitive relation (a parody of the real relations of competitiveness in which they are also engaged ?), determined to outface the other in upping the ante of tabooed areas, so the gradient gets steeper in heterosexual terms from the relatively innocuous :

- a. 'getting off with' ie. kissing to the more passionate,
- b. 'getting well away with', through to the much more physical,
- c. 'I know what you could fit in your mouth and that is a nice juicy prick' - oral sex itself but interestingly not simply expressed as the 'servicing' of male desire.

This slide into sexual explicitness flows 'naturally' from the byzantine journey through other objects and mouths, but it is intriguing to see how girls construct this realm against the norm, to make male difference the subject of the commentary :

'It's the first thing you look at'

As I stated before, given the total cultural obsession with eroticising femininity, this 'admission' breaks a taboo. It's shock value comes from the challenge to the 'male gaze' ie. we have two girls 'lusting' after boys, judging their attractiveness/desirability by the dimensions of their genitals! No wonder masculinity is to some extent made from the struggle to retain control over the rights to survey.

The culmination of this heterosexual adventure in language, this

sexual goonery co-exists within the patriarchal practices and ideologies which persistently work to secure femininity as 'desirable objects' rather than as 'desiring subjects' . Therefore the interest for me, in the above, lies in seeing what happens when girls break those rules, ie. when they do the looking.

I am not of course arguing that they have equivalent absolute powers in this business, or that they have come to a 'liberated' account of their own sexuality through this solidarity, ie. I am not claiming that their sentiments (which are anything but sentimental!) represent the 'repressed' pure form of female sexuality (Note 18) Indeed there is nothing immediately progressive about 'measuring' masculinity in these terms, quite the converse, it could be seen to be yet another version of the male sex drive discourse.

However, I would want to suggest that when girls 'talk dirty' they too are claiming in safe circumstances ie. amongst best friends the 'right' to be sexual. To speak about something which normally only 'slags' do is bound to be a secretive business, especially in the context of school where the only publically accepted form of female desire (if judged from the sex-education curriculum) is the desire to reproduce! I will look at this issue in more substance later in the final chapter.

As Rosalind Coward writes : →

'(When) we live in a culture which offers the body of the opposite sex as the reward at the heart of the incitement to make sexual relations. So isn't it odd that one body seems to be valued more for its' curiosity value than its' aesthetic appeal ? Isn't this a strange contradiction at the heart of a culture which in many ways is strictly heterosexual ?'

'Female Desire : Women's
Sexuality Today' Paladin (1984) p227

And she 'fleshes' out this general statement with the following observation :

'Our society has been saturated with images of women's bodies and representations of women's sexuality, under this sheer weight of attention to women's bodies we seem not to have noticed that men's bodies have quietly absented themselves. Somewhere along the line, men have managed to keep out of the glare, escaping from the relentless activity of sexual definitions.'

(ibid)

One consequence of this 'invisible man' syndrome is the preponderance of female responses to male bodies couched in terms

of 'strangeness' and the 'unknown', which Coward sees as common to negative feelings of repulsion and positive feelings of attraction.

The 'otherness' of boys made from the 'obviousness' of their penises fascinated (frightened ?) the girls too. And part of the utility of their private letters is that they can undress boys to get at parts other discourses cannot reach !

'Men are physical strangers to women and to themselves because in this male-dominated society it is men who have the power to define.....Controlling the look, men have left themselves out of the picture, because a body defined is a body controlled.'

(ibid)

I have tried to show what the girls are up to is a resistant practice in the context of the male incessant elaboration of sexual acceptability. I have already cited other instantiations of this exercise in male power and I will return to it later when I bring together a critique of masculinity as directly based upon male rights to sexually define, sexually initiate and sexually pursue all of which flows from and actively remakes male power. But this is not to argue that I view this power as having a biological base, for I think these definitional powers themselves are social products of male economic, social and cultural power.

Before leaving this chapter I would like to use one more scene in telling this particular story. This features two 1M girls in conversation with me about growing up and their feelings about boys in their own class. This section will therefore be about what Iris and Sonia have to say (or not to say) about boys.

It is important to be aware that in this and other subsequent conversations, both girls had mentioned to me situations in which they experienced sexual harassment, once when they were doing their shared evening paper round, and during their first term at the school from one boy in their class.

So common is this fact of the 'hidden curriculum' that most girls I spoke to, took it as a 'common sense' view about what boys were!
(Note 19)

Yet despite this, it is important to recognise in this extract a persistent voice determined (with encouragement) to turn the tables upon those voyeuristic boys, at least at the level of words.

Speculating on the Privates 2.

We had been discussing the 'bra culture' (both girls were 12 at the time)

VH. Do you think it matters that girls have busts ?

I/S. No

It'd be different if the boys had them as well.

(hoots of laughter)

S. Yeh! and we could go around flicking their bras...

'em. I mean some boys have got.....you know ...?

VH. No.....

(Huge giggles from all three of us)

S. I mean some are quite big.....and you know....

...you know.....

(more giggles)

I. Go on.....

VH. And you notice things like that do you ?

S. Sometimes....it all depends.

VH. Do you ?

(giggles) Do they get teased do you think ?

I/S No!

I. They never get teased.

I don't think there's any doubt that what the girls are referring to is the same topic of mirth/fear/interest which Sally and Judith were speculating upon. Given that the girls and I are involved in speech, they couldn't even say the word.

Later on in the same tape they go onto discuss with me the more acceptable aspect of male aesthetic curiosity. I am trying to check out with them how they 'saw' boys.

VH. Do you think it's important that boys look nice ?

This precise question elicited an eight second silence.

I/S. (Giggles).....yes

yes.....

I.in a way yeh..

VH. And it....do you notice what they are wearing ?

S. Not really.....

I.sometimes the well dressed ones like Jack.

He's very well-dressed.

S. Yes....like I go 'Oh I like his trousers' or

'I like his jumper'

I.And Chas.....and Chas.....

VH. You say that to the boys do you ?

S. No....to each other.

VH. You check it out with each other ?

Their detour into the 'explicit', as well as their judgements about what makes a boy 'fanciabile', is evidenced here, but it hardly needs to be said that it does not make it into the public domain of a classroom, to work as part of a mobilisation expressing a collective resistance to the male control of sexual definitions.

I would suggest that the emergence of these 'naughty' thoughts themselves were predicated upon the close female bonds that the two girls shared and allowed me into as well.

However, a more comprehensive challenge to male power requires a 'politicisation' of female friendship, which moves outward from the solidarity of two best friends to embrace a wider community of girls.

This ambition can only be achieved or at least addressed when we

come to see those points in female friendships constitution as sharing a common starting place which as Chapter 3 discloses as the necessarily massive emotional/personal investments which girls bring to their homosocial relations as a continuity of their subjectivity as more consolidated within such close bonds.

Therefore, any understanding, has to be alert to the materiality of female friendship as the equivalent of the material structures which masculinity articulates through the medium of sport and competitive games. However, there the resemblance ends, because if male sport is socially sanctioned, culturally endorsed in its ubiquity, the opposite is true of female bonding ; which as an historical and social institution of significant importance to females at all stages in their lives, might just as well as not exist for all the public celebration/attention which it draws.

And yet it thrives and struggles in the hidden spaces of hostile environments. The point of this chapter has been to show the range of concerns it carries and the empowering possibilities which its safety creates the potential for.

The next chapter breaks away from tracing the friendship cultures of girls to examine the way one particular girl sought to make herself into a 'proper woman' - a career move given more permission I would argue, precisely because of her 'emancipation' from best or consistent friendship. It will be the only time in the thesis when significant attention will be paid to this other (heterosexual) career, although as I have already indicated this tension between

the two bonds is a continuous one throughout ^{grs}~~their~~ secondary school careers.

Chapter 4.

Notes.

1. Cf. for example, the displacement of the 'contaminations' of homosexual desire onto Judith's and Sally's enemies. It is they who are said to be 'the other side of the hill' leaving the two definers to describe their sexuality as : 'We all know we only like boys and that's as far as it goes'
2. See 'The Case of Beatrice : An Analysis of the word Lesbian and the Power of Language to Control' by Sally Cline in *Feminist Experiences in Feminist Research : Studies in Sexual Politics* ed. Olivia Banks. University of Manchester. (1984) p33-60.
3. See Chapter 7 for other discussions about these middle class girls' friendships. This chapter also is concerned to explore something of the impact and meanings of their differentiated attitude to boys.

4. This is of course ironic given the way male fantasy constructs school girls' uniform as provocatively sexy, See my use of Stuart Weir's observations about this and other matters in Chapter 2.

5. Space limits have compelled me to eliminate detailed consideration of how girls take up different positions in relation to heterosexuality. Barbara's style could definately be seen as 'semi-liberated' ie. she had asked a boy out, and she also saw herself as making the ground rules inside courtrship etc. : a position predicated upon her sense of herself as 'attractive'. The gist of her postion being that she saw herself as more attractive if confirmed in a relationship with a boy. (cf. Wendy Hollway's work too)

This is completely at odds with Suzy's role as 'celibate' which she characterised as stemming from her vulnerability to being undermined in terms of her self-esteem by boys she might 'go out' with.

6. For a developed understanding about what class values are packed into the word 'tacky' see Chapter 7.

7. See Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin : 'Sex' at 'Work', in particular 'Sexuality Appears' pages 3-16. This section is extremely interesting for what it has to say about the myth of 'sexless' institutions and in the light of my own research findings about the parallel narrative of girls'

heterosexualisation highly pertinent too. The following extract provides a very useful gloss upon the findings of this thesis both with respects to the institu^o_^tion of homo-sociality and heterosexuality :

'To put all this in more concrete terms, we may usefully draw on the broad distinction between the public domain and private domain. Organisational life clearly comprises part of the public domain. Sexuality is often considered primarily biological, and socially part of the private domain. Both these assumptions are disputed. Within organisational contexts sexuality clearly becomes part of the public, though sometimes unrecognised as such or only recognised with great reluctance'

And as they go on to assert :

'The public/private division has in recent years been seen by many feminist writers (eg. Elshtain, 1981 ; Stacey and Price, 1981) as crucial in understanding gender relations and the distribution of power between women and men, and indeed children'

Wheatsheaf Books (1987)

My emphasis.

8. References to Weeks, Ferguson, Rich and Foucault - see note 6, Chapter 3. And for an entertaining contribution to this debate see Elizabeth Wilson 'The Context of "Between Pleasure and Danger" : The Barnard Conference on Sexuality' Feminist Review 13 Spring 1983 p35-41.
9. I will be drawing upon Melanie Klein's concepts later, to develop this psychological dimension underpinning the visible form of female friendship. See in particular my discussion in Chapter 8.
10. In a comment on one of the themes in her latest piece of writing - 'The Friends of Alice Wheeldon'. Sheila Rowbotham remarks on the mother-daughter relationship of Alice and Hettie :

'I was interested in their closeness and also in the pain of their disagreement. It has a connection with the feminism of today. It's been very difficult for us to accept that it's a broad movement with conflicts and divisions because there's been an enormous desire to agree, to co-operate with each other. Somehow, men's way of distancing themselves seems to help them pretend, at least, not to be hurt by personal conflict'

The Guardian →

June 18th 1986

This suggestive linkage between maternal/female child bonds and its resonances within contemporary feminism strikes me as very rich and one which speaks to my own thoughts upon the ferocity of female love/hate. It is in this context also that I find Melanie Klein's work appealing.

11. Wendy Hollway in 'Heterosexual Sex, Power and Desire for the Other' in Sex and Love : New Thoughts on Old Contradictions eds. Cartledge, S. and Ryan, J. The Women's Press (1983)

'After all according to the idea that male sexuality is a "natural drive", men are only in need of sex and they can, supposedly, get it anywhere.'

(ibid p130)

12. See the Martin Bauml Duberman archival excavation : referenced earlier in the notes to Chapter 3. See his observation of the 'crush business' as part of his understanding the content of what Honora Downey was describing in detailed terms to her therapist, Dr. Emmerson - as showing something of the existence of the sub-culture of working class female sexual 'unorthodoxy'. See in particular pages 831-834 and the intergral notes 5,6,7 and 8. Space disallows me from pursuing the many

amazing (to me!) similarities in his work and mine. I can only recommend the reader look to identify them herself.

13. No space to elaborate upon these comments except to note that my discussions with 4th year girls at B school confirms the work being done by Jacqui Halson into working class girls' sexual practices which does indeed reveal a strong sense of the girls' sexual self disgust. (Thesis in progress University of Warwick) It is in this way that one can learn to appreciate the power of the term 'fragrant lady' invoked by the defenders of the reputation of Jeffrey Archer.
14. See Gayle Rubin's work which strongly influenced the course of this thesis and in particular the chapter on Carol to follow. 'The Traffic in Women : Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex' in Towards an Anthropology of Women. ed Rayna Reiter. I am grateful here for her fascinating account of Levi Stauss views on 'rights'.
15. Chapter 8 debates this contradiction again.
16. I am thinking of Elizabeth Wilson's 'Hidden Agendas : Theory, Politics, and Experience in the Women's Movement.' Tavistock (1986) and Lynne Segal's 'Is the Future Female ? : Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism' Virago (1987)

17. 'Girls, Wives : Factory Lives' Anna Pollert Macmillan (1981)

18. For a sophisticated argument pressing the need to elaborate a theory of power, desire and sexual oppression see L. Segal : 'Sensual Uncertainty : or the Clitoris is Not Enough' in Sex and Love : New Thoughts on Old Contradictions' (ibid) P30-47.

19. Space limitations mean that I cannot do justice at all to the regime of sexual objectification which intersects the girls' lives, practices which include ; the knowledge of the adjacent park being known as a 'flashers' paradise locally, (C school) or the fact that at B school girls had on one occasion to rescue each other from the sexualised commentary of the nearby park keeper, Maureen's sexual molestation by her uncle, Frankie's step-dad buying her 'suggestive' presents, Saskia's being the victim of a man who exposed himself to her at school, Barbara being talked about by her ex-boyfriends concerning her 'easiness' etc, etc.

CHAPTER 5

CAROL : 'A WORKING CLASS HEROINE IS SOMETHING
TO BE'.

Contents.

1. Introduction : 'Lies, Damned Lies and Carol' :
Friendship, Femininity and Feminism.
2. Men friends, boy-friends : 'Fancying Older Men'
3. Street-wise.
4. Foot-loose and Fancy-free.
5. 'Being a Proper Woman' : Issues of Sex and Maturity.

1. Introduction : 'Lies, Damned Lies and Carol!' : Friendship.
Femininity and Feminism.

1
One story which sticks in my memory about Carol, one of the many which dot my field notes and which frequently transform dull observations into animated dramas, concerns Carol's avowed intention to seek revenge for one of her 'best friend's' (Note 1) major misdemeanours.

Amy had 'grassed' on her for being instrumental in the redistribution of cigarettes. Senior staff had noticed the circulation of Turkish cigarettes and had tracked down the source, using the interrogation of Amy to provide substantive proof of the 'racket'. Carol, hearing of this, was ostensibly 'furious', all righteous indignation, threatening Amy with all sorts of dire consequences. I met her in hot-blooded pursuit of the 'enemy' and was invited to tag along. I did not have time to think through the type of response I should make, in case blood was spilled. I joined in the delegation headed towards the park, anticipating at the very least a violent verbal head to head.

In the event, I needn't have worried, the clash was no more than

a formal and frank exchange of views with Amy defending herself, and Carol claiming some sort of moral victory in her 'taking the blame' for the contraband cigs. That which had been billed as the female version of 'Godzilla meets the Smog Monster' turned out to resemble no more than ritual posturing. Later in the week, I asked about her continuing threat to do Amy some damage and the present state of their relationship. Carol retorted :

'I nearly smashed her face in!'

Nothing for me characterises more the ambiguities of her personality and style, and my relationship with her, than this comment. The language itself displaying the linking of two totally opposed possibilities - 'smashing' being an absolute action which the 'nearly' attempts to hold back. Carol's rhetoric is full of 'smashing' and 'damning' ; of absolutes of the emotions coupled incongruously (and fortunately), with ambivalences of the actions. It didn't matter to her that I'd actually witnessed the 'real' showdown, in her memory and as part of her own mythic self-concept, she'd 'smashed' Amy.

Nor did it matter to her if the narratives of her life displayed anything more than nominal consistency. Her 'truths' were of a different order than straightforward veracity. It wasn't that she simply told 'lies' for any simple material gain, it's more that her versions of her own life were extremely experimental and represented her chief 'ideological' package in dealing with the problematic issues confronting her as a working-class girl ; noticeably issues

to do with countering authority ; either familial or institutional or patriarchal in origin.

The principal battles against these forces took both time and energy and were expressed in complex trade-offs between her and authority in which her sexuality played an essential part.

Just as Anne Whitehead found in her study of rural Herefordshire : 'running away represented the main female fantasy' (Note 2) - Carol's diaries are full of references to 'escape' and her accounts of her own life read as her embattled in relation to her mother, who she produces as the archetypal controlling wicked witch. From my field notes :

'Carol reports that her mother keeps a very tight supervisory reign on her whereabouts and yet she also tells me that she is allowed out 4/5 days a week ! She also says that she had escaped out of the house for a 2-30am. rendezvous with Ivan near the river. She had apparently used the drain pipe to effect her freedom, like all good school-girl heroines.!

(FN 7 Nov. 14th 1985)

Her own diary is similarly full of comments like :

'I sneaked out of the house to see Adrian'

→

entry for 13th May 1986.

'On the 7th of November 85 I said I would meet Ivan about 7-30, what with the police taking statements because Dan was mugged and my mum nagging I didn't sneak out of the house until about quarter to eight.."

As always these extra-domestic activities concern quasi-sexual or sexual encounters with a variety of boy-friends in possession of fast cars and usually fast morals. Just as I lost track of her succession of her boy-friends I also failed to keep up with the status of her many attributed girl-friends. I'll return to this later.

Part of this fast turnover in men was in fact central to Carol's construction of herself as desirable.

My argument at this point is more focussed upon understanding her identity as made from the meanings of 'sexy' femininity. It is far less concerned to be the detective of the 'truth'.

However, there is the empirical question as to whether all of these boys/men actually existed! Some of the men Carol very actively 'fancied', I had actually seen. I had witnessed (somewhat uncomfortably,) her high profile 'fancying' in action. She had a good line in loud comments made to her friends about the men

sitting at a table in the cafe, she used to use as one of her off-site school social bases.

Her style in these encounters, whilst not the exact parallel to male harassment, was certainly not the stereotypical shrinking violet, more the 'vamp', much beloved of male fantasy.(Note 3)

And yet the vexed (and problematic) question as to the actual status of her sexual reputation, I am unable to make any accurate statement about.

Now, given that she was one of my most prolific communicators at C school, this is a paradox which requires careful unlocking. The answer to this puzzle lies not only within the difficulties of ascertaining the precise nature of girls' sexual lives (which will be discussed later as the issue of self-incrimination in a culture which views active female sexual experience as pathological Note 4), but it is also embedded within the particular circumstances which structured my own personal relationship with Carol and the specific 'solutions' she'd developed to cope with the contradictions between desire and circumstance.

I want to argue that in 'fiction' at least, Carol could attempt to work for continuity and satisfaction by experimenting with the forbidden in hidden and more ^satisfactory ways. By 'fiction' I mean to include some of her verbal recountings of dramatic confrontations between herself and authority (interestingly almost always female!)

as well as her 'stories' about her dates written up in her own personal diary and the week long diary she did at my request.

And by 'satisfactory' I want to suggest the ability of 'her' versions as delivering to her some of the resolutions in which the powerful existence of others (people/forces/structures), is all but cancelled as Carol 'tells it how it is'.

If she aimed to marry fantasy and reality within her texts, this was principally tried out in the increasingly more explicit 'love' narratives, in which she characteristically constructed herself as active and pleasure-taking as well as pleasure-giving. If one reads her own diary as either sensational confessions of a school-girl, explicitly engaged in the 'Permissive Discourse' or as the repressed erotic imaginings of a young girl fed by the pornography of romance, is of less concern to me, than the story they tell about the persistent coupling of 'love' with sex as providing her with the necessary and essential permission to commit either the actions in reality or the ideas in fantasy. Carol's insistence all the time, whether she's talking about being : 'touched up' or 'touching up' Ivan or 'frenchying' Brian, or nearly 'letting' Adrian penetrate her, is to vow her love for them.

It's not so much that she wants them to 'love' her ; it's much more crucial that she convince herself (on paper at least!) that she 'loves' them.

This is what interests me and only partly because I couldn't say

that what she told me and what she wrote corresponded unequivocally to empirical 'truth'. As this section title expresses it : 'Lies, Damned Lies and Carol!'

And I have to say after all the re-reading and revising and thinking about her. She has managed to keep her own counsel on this, despite her constituting a vast amount of my extant research material and my time both within and without school too.

She has quite literally evaded detection and still keeps her secrets. The very fact that she has avoided my gaze so to speak at the same time as she operated as my school 'sponsor' (a la William Whyte), provides a telling comment upon the success of her survival strategies in blocking incursions into those areas of her life into which she'd actually also invited me. Her supremacy within the autobiographical mode ; in which everything is said but nothing revealed seems to present something of a challenge to the conceptualising of power as discursively produced - Carol's prolific discourses were so confusing and mutually inconsistent that her fleet-footedness and inventiveness kept you guessing.

I mean she knew very much the market-rate for her 'knowledge', and she enjoyed both her status as my confidant, and my status as her dependent. This had a crucial impact upon both the history of our relationship but it also raises questions about the nature of the research relationship which I think have sometimes been missed in the necessary attention which has been placed upon feminist

sensitivities over 'exploiting' girls/women.

Certainly in the context of the research relationship which evolved between Carol and I, I have no doubts in my mind that she was 'bargaining' with me all the time, just as I was 'bargaining' with her. I will say more on this later.

In part of her work on girls' who are sexually active Jacqui Halson argues, (Unpublished Ph.D in progress University of Warwick) that the issue for her was only partially about the substantiation of events via cross-checking with other girls/boys to see if the events had actually happened :

'However, I have no way of knowing whether the girls' description of their experiences are "truthful" as in "factual". Having the boys describe their interpretation of the same event would not necessarily render the girls' accounts any more or less "factual"'.

She goes on to propose that that she is 'less concerned with the "truth" than with the girls' interpretations and feelings about what they considered was happening'. I don't propose at this juncture to enter into the debate about objectivity versus experience as touchstones of the 'truth', that discussion in a sense has been settled as part of my commitment to an ethnographic methodology. My own concern here is to suggest that in a similar

way, (though not an identical one), my interest in representing Carol through the media of her chats to me and her diaries, is about capturing the quixotic quality of her style which is the very thing which enabled her to 'get by' in a hard world.

So that by focussing upon the written and the spoken, I am having to work with the evidence Carol herself offered, about her own life and also the manner in which she chose to give it to me. This angle is however, only partly to do with pragmatism since in the context of my previous recognition of the fundamental importance of female-female bonding, this 'style' and the way she re-constructs her adventures with authority, familial, educational or patriarchal is actually predicated upon her free-floating dis-connected 'connectedness' - which whilst it resembles relational engagement actually amounts to a remarkable degree of self-sufficiency in which she converts her contacts with people (principally though not always adults into profitable exchanges)

I am not saying that she is some sort of transcendant super-star able by act of will to avoid the exploitation of her class and gender positioning but what she seems to have evolved are distinct 'entrepreneurial' skills in managing aspects of the hidden economy of sex in which she trades off her sexuality/knowledge in return for access to more interesting worlds.

Now this could read no more than the classic female 'solution' but it is more than that, in the self-conscious way in which she operates at least in relation to certain aspects of her life.

Carol's way of recounting her adventures with authority and her power are constructed out of a casual attitude to others, principally expressed in relation to her girl friends, towards some adults, occasionally to her boyfriends. It thus seemed as if her off-beat style (in more ways than one), kept her from the necessities of consistency, allowing her more scope to practice the developing range of 'entrepreneurial' skills in working out the market value of what she had to 'sell' :

1. to me it was access to her friendship and an insight into the workings of her life
2. to her mother and second step-father, it was her child care services and domestic labour.
3. to her men-friends it was the school-girl sexuality which flatters older men (since it's made from imagery which deliberately instantiates the 'innocent' powerlessness of the feminine).
4. to her actual boy-friends it seemed to consist of access to her body in return for quite explicit material benefits, clothes, meals, being seen in a Porsche, as well as the ideological pay offs of being someone's girl-friend and of thus being validated as 'desirable'.

Gayle Rubin in 1975 had asked that the Women's Movement construct what she termed 'a political economy of the sex-gender system', - all I can say is that Carol's micro economy in some senses constitutes some expression of that demand and her trading in her femininity in quite explicit forms represents a challenge to the cruder feminist positions, which insists on only reading heterosexuality as seamless oppression, a piece of reductionism which ignores the benefits which girls and women can retrieve from the institution.

This is emphatically not to argue that Carol was not oppressed in quite brutal ways by some of the practices which she describes in her heterosexual encounters but it is to acknowledge the very real sense of power which she felt she had in the managing of male desire for her. She didn't need to read 'The Sun' to appreciate her bodily assets ; she was actually very proud of her nick-name as 'Big-tits', though she was very choosy about the tone of voice in which this was announced.

She constantly drew attention to her body in my conversations with her. One time we wandered down to the Rec. in summer, and she commented upon the young women there, dressed in swim-suits, playing with their children : 'They're a bit skinny up top.' Another time she told me that she wasn't big', since she was only a '38'. I asked her why did it matter about having a 'bust' ? And the answer was couched in terms of mens' 'disappointment', if they couldn't 'feel anything'!

Despite Carol's ostensible 'upfront' sexuality and bargaining skills, her reliance upon the bed-rock notion of female sexuality as passive, unsurprising, in the context of 'the slags and drags' dichotomy is surprising in the light of her own stylistics especially with regard to heterosexual manners. She was anything but passive in her 'street' politics, having formed complex and 'useful' alliances with several men in the vicinity of school.

Men, or more accurately young men who subsidised her truancy and offered her a 'safe' house in her need for a warm, dry and convenient base. A place from which she could conduct reccies to see her mates, at breaks/home-time and from which she might even sometimes launch herself into school for favoured lessons or favoured teachers, especially if the tempo of home/school surveillance hotted up.

A tatty, but domesticated out-building, in the near-by cemetery, may not be everyone's idea of the perfect retreat, but to school girls with no material base to call their own, which is not also monitored by controlling adults, this was heaven! Here she found, warmth, fags, companionship with male adults, whose life stories she seemed to know in elaborate details and with whom she seemed to enjoy a flirty but innocent repartee of sexual banter. A form of relationship which allowed all the participants to recognise the 'illicit', not to say illegal, fantasies of under-age sex in a jokey atmosphere of sexual innuendo.

Not that total safety was an achieved reality for her, far from it. But the 'illusion' of 'safety' was an important element in maintaining these links with older men which provided so many practical as well as emotional and social satisfactions

In ironic truth, one of the graveyard groundsmen, the oldest one and the boss, had actually tried to assault Carol, when she was there on her own with him. And her other 'men-friends' had between them devised a joint strategy to protect her from him by 'chaperoning' her so as not to leave him unattended with her on other successive occasions. This appeared to have 'worked'. →

If Carol flirted with the idea of her sexual power over her men friends from the cemetery, she showed evidence of playing dangerously with this commodity in more privatised and hence more potentially violent scenarios. In her own diary she mentions on two occasions when her 'boy-friend' had cut short their relationship because he'd heard of a rumour, circulating (said to emanate from Carol), that they had had sex. (Note 5)

Carol's defence was to claim it as a 'joke' but it's hard to conceive her actions as so 'innocent' and what sense can we make of these 'jokes' in the light of her own obvious enjoyment about their discomforture ; (It is important to note her age as 13/14 at the time) Can we see in it a sense of her power to play with the notion of her being under-age within these relationships ? A form of experimenting with the forces of sexuality without actually 'doing it' and going the 'whole hog' ?

As I mentioned earlier, it was a testimony to Carol's ability to utilise definitions of active sexuality which made it impossible for me to make certain statements about her actual sexual experiences. At one time for example, she told me an elaborate drama about her auntie diagnosing her as pregnant, during an alleged shopping trip which just happened to be for a pencil-slim skirt.

The auntie secretly planned for her to have an abortion, which was duly arranged so that her mother would not find out. (Note 6)

On another occasion, she had written in her own diary, graphic details about a primal scene, which in its strange mix of sexual mis-information and lurid intensity seems to signal more of a fantasy than an actual seduction. (See other edited parts of her diary quoted in the following pages and my altered opinion on this scene) Similarly her narrative entries for the diary requested by me, read like Mills and Boon - steamy sex and mundane reality co-existing incongruously together in suburban Westpark.

As I've implied earlier, I am not naïve enough to think that I might have magically somehow avoided being another target for her trading and bargaining strategies. Thus if girls' sexuality featured as part of the 'hidden agenda' of my work, Carol very obligingly provided me with some material, though of a sufficiently ambiguous nature to keep me guessing, to keep her 'reputation' fundamentally unblemished whilst still advertising herself as 'desirable' all with some intentionality of providing herself with some interesting company as she skived off school.

Indeed, there were other explicit 'trade-offs' in our relationship, which crept into our friendship in a piece-meal sort of way. It started with me buying her drinks at the cafe we used as one of our social bases.

Her necessary use of these premises, caused by her truancy, meant she couldn't trade in her free meal ticket at the canteen, nor could she sell her ticket to others on the day of issue, since that also meant a risky entry into the school premises to face the arch-enemy, the female deputy head, who along with the head, patrolled as the only staff on duty

After drinks, came the request for money for some cigarettes which she scrupulously shared with her girl-friends and which she hurriedly passed to me once when prior to the interrogation about the 'Turkish cigarettes' racket she had wind that the forces of law and order within the school had intentions to search and interview the 'suspects.'

I dread to think just how much she 'cost' me in material terms, during my close association with the C school. I frequently felt inclined to claim her as a field site expense! Whilst her motives for continuing the relationship were undoubtedly influenced by this unofficial source of sponsorship for her social activities, there was also a less mercenary aspect to our encounter which represented a form of affection akin to friendship.

In truth our relationship worked within parameters which at some level acknowledged the 'contract' between us which in my case consisted of demands for helpful and interesting/continuing access to adolescent girls' material lives whilst Carol wanted to 'get by' the boredom and authoritarian regimes of school/home life with as much 'fun' and entertainment as she could construct.

I am sure I constituted part of that 'entertainment' with her using her writing in particular to shock me. Though it has to be said that her private diary was entirely consistent in tone (raunchy, sad and embattled) as well as in content (sexuality, adventures, disappointments, family politics) with the offering she produced in direct answer to my request.

However, I never got over the fundamental feeling with her that I was a 'patsy', in the sense of being a 'punter', a sociological client for the information and material world she actually lived.

Not surprisingly, given this is the uncontrovertible nature of the ethnographic research relation - it was to be paid for.

As they say in (show) business, (and qualit~~at~~ive sociology), 'There is no such thing as a free lunch!' →

Certainly Carol knew the market-place, and had a highly developed sense of opportunities and a positively entrepreneurial acumen in detecting the chance to make an 'exchange' to her own immediate profit.

If her conversations with me dealt in the value of having a 'figure', they also summed up the material price for most of her associations :

Brian, her ex-boyfriend was earning five hundred pounds in two weeks as a window-cleaner

(FN. 4 page 86 17th Sept. 1985)

Carol says she is going to get two hundred and fifty pounds worth of clothes from her aunt, who insists on C wearing stockings and appearing a 'proper dressed-up young lady'

(FN. 8 page 5 Dec. 1985)

Her chief delight at the thought that her mother might re-marry her own biological father was phrased as being good news in terms of having more access to his money.

(FN undated entry 1985)

Her boy-friends, in particular, played an important part in the economy of subsistence which she operated. From reconstructions it often seemed like she had seen it as a totally legitimate that their wages were to some extent hers also. She was a genius at extracting expensive gifts/clothes loans from them. Brian had apparently lent her some of his designer clothes and when the relationship ended demanded them back. Carol's version of the conversation which ensued shows her as equally determined to hang onto the 'gains' : in her terms it was after all, part of the surplus value of having a boy friend in the first place. According to Carol, she told him in triumph :

'If you can get the jumper off my back and the boots off my feet you can have them back!'

(FN)6 page 7, 7th October 1985)

That her memory of these scenes is partial, (in all senses of the word), I've already alluded to earlier. In fact, if one was to 'triangulate' this fact, I have another version of events (given by another of her friends, Michaela) which totally contradicts this 'victory'. Offering instead quite a different interpretation in which the power balances are tipped the other way entirely.

(Note 7)

However the focus here is on the material value Carol can see and attempt to use in her dealings with those she recognises as having more than her. In the context of her own family's resources,

this must have constituted the vast majority of people with whom she came into contact with. (She came from a working class family of 7 children.)

However the market-place is not just about the trading of actual goods and tangible services : it is also concerned with the managing of difficult and constraining adult authority relations. The school environment is especially rich in these, and the sensitive negotiation of which is crucial, if you are into surviving the system as a persistent non-attender.

Carol's way of handling the continual cross-checks and periodic 'raids' on her truancy (she sometimes got caught by various members of staff) was to 'charm them'. Not that I saw this in practice, it's very much my construing her accounts of encounters with 'authority'. I can only suggest it worked, since she never seemed to get into any substantial trouble, despite an attendance record which must have been unorthodox by anybody's reckoning. (Though see the post-script to this chapter)

Again I cite my field notes as evidence here, they are dotted with the tales told with considerable relish of her being nabbed by a variety of male teachers, noticeably her form teacher a Mr A. and the male head of year a Mr.C. who admonish her privately but do not take the matter any further.

'Also C said she'd been caught bunking on Friday by Mr. A. He apparently covered up for her in respect of other higher authorities.

'Why ?' I asked.

'Cos, he likes me', she replied.'

(FN 7 page 40. Nov.27th 1985)
→

In a slightly different context, Carol had been sent to the year head for some infraction incurred with her friend Liz in a biology lesson. When confronted with the next chain in the disciplinary sequence, Liz, apparently was insufficiently contrite, leaving Mr C. no option but to administer more punishment. Whereas Carol judiciously penitent, left him free to just 'tell her off'.

Later on in the conversation, when we were discussing this situation, Carol observed that 'Mr C. likes me, he gets on with me'. The inference being that he protected her from other more malign autocrats in the system. It is typical of Carol to claim that it is he who likes her! (FN7 page 50-51 Nov. 27th 1985)

It was one of Carol's more engaging qualities to operate at times in ways that assumed a certain democracy of comradeship : ie. as in absolute control over the distribution of her own social services, including the patronage of her frindship and whilst it is true that in one obvious sense she is, schools seldom operate on such egalitarian principles!

I would want to argue on very fragmented evidence I admit (in respect to these precise circumstances, though not as an element in many girls 'weaponry' and as certainly consistent with my understanding about her out of school), that part of Carol's 'charm' was proto-sexual (See Note 8 for the difficulties over this word) embodying a flirtaciousness which she used to very considerable effect in minimising her chance of 'punishment'.

This is substantiated by her incessant inability to manage her relations with female teachers with anything like the 'success' of her dealings with male authority. Her experiences with the female head of year read like the 100 years war! No charm here, just 'aggro and bovva' and it is significant that this hostility has continuity with her dealings within her own family viz. her fierce battles with her mum and her easier, though by no means untroubled, relations with her mother's third husband, her step-dad.

There is, if I think about it, another thesis to be written on the unconscious projections at play within institutional school life, where the unacknowledged Oedipal dramas of the nuclear family are displaced onto powerful others in gender-differentiated forms.

I can only hint at the valency of such forces at play within one individual girl's interpersonal life, for what it might say to us about the social construction of 'hyper-femininity' but having occupied a teaching role, I always felt something else was going on in my dealings with certain students, now having been witness to these interactions I'm certain of it!

2. Men friends, boy-friends : 'Fancying Older Men'

Within this account I have alluded to the way in which Carol uses her age as provocative in a variety of different forms, both as a specific tactic in 'frightening' her older boy-friends (though as we have seen, it's a risky one which could back-fire.) and also in the more generalised awareness that her 'womanly' shape attracts considerable masculine interest, especially as she is so young and 'innocent' : the linking of the twin phenomenon of sexual provocation and sexual unworldliness I have noted elsewhere as one of the recurring motifs of pornography (See the discussion within Chapter 2)

Carol's awareness about the potency of these configurations was certainly not all at the level of consciousness, nor was it entirely unconscious either. Her active interest in older men was no mere ideological absorption of these forces. For here ideology and material positioning formed a symbiotic bond worthy of any vulgar Marxist formulations. Older men were not only more desirable because of their particular pliability within the 'Lolita' discourse, they actually had money!

Obversely Carol's contempt for her male peers was very vocal. Some poor undersized 13 year old, at the behest of his 1st year

'mate' had the difficult task of mediating between the two of them. Carol, in a very loud voice, so that the err^and boy and the assembled company could hear (We were on the playing field at break-time) confirmed that she didn't usually go out with any one under 16, though she might concede a 3rd year boy. But in any case, to paraphrase her meaning, she wanted to see the organ grinder and not the monkey! (Reconstructed scenario from FN 2 page 110 June 1985)

Hardly the utterances of a dependent female! And yet this 'power' to refuse is of course a negative and conditional one. But it is a power nevertheless, and Carol certainly made the most of her options in this respect. Indeed she was quite precise in her articulation of this preference :

'With some girls its'.....with me its older men'

(Quoted 'verbatim' from FN 7 page 7 November 14th 1985)

Actually I've edited out the racist part of the verbatim, simply because I cannot let it stand uncontextualised and this would take me into other areas of Carol's life. The main reason I took this editorial decision, however is more to do with the limitations of my words to counter her word. (I say more on this in Chapter 6)

Also, in my field notes, I have an entry concerning a discussion on girls' 'popularity' during which two girls who knew her but who did not claim to be her 'bosom buddies', are noted as saying

that Carol was not particularly popular with her male class mates :
because 'No-one knew her'

This quality of being an 'unknown' is partly based upon this
'choice' of older men to 'fancy', allied no doubt, to her pretty
intimidating cavalier treatment of her male peers. It is also
obviously produced out of her poor attendance record, no doubt
her teachers didn't know her either!

But this enigmatic in-school profile suited her perfectly and
enabled her to operate in a far less female-dependent way than
some of the many girls I knew. Instead, her diaries are full of
the stories of her real or imagined (or both) liasons with older
men ;

Brian, 22 years old (FN 4 page 35 insert 11th Sept. 1985
duration 16th Sept to 6th October 1985)

Ivan, 32 years old (FN 4 as above, duration 4th November
to unknown 1985)

The latter just disappears off the scene, both in terms of
references to him in the FN and in her personal diary. He did go
abroad for a month in Jan. 1986.

Adrian, unknown age, but having met him I estimate him to be about
20. Duration of friendship unknown since both diary ended and my
field work too. This information is taken from Carol's own diary

entry dated 13th May 1986.

I have substantial 'proof' that the dates with Brian, and the subsequent relationship took place. As well as corroborated support about the existence of Ivan and I have actually met her Adrian, on one of our jaunts in the cemetery. I have no doubts about her practice of actively seeking out older men to establish quasi-sexual or 'platonic' relations with. I have been with her as she stalked the vicinity of the school!

I have witnessed and acknowledged the comprehensive network of male contacts she has actively constructed to service her 'needs' : her street wise colonisation of the local near school area was pretty total. She seemed to have her hand in any scam that was going. She 'knew' the groundsman at the adjacent primary school, he used to give her fags. She nodded and chatted with the road sweeper, Brian, whose landlady was giving him a lot of trouble. She had a complex set of friendships within the cemetery workers ; involving about four of them. She boasted too, of her 'fancying' several more in the local shops and I'd seen her in action doing this 'fancying' in respect of Peter at the Pond Cafe.

The only older man I saw, who she singularly failed to charm, was the unsavoury proprietor of the cafe, who I suspected, reserved his pleasure-seeking to seeing how many times he could re-use his chip oil!

In comparison with the diaries of the girls in her tutor group,

which are full of the chronic passivity which paralyses female actions and freezes up the capacity to take any sort of charge, Carol is a sexual politics activist. Gabbie and Amelia's are for example, full of pining and hoping, waiting for 'something to turn up', rather like Mr. Micawber. If you recall, Amelia's discomfort invoked by the mere experiencing of desire, was examined in the previous chapter.

This is not simplistically to assert the position of claiming Carol's 'choice' as better, not least because it is fraught with its' own difficulties, as her own common-sense tells her.

But it is to acknowledge the capacity of girls to 'act' within the discourse of patriarchal femininity and to use their 'assets' in pro-active as well as re-active ways, if only in the expression of their 'rights' to desire. It is in this way that Carol's stance takes on a new dimension.

3. Street-wise.

I have already mentioned Carol's capacity to seem at ease on the street, a position usually considered as less available to girls/women. This is produced out of several factors which interact I believe, to provide more access for her, these are ; her personal confidence, her familiarity with several adults and her subsequent identification with them as sources both of interest and prestige.

After all her strategy of using the school on a semi-detached basis, as an occasional resource, meant her reliance on many off site venues. Thus she was very knowing about the 'soft' urban spaces where she could hang out without fear of being detected ; ie. the park grounds, the cemetery shed, the 'Pond Cafe', the 'Prom' and rec, all conveniently adjacent to school (for the necessity of registration) but all places where no teacher was silly enough to look.

Apart from this, and supplementing her street style, and something easily overlooked is her 'legitimate' excuse for street-walking provided by her dogs, of whom she was very fond. Her week-end jaunts, mentioned in her sample diary, feature several stories of her outings with her pets, providing both a narrative and practical device which allows her both to meet and contact men.

This tactic never really struck me as a possibility until I began to consider my own feelings about street self-consciousness and to realize that when I am pushing a pram I feel much more secure than when I am unaccompanied. I don't think it too fanciful to suppose that something of the surplus value of dogs (and prams) to girls/women is that they give you more permission to be in public places.

This is not to argue that Carol consciously operated with this knowledge, but it is to conjecture that dogs, like babies, have added bonuses in facilitating more comfortable access to places which have historically been less available to the female gender.

For an example of the way she deploys both as narrative and interpersonal devices, I cite the first entry in the diary I asked her (along with several other girls) to keep for one week over the Christmas 1985 period :

'This morning my mum woke me up. She asked me to look after the baby while she went to work so I said, "Yes alright then."

Afternoon struck so I took the baby for a walk down the high road. I was listening to my head phones when Peter passed me. I shouted back to him and he stopped and walked back a few paces then said, "Hi".

"Hi". I replied.

"What have you been doing with yourself ? " said Peter.

"Not much, haven't seen you lately, and where's Fella ? "

"Well, I moved to Centre Green, and in my flat you're not allowed puppies or cat"

Oh, Fella was such a nice dog as well."

So he said all of a sudden, "When are we going to make love?"

I was surprised so I said, "Don't know."

"Meet me over Garden House by the cafe," Peter said.

"Ok" (I) said.

I went over there at 1-30 and waited. He didn't turn up so I started to walk home. As I had just come up the subway there Peter stood talking to his mate. So I stood there waiting, finally he came up to me and said,

"Sorry I didn't meet you, but I went everywhere to find my trainers."

"Yea, that's alright"

"Forgiven ?"

"Of course Peter, you know I have to forgive you don't you because you're sweet!"

"Walk me to the other end of the subway ?"

"Yea, why not".

I walked Peter up there, then he kissed me goodbye. I said to him, "Will you be down the Pond Cafe ?", so he said

"Yea, I still hang around there a lot."

So I said, "Bye Peter," and went.

(C's diary for me, initial entry 23rd Dec.
1985 with punctuation standardised to enable
understanding)

As you can also see this has the flavour of paperback romances and hints at their characteristic theme of the saturation of everyday life with sexuality. I would also argue in this context that it is the mundane reality, (Peter's lost trainers) which actually rescues Carol from the fantasised dilemma of managing her desire of him and of his for her.

I was with Carol at the time of one of her Pond Cafe scenarios with Peter. She was urging her, then best friend, Liz, to convey her Christmas card. A service duly performed with much giggling - eventually soliciting a cool nod and circumspect 'Thanks Carol' from the recipient. She explained to me that she had met him one day in

the place, through petting his dog, and had decided he was distinctly 'fanciabile'. He didn't actually become one of her 'boyfriends' in terms of actual dates (even if he did in terms of desire) she did therefore see him as on her 'list' of adult males with whom she had a 'flirtation'.

Part of the unexpected pleasure about using the 'Pond Cafe' for Carol and the other girls, (since it couldn't possibly have anything to do with its' food) was its steady supply of older men who used it as their transport cafe, as well as its' warmth, its' juke box and the fruit machines.

All the time I was doing the field work, gathering material I was constantly being thrown back upon my own memories of my own adolescence. Sometimes these memories would come unbidden from consciousness provoked by situations and details of observation, at other times, they would be invoked by me in order to substantiate an interpretation of a particular event or practice.

The principal 'ghost' who has guided my insight into Carol's modus vivendus, is a girl I recollect from school called Ann who was for some time my friend, my best-friend, someone with whom I joined forces in our 'club'. A secret 'spying' club (courtesy of Kellogs who had give away spying equipment in cornflakes at the time) complete with its' own codes, meeting place and pass words.

She also remains in my memory because of her daredevil recognition about the commodity market and the high value placed upon the

pubescent female body. One of the shocks rekindled in this work has been the extent to which the practices utilised by girls today, had their version in the variety of survival strategies adopted by me and my contemporaries.

To return to Ann for a moment. I can vividly recall her 'trading' herself to a man who ran the local 'Home and Colonial' shop on the estate. This transaction took place at lunch-time whilst we all crowded in the shop and the deal was that he could 'touch her up', in the store room. In exchange, she got some cigarettes, whilst some of us virtuous non-smokers helped ourselves to the toffees on display. I can't remember how this deal was ever struck but I do recall feeling tremendous awe at the fearsome hold breasts must have over men. To me at the time, it didn't seem that she was being exploited, rather the opposite case.

Namely, that she was in possession of a very precious asset which I couldn't wait to acquire, though I was characteristically afraid of its' powers as well. It is this aspect of my own recollections of girlhood which sensitised me to the commoditisation of Carol's sexuality and of her developing awareness and experimentation about its' power.

I would therefore want to argue that her 'truths' or 'inventions' are of less interest to me than the more pertinent issue, (although it would be nice to know the difference on occasions!) of her persistent stretching of the boundaries to do with acceptable female behaviour, even if in the final analysis, she is

forced to defer to patriarchal definitions. Her practices, and here I include both narrative and interpersonal, demonstrate a complex awareness of the power and limitations involved in trading in femininity and show interesting 'solutions' or rather pseudo-solutions to just what can be managed when one operates in subordinating circumstances.

Angela McRobbie once characterised the twin elements of 'best-friends' and the 'culture of romance' as mitigating girls' oppression. I have tried to explore in Chapters 3 and 4 (especially) of this thesis the former, whilst this section concerns the effectivity of 'femininity' as a power lever too and as I want to go on to argue that it is from within this notion of femininity as confirming 'maturity' and vice versa, as perceived by certain girls, that Carol's practice is best read. I intend to explicate this after an account of her 'independence' from female networks.

4. Foot-loose and Fancy-Free ?

I have tried earlier in the discussion, to situate Carol's actions within a recognition of her own 'disconnected' status, in terms of the world of female best-friendships. It is this aspect of her life to which I shall now pay attention. It is not that ~~Karen~~^{Carol} was without female friends of her own age so much, rather that she seemed to resist developing a dependency upon them - so that contrary to most of the girls with whom I had continuous contact she had 'serial' 'best-friendships' which she appeared to swop as regularly as her 'boy-friends'. It was her 'men-friends', her male 'mates', who seemed to constitute the bed-rock of consistent relationships.

Thus, when she told me that so and so was a 'best-friend', I felt after a while, that this was mere form, without the characteristic intensity accompanying most girls attributions.

Therefore, I find, that when I first met her in early 1985, Gill was the designated 'best'. In mid-September, it was Amy, and by the end of the same month Maria. However, by the start of the next year, it had shifted again to Liz. Apart from the 'cigarette' debacle I never ascertained why some one was 'in' and some-one 'out'.

I began to surmise that, for ^{Carol}~~Karen~~, these questions were meaningless, simply because her interpretation about girl friendships took a minimalist form. For instance, she never seemed to put into her 'best-friendships' the emotional hard labour, normally considered necessary to maintain them. Hence her sequence of them, very unusual in a third/fourth year girl. I could be guilty of exaggeration, as they say it takes two to tango. The other girls as partners obviously operated a similar contingent alliance.

Maybe the issue has more to do with the absenteeism endemic in this particular network of girls and thus is a comment more on the material, rather than the emotio-psychological/interpersonal, aspects of their lives (not that these components can be so nicely abstracted from each other. I do so here for analytic reasons).

By this I mean to suggest that they lacked an organisational base over time to develop the continuity necessary to the development of familiarity and predictability as the prerequisites of true best friendships. Carol's casual attitude to her girl-friends contrasted markedly with her consistent reliance upon the 'street' network of men who could always be found at particular places at certain times of the day unlike her female network which was not only fragmented by absenteeism, (aided and abetted by the no-cover policy of the teachers' action of 1985-86) leaving her, (and others) stranded at times, with no-one to go around with.

This problem of 'loose' girls so to speak, was recognised by the girls themselves and they frequently acted as each others' minders when the designated 'best' failed to show. Carol, herself, took it as a responsibility to look after Rita on several sessions, (when Liz was away) :

'Field Notes 11th Sept. 1985 Carol is with Rita today, who she describes as nervous and alone, since her friend won't be in until tomorrow, therefore Carol, has sort of "adopted" her.'

There were other senses too, in which Carol particularly 'minded' in a way very reminiscent of the the following McRobbie quote :

'Most significantly, she is forced to relinquish youth for the premature middle age induced by childbirth and housework. It's not so much that ~~that~~ girls do too much too young : rather, they have the opportunity of doing too little too late'

A. McRobbie 'Settling Accounts with Subculture'

Screen Education Spring 1980 No.34 p49

ie. that her way of 'connecting' to her female friends resembled

a form of 'mothering'. To claim, as I did earlier therefore, that the 'passion' of girls' commitment seemed to be lacking, I need now to show, just what type of 'mothering' was demonstrated by Carol. Especially given that the ideology of 'mothering' is situated within a rhetoric of intense self-abnegation. (See in particular my commentary upon this aspect of the maternal discourse in Chapter 4)

Carol's way of 'minding' some of her girl-friends, was essentially pragmatic, materially rather than emotionally nourishing. Impersonal rather than inter-personal (Mothering of that sort, she characteristically only publically manifested in relation to boys/men and dogs. See later)

Thus she showed maternal concern over one of her friends Mary who she had uncharitably described to me, as looking like a 'tramp' :

'C going to help out by passing on her old skirts. It seems M's mum very controlling of M via control of money ie. no new clothes and in the household won't let M use an iron. C took it as "common-sense" that appearance mattered. C had just had a visit from a social worker.'

(FN 5/6 Nov.27th 1985)

I left the last comment in, because I think the 'social work' ethos of case-work seems to be captured in Carol's own version of

social work, with Mary. ie. a concern with a sort of 'detachment'
- a form of the ideology of professional welfarism.

Carol's mimicking of this style seems essentially continuous with
this approach, never mind the angst feel the quantity!

Certainly sentimentality in her life seemed reserved for
'boy-friends', and dogs. Her own mother, who was, as I mentioned
frequently characterised by her in the diaries as a Cruella
De'ville sterotype, constantly in conflict with her over aspects
of sexuality (Note 9) nevertheless, invoked in Carol the more
usual ambiguities of love and hate. After an elaborate re-telling
about the endless rows precipitated at home by the over-over-
crowding, (The original house-hold had been extended by her
mother's friend and two young children to 11 in all!) A situation
in which Carol had to actually share her bed with the two children.
Carol unsurprisingly, described herself as :

'Very unhappy at home with no space and involved in
arguments with mum over little things but (I) won't hear
a word said against her.'

(FNB 13th March 1986. page 37)

If her loyalty was the defensive solidarity based on kinship,
rather than on pure sentiment, she might also have learned about
the fluidity not to mention capriciousness of relationships from
the politics of her own family. When defending herself once

from the charge of being a 'bastard', she declared, 'I'm not a bastard I've got 3 dads!' (FN 4 17th Sept) ie. her mother had married three times. Given the serial nature of these marriages, Carol probably and realistically reasoned, that it may not pay to get too attached. I am sure this experience influenced her 'easy come, easy go' attitude.

Earlier I indicated, that 'escape' featured as a recurring theme of her diaries and her discussions. When it was suggested that her biological father might be getting back together with her own mother she had responded with a comment about his money and of how she could get him to buy her anything in her secret rendezvous with him. This 'hard' stance, taken at its face value as a public disavowal of 'sentiment', mirrors the rhetoric of 'smashing peoples faces in' and is a fairly crude mechanism for managing emotional vulnerability and possible disappointment.

Carol had plentiful experience of this in her life already and had, as a consequence, rapidly evolved a relational repertoire which in some respects was more akin to aspects of masculinity than the emotional sensitivity usually characterised as femininity. She specifically recognised this style as a pose, though none the less real for that, and she characterised it as 'acting slaggy and hard' which when asked to explain meant, 'being flirty', defined by her as 'hanging round boys you fancy' and 'smoking and drinking'.

Predictably 'slaggy' references active female pleasure seeking and sexual self-display, under this rubric even the innocent act of mere

'flirting', as we see, is open to self-incriminating evidence of 'badness'. When I asked her the question :

'What's in it (for you) being hard and tough ?'

She replied : 'It's good fun but it can give you a bad reputation.'

(FN 8 Dec 17th 1985 page 27)

I have other comparative evidence about girls' awareness concerning this 'hardness' and the ambivalences they feel when they operate along more 'macho' line ; 'its' fun but it can give you a bad reputation.' (Note 10)

I would like to claim that this particular mode, a more brutalised form of the feminine discourse, pre-dates the 'liberated' era, I can for example, recall girls at my old secondary school who certainly 'acted hard' and that was in the early sixties ; pre-pill, pre-liberalisation and most definitely pre-permissive.

This 'discourse' for want of a better term has therefore ancient origins inside working class culture and indeed is frequently invoked in soap opera stereotypes of the 'battle-axe' eg. Lou Beale in East Enders for example, (or recollect Elsie Tanner's classic portrayal). Though, it is a testimony to the core construction of femininity as caring, that beneath this hard exterior is usually said to beat a heart of gold.

Maybe the edge is made from the brutalisation which Paul Willis's work considered, as the defensive pose, taken up by heavy-duty boys in his study. I am not aware of any substantive work done on examining this 'brutalising' of girls. I am not thinking about the 'tough cookies' in deviancy studies but the much more generalised 'hard-facedness' which I experienced as a teacher and which I've observed as part of the practices of some girls.

Christine Griffin has alluded to the way some teachers 'read' girls' 'hard' behaviour as indicating a future 'career' in the sex-industry explicitly stating that their expectations for the girls are that they will become prostitutes. Maybe what the interpretation is fed by is the tendency for girls' 'hardness' to carry an inappropriate sense of femininity as disconnectedness. And it is this meaning, inscribed through the association of masculinity as activity and disengagement which is then contrasted with the apparent and ostensible impercipient of certain girls' manners.

Because of this 'semiotic chain', girls who put on a hard front risk the implication that they are sexually active even more than other 'softer' girls, when as we know, all girls are potentially vulnerable to the ascription of 'slags'.

Possibly understanding this no-win situation Carol thought, might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb and at least get some pleasurable benefits from the patriarchal curse by claiming it for

I'd like to clarify this a little by showing how one girl had 'embraced' the description of herself as a 'slag'. Olga told me that when her enemies called her a slag she simply agreed with them! A strategy, whose simplicity, effectively silenced her opponents.

Since the power of the word takes force from you contesting its' non-contestability, once you 'concede' the point, then you seem to be above the fray because you have refused to play. By engaging in the game of 'proving' the falsity of the term you only become implicated in a recognition of your opponents' power. (Note 11)

I have tried to argue that 'hard' for Carol constituted an option which she took on several occasions, despite the risks of being targetted as 'an easy lay' and I mentioned her lack of 'public' sentimentality as an element in this 'hardness', suggesting that it disguised emotional vulnerability and receptivity.

I'd like to show that this is the case with reference to an entry in her diary about her biological father, who she had originally and publically spoken about as merely the source of more pocket money :

'Sneak out to see Dad Saturday down Wimpey with Cas (her brother). Fell out with him (ie. biological dad) but he said he can't leave me out because he really does love me. I think mum has got over me doing a bunk. Can't go over Eve's 'cause she blew me up. Ivan still asked me if I was still going to get a flat when I am 16

and I said yes, but I think not straight away. I'll live with Carl (her 'real' dad). I am glad my dad came back, if not I would have to stay at home and I didn't really fancy that. Cas, me and Carl are going down Brighton for the day. Dad's buying me a pair of shoes and hopefully getting my hair done.

(Carol's own diary entry 13th May + 1986)

This insight into the more 'acceptable' face of her femininity stands in sharp contrast to the 'front' ^{Carol}~~Karen~~ adopted in respect of her dependency needs and it is useful I think to conjecture that the affected 'cool' adopted in most of her behaviour to others, (with several qualifications) is nothing but an attempt to simplify and deny the emotional connections which she would actually like to have, if she could. Except that of course, there are intractable material circumstances outside her immediate control.

Thus I do think it was her 'fancy' that she imagined the possibility of her dad and her mother getting back together again if only because of the somewhat problematic existence of Fred (her 3rd Dad).

At the level of desire, that is what she really wanted and that is what she arranged as a wish.

This is not something I think is just peculiar to Carol ; this form of self-delusion structured out of the specific contradictions

'beyond our control', is a capacity we all exhibit and it is certainly something which I witnessed inside several of the girls' lives I got to know something of. Further, it also forms some sort of continuity with those other desiring relations actively constructed by the pop and media industries which encourage people, (especially girls/women) to create attachments to the unattainable, by providing the consumers with the minutiae of facts about the personal lives of the 'stars', not even known by their own mothers!
(Note 12)

I have already indicated that Carol's range of daydreams and wish fulfilments cannot be seen simply as bare faced 'lying' in the sense that it is self-consciously and deliberately manipulative in the manner of making the teller materially better off. It has more in common with day-dreaming than actual scheming, but it does serve the function of brightening up the dull day by reaching those parts not reached by ordinary reality. And in terms of the abundant dis-satisfactions in Carol's life - it makes abundant 'common sense'.

I now would like to finish this extended pen portrait of her with references to what I take to be the most important item for Carol, in situating herself in the world.

This last part will therefore put together her way of describing her world with an account of the risks she took to achieve the identity she was seeking. In her 'singularity' in this process, she was both independent of - the school, and her female

friendships but not patriarchal prescriptions. I think it is important to recollect her practices, desires and choices, when reading the final chapter ; and although I see her management of the conundrum of femininity as 'her' story, it is essentially the same struggle facing all girls as they strive to make sense of their growing up into women'. I just think that Carol's way, whilst it specifies one working class girl's, dramatically characterises something of what is at stake for all girls.

5. 'Being a Proper Woman' : Issues of Sex and Maturity.

I have examined some of the ways in which the category of age is 'used' by Carol with respect to the relationships she has with older boys/men, in particular I have tried to demonstrate that her 'older men tendency' is not just a response to their interest in her, but is actively sought by her, since they are the ones who have the money, the cars, and the status, invaluable, in terms of validating her as sufficiently attractively feminine to be viewed as a 'proper woman'.

It is towards this concept of 'proper' womanhood which I should now like to turn because it is the attractions and impossibilities of this, as an aspiration, which seem to provide the key to unlock elements within Carol's practices and her versions of those practices.

Being a 'proper woman' in this society, means being sexually available, sexually desirable, nurturant, and understanding. Both able to 'please your man' by having 'something up top', sexy (eg. wearing a suspender belt) : 'cos men like that, it turns them on', and of course, faithful.

As Carol, expresses the last point , eloquently not to say briefly : →

'6th October, he packed me in because I was talking to other people.'

(Diary entry same date 1985)

However, it is important to note that this is one account whilst her verbal statements tell of her triumph at maintaining the clothes he'd lent her. (See earlier and the discussion to follow)

The dilemma for Carol, is that of having a fast maturing body, (a material fact), which propelled her into a recognition of the physical form of 'proper womanhood' without the actual permission or legal recognition of having any sexuality. A version of all dolled up with nowhere to go!

It is from within an understanding of the hideously convoluted double binds wrapping around female sexuality that we can understand the 'choices' she made - out of this clash between her 'primed' state and both the incitements/impediments to its expression.

No wonder, given this opposition that her situation found a form in the experimental/fantasied/real alliances she operated from amongst her male network.

Thus, the mix of the 'real' and the imagined represents less the actual divisions in her life, than the sexual dilemmas confronting her as an under-age school girl (13/14 year old) with sexual desires and social ambitions in a sexist society.

The doubly illicit nature of her feelings were displaced and fragmented in the stories she told and the tales she wrote. The consistencies attained were only internal to the narrative of any one particular story at any one time, simply because consistency between narratives didn't matter too much.

On the other hand it was important that the sexual found a form since being sexual was what a proper woman was, whilst being 'sexy' or 'having sex' was not proper for a 14 year old schoolgirl.

I will illustrate this complex tension with reference to the fine print of her diaries and her conversations with me.

In this context I should also like to provide a gloss on her 'lies', taken from the remark made in a totally different context.

The source was a Lebanese 'terrorist', who under interrogation offered information of sufficient credibility to tempt the interlocutor into following these 'semi-truths' as a valid line of investigation. Apparently it is a standard procedure within illegal counter-state organisations to counsel their operators that neo-truths are more confounding than outright lies. There is some substance in this interesting strategy with reference to the contradictions and confusions manifest in Carol's stories/practices and discourse.

Perhaps the decoration she added to her diary (the one I commissioned) gives a hint of what I am struggling to say, it reads :

'Sex is evil
Evil is sin
Sin is forgiven
So sin is in'

The tautology of having your cake and eating it, neatly expressed in the opening formula. Actually the 'sex' in the text is confined to the statement of P who is said to have asked her, 'When are we going to make love ?' with the liason fixed up, but the lost trainers saving Carol's 'virtue', as well as P's virility, whilst the narrative still worked to recognise and validate her desirability without risking their exposure to the problematic though differentiated consequences of under-age sex. I think it is obvious from this [^]intepretation, that I read this diary entry as serious fantasy ; with her managing the 'proper' woman ingrediants but developing a narrative device to 'manage' those contradictions.

However in another diary she proffered to me, ie. her own private one (Carol's Private Dairy CPD.) ; there are other things going on which seem to show a more explicit set of statements about Carol's experiences. But I want to argue, with reference to other statements she made to to me in conversation, that these texts too

are continually contradicted by her (and others) public voice.

And furthermore this boundary between public/private has to be understood as constituting more than the orthodox acceptance that the 'private realm' contains 'the truth' whilst the 'public' contains the 'front', even though I have seen this as a useful split in explaining her 'hardness' before. As I have tried to show, it is also true that the ambiguities of the private are in themselves revealing of experienced difficulties at the level of desire.

Within her own personal diary (CPD), then the major theme is the telling of a heterosexual invasion which perfectly presents the classic representation of the female body as territory to be conquered, with each 'zone' carrying an increasingly heightened taboo status which correlates with the imagined 'needs' of the penetration-primed phallus. The erotic adventures detailed by Carol read like a catalogue of increasingly 'risky' encounters which place her in the position of extreme vulnerability to the possibility of pregnancy. This narrative of desire is taken at face value by me in this instant as an opening orientation point in discussing the tensions surrounding her confusions about the girl/woman split.

I want to show how the texts tell a story in their own terms (even if there is no absolute way of finally knowing their genuineness).

These accounts were not solicited by me directly, Carol originally

showed them to me early on in our relationship and I reciprocated by finding my own personal diary for my 15th year, for her to read.

From her remarks, each successive relationship seems to have incurred the increasing demand for and the expression of more sexual servicing : a narrative with a mix of noted pleasure, risk and subsequent fear. The whole theme of the diary takes as its' story the secret world of female-male private relations, that element which Cynthia Cockburn astutely observed as absent from the book 'Losing Out : Sexuality and Adolescent Girls' (Sue Lees 1986) leading her to speculate that the consequent instantiation of gender relations were so unremittingly awful, as to raise the question - if this is all of the case why do we ever continue with heterosexual desires and practices.? (See MF September 1986)

Part of the value of using the 'private' in this way is precisely because it is so invested with the articulation and expression of illicit/hidden worlds of girls' lives, as I've shown in my deconstruction of girls' correspondences. It can offer us a privileged insight into the 'secret world of girls' and by their own narratives, we can glimpse into the relations and practices of boys/men which through girls' depiction can offer us some access to the nature and dimensions of girls' imaginations and the operational discourses through which girls read the events with which they are confronted.

Even if, in Carol's case, her CPD is a set of 'mere' fantasies (I have suggested that there are certainly such incredible details

which lead me to construe other elements in Carol's stories as implausible), nevertheless I consider the fantasy mode as of substantial interest in itself. What I want to argue in this case is that her diary represents a cross-fertilisation of fantasy and fact exactly characteristic of her personal style.

And that this use of such a descriptive mode gives her the best possible opportunity to 'practice' being a 'proper woman'.

Thus I want to propose her narrative is both based on empirical reality which has as its substantive problem - the managing of the acquisition of an identity as a 'real woman' with these demands necessarily on occasion, overriding the actual truth of certain encounters.

In the last analysis all I can really rely upon to make the case is that Carol 'embellished' her life to conform to what she took as the prerequisites of a 'proper woman' identity are the fantastic discrepancy between the romanticism and the realities of her material life; a romanticism, (only abandoned at the end), which works to create a narrative coherency, absent from other areas of her discourse. It is this investment in 'love' which sustains the consistency of her association between sexual desire, sexual activity and femininity : an investment so pre-eminent as to almost write the stories for her.

It could well be that what I'm actually struggling to depict is the indivisibility of 'fantasy' from 'reality' within Carol's emotional

life.

By this I mean to suggest that the way she 'reads' the events is so suffused with the necessities of 'romance', that the reality can only be comprehended this way.

It is therefore via the compelling (compulsory) mediations of the romantic love discourse that inconvenient 'facts' become reworked so as to be consistent with the production of heterosexualised and romanticised reality. (Note 13)

I have already indicated that the main 'plot' of her diary was 'sex' and its production, distribution and consumption : perhaps the inside first page will convey something of the way sex is spoken about on the ensuing pages :

I'm a Sex Beginner

Holy Fucking Shit

I fancy a good fuck with you

Avoid rape say yes.

If sex is a pain in the arse - you ain't doing it right!

Love to fuck Mick and Gary X.

Whereas the last couple of pages mark out the other theme : the ubiquitous parameter which sets limits on sex which is always, but always coupled with love. (the crucial exception to this I will return to later) Here printed in bold is I LOVE IVAN x, next to the equally ubiquitous SEX IS GREAT.

I am not aiming to construct my argument about the state of Carol's consciousness solely on the basis of grafitti, I rather think that these 'idle' jottings are purposive at some level and when allied with other 'hidden' aspects, make up a genre of feminine subjectivity which is normally unavailable to researchers.

As a teacher I often used to allow the pupils I was teaching to 'doodle' if I was reading out loud to them. Out of curiosity once, I 'hoovered up' this ephemera. They made startling reading, showing something about the working of different levels of consciousness and the persistent hold that their own concerns had on their everyday lives despite the incessant demands that they address an agenda determined by someone else.

I have referred before to what I describe as a more fully developed female capacity to operate on different levels of interest/engagement. This 'holding onto the private in the public' is worthy of note in this context since it is made from the attention girls give to their 'private' lives and it forms an element in a range of practices which they draw upon to sustain and legitimate it : diary writing, which I take to be, a particularly female activity, is one such aspect of their insistence on working over the 'private'

so that like their notes, it both records and dramatises their existence in terms which matter to them.

The following commentary will only draw out some of the more salient details from Carol's diary, as corroborative of my reading the content as principally structured by the conundrum : 'What is being a proper woman ?' and how can you be 'feminine' as a school-girl if you aren't supposed to be sexual ?

My argument will be that inside contemporary definitions of femininity are both the incitement/excitement to be 'sexy' as well as the rigorous production of that 'sexiness' as only really guaranteed and allowed by loving one man in a privatised act of sexual servicing. Insufficient 'heterosexuality' impacts upon how or whether girls' experience themselves as feminine or not. This is hardly news to feminist research but what I think might be of interest is access to the means whereby part of the production of that 'femininity' is constructed and the tactical exigencies deployed as narrative/empirical devices to constantly present the 'sex' as conditional upon the 'love' despite, the number and quality of relations, and the brevity of the relationship so described.

In this heterosexual market-place, as expressed in the narratives, the material contract might crudely be expressed as body-knowledge for money/clothes/status but the strongest ideological exchange is sex for love and that is true whether we read the following as

'true' empirical wise or 'true' fantasy wise! →

1st entry

1985. He's got brown hair, green eyes, he's about 6 foot tall. He's really meaty and good-looking. (I don't think). On the 17.9.85 I went to the pictures with Brian to see (Rambo) there he gave me love bites and they were smackers. I love Brian and because I'm so happy I find it difficult to sleep because I'm always thinking about him. The first day I brought Brian round was the 17. 9. 85. They both approved of him. Then I went to see Madonna in 'Desperately Seeking Susy.' Saturday the 6th October he packed me in because I was talking to other people.'

Incidentally, I have a field note to the effect of Carol coming into school 'wearing her love-bite as a trophy' and that she told us very volubly that a male teacher had commented upon it as well as her mother, who'd asked if the new boy-friend was a Hoover or a vampire! (FN 4 47? dated 17th Sept. 1985) This pride in showing off the evidence of dating activity seems to confirm my view that for Carol, the overwhelming imperative for her actions and the accounts which she gave of her actions were constituted by her investments in femininity as heterosexuality : an election which places her in two mutually exclusive discourses ; as either feminine and a 'slag' or asexual and not a 'proper woman'.

There is another twist to the 'jilted' story though, and it clearly shows how the public/private works in Carol's life to maintain her femininity in ways remarkably similar to the same

split which is one of the determinants of masculinity.

Carol had another rendition of the ending of her 'relationship' with Brian. In her declamation, about the situation, she represents herself as much more assertive, insisting that she created the scenario, by attacking his 'silence' which had cut her out of the conversation he was having with his male friends.

Carol's strategy had been to attack his preference for his friends and according to her, she then sought to cope with his 'ditching' of her by commanding some other boy she knew, Bodgkin, to take her on the ice (they were at an ice rink) in an attempt to, as she put it to me and her female audience, 'make Brian jealous' When the poor 'Bodge' resisted, she was said to have demanded of him, in truly filmic prose, :

'Get your arse on the ice now!'

(FN 6 Dated 7th October 1985)

This is the prelude to the 'jumper and boots' incident and the break up is completed when Carol and her girl friend Gill, were 'chatted up' by two other boys at the bus-stop on their return journey home. A scene in which the two 'new' boys were instrumental, according to Carol, in further insulting Brian about the white boots he had loaned to her and was at that stage trying to secure. They were apparently enlisted on the girls' side and

were alleged to have said : 'He must be a poof to want his white boots back.'

Later in the day, however, I managed to speak to Michaela, another of Carol's fluid network of girl-friends, who gave me yet another description about the Brian/Carol split. In which she told me that Brian had practically issued Carol with the following ultimatum, 'I'm going out with you (ie. Carol), if me and Jenny don't work out.'

Hardly the vanquished lover of the earlier scene! Nor even the neutral character who 'packed (Carol) in.' How come such a disparity ? →

This representation of one's self as 'in charge' and not dependent, is both a traditional aspect of masculinity, and a piece of rhetoric in terms of Carol's self promotion as a 'bit of a battler', as well as showing her intense involvement in insisting upon her prestigious (if problematic), identity as a 'girl-friend'.

In the light of the conflict between herself and Brian, then it is predictable, that both of them publically would hold to an account which maximised their respective self-interest.

As far as I can recall Carol never actively or expansively constructed stories in which she 'lost face', (let alone a boyfriend!), despite her actual material circumstances, (differences of power and authority for example) she always 'won'. Victory was either arranged through open conflict or secured through 'charm' or other equally subversive means.

However, in the confines of her 'confessional', perhaps her reticence actually counts as an acknowledgment of loss and this is as near as she ever comes to expressing upset.? Her public volubility about the exchange stands in marked contrast to the 'silence' in private.

Indeed, Michaela had once specifically commented upon this aspect of Carol, 'She's alright but a bit larrupy' ie. mouthy. (This has, of

course got to be placed within a framework which understands how sexism works to disqualify girls' talk as 'disproportionate' if they offend against what is considered appropriate public discourse).

To support this interpretation of her 'sadness' I note her next entry which reads as a regret expressed in the form of an 'epitaph', very reminiscent of the markers of important heterosocial/heterosexual experiences which pepper my own diary at the age of 15. She simply records, 'I finished going out with Brian, 3 weeks on a Sunday'

The next significant marker of her femininity Ivan, forms the subsequent heterosexual entries and her remaking of the relationship is focussed on further evidence of herself as a sexual/sexy individual claiming a sexuality which is successfully turned on by him and which in turn 'turns him on'.

It is the imagery of herself as 'horny' which she is pleased about, though at this stage, it is only seen as a contract of verbalised erotica, described as a mutual exchange, (hence my use of the word contract) but significantly, it is only Carol, who is self-described as being 'in love' :

2nd entry.

'On the 4th November, I sat in Ivan's car (TR7) and talked about SEX and then I give him a frenchy, the guy he makes me really horny. I love him so much. I love him with

all my heart & always will.'

These utterances are followed next by an elaborate set of 'grafitti' including questions and answers as another type of conversation about 'sex'.

After these outpourings comes Carol's profession of ostensibly unambiguous desire, 'If I ever had the chance I would get a leg over with Ivan and that's a fact'

In the light of my excursions into the inter-relationship between 'fact' and 'fantasy', the last comment is possibly prescient.

And in the light of the 'fact' about why their relationship ended, this is a very suggestive phrase. You may recall that Carol and Ivan split, because he found out about her circulating a rumour that they had actually slept together.

As I have already shown, she was undoubtedly well aware of the issue of his 'vulnerability' to accusations of taking advantage of a minor, and yet she manipulated this at times within their relationship to her own ends. She knew she was, 'playing with fire', in more ways than one. At one time she told me, 'I've promised myself to Ivan on my 16th birthday!.' A view of herself as a 'gift', in her own possession. (cf. Gayle Rubin's comments about females not really having rights to themselves on the same terms as males have rights to them.) Actually, her way

of putting it sounds more like a threat, than any 'promise'!

From this statement it appears that the illegality of under age sex is the more effective deterrent than the ideology of purity. For it is the former which seems to more effectively police the desire.

It could well be that the 32 year old Ivan found 14 year old Carol, a little too hot to handle!

This is to leave aside the other issues about about their age disparity for the moment, though I don't think one can avoid considering this issue. Mostly because it is fundamentally germane to Carol's sexual politics and to the ways in which girls/womens predisposition towards 'older men' are structured, out of such negotiations with masculinity.

Central to these exchanges is the concept of 'maturity' which I have already suggested (See Chapter 2 for my discussion of its male form as breadwinner and good worker cf. the good wife and mother), takes a gender-differentiated form.

Carol's third entry and her next date with him involves more proto - sexual activity :

'We sat in his car and had a quiet chat and cuddle.

While he was kissing me he was playing around with my suspender belt because he love me in a s(uspender) belt.

I was wearing my mint dress with no bra. Red and black s. belt and pale stockings. We had just finished our kiss and cuddle when I said, "I really love you, I think you're a sex symbol."

"Thank you", he said.

So he left me and while I walked out down the road he was in the traffic jam so I stood there blowing kisses to him. He's really hunky and I love him.

(Extract CPD dated 5th November 1985)

Again the sense of her self as sexy and desirable, and of him as 'hunky', but these feelings are all indications of her loving him, nothing records his 'love' of her. Even if she feels 'in charge', she must also operate within the strict conventions of the romantic love discourse, which is the only legitimating protocol for the expression of sexuality for working class femininity.

This form of inequality ie. masculinity predicated upon denying these dependency needs whilst femininity is seen to be all about celebrating them or pandering to them in others (publically in child care and somewhat more privately in husband care) ; renders Carol (and other girls/women), vulnerable to mis-reading 'desire' as 'love' and of thus investing in these encounters aspects of her self which are normally and more wisely reserved for long-term

and long-standing relationships.

The confusion whereby men read womens' desire for them as designs on them, is actually constituted by the sex-differentiated ideologies (and practices), which encourage women to understand desire as 'love' and men to understand their needs of women as 'lust'.

Men seem much freer to 'feel' desire as desire, in fact the very evidence of their masculinity, whereas for women, desire is almost always the signal for something else. It's as if it doesn't actually belong to you, rather that it is 'on loan' and it can only be issued disguised as, or experienced as, love. (Note 14)

In chapter 2, I also discussed the problematic nature of female desire, (with the aid of Ros.Coward's work), which is constantly incited by the commodity forms and ideologies in circulation. It is therefore external to women, being imposed from outside by the combined forces of men and the market-place. However, she demonstrates that its' forms do make successful connections with us at the level of pleasure - the difficult terrain where ideologies burrow into our conscious/unconscious selves.

But what I think is under-developed in this account is the vexed question as to the precise or even imprecise nature of female sexual desire. She does have a speculative and intriguing chapter on 'Men's Bodies' (which I alluded to in Chapter 4 part 2 Desiring Boys : The Naming Of Parts), where the material object of

normative female heterosexual desire is discussed. But the actual articulation of feminine sexuality has hardly advanced from the arcane biblical notions which she herself quotes. viz.

Unto the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception : in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children ; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee".

It could well be that there really exists no language to talk about female desire for men, because we as a gender are denied the psychological/social/interpersonal space to do the 'desiring' (But see Note 15)

We have literally had to suppress or divert our desire via its domestication ; 'nice girls don't', or go to the other extreme and hype it up as undying 'love', dominating the whole of our consciousness. We can't just 'feel' it, without having to see it as symbolising something else.

This inability to unproblematically claim hetero-eroticism for ourselves is possibly more the reason why we find talking about men's bodies make us uncomfortable not only because they are strange to us, but we are strangers to the discourse of active sexuality, be it about their bodies or other bodily desires.

Carol's permissive, 'I would get a leg over with Ivan and that's a fact' becomes mystified in the discourse of romantic love so that it is probably actually experienced as love.

Entry 4

'Andy (Carol's elder brother) asked me to go and get some bird seed so I said "Alright."

I ran all the way down and all the way back with ten pound of birdseed. I was walking down Ashley and I saw Ivan. He said "Meet me where we met last night." He come along and I sat in his car. We had a good kiss and cuddle then I went.

This morning, 7.11.85, he said he doesn't get back until 7.30. So I said I would try to meet him.

On the 7th of November I said I would try to meet Ivan about 7.30. We agreed.

Well what with the police taking statements because Dan was mugged and my mum nagging, I didn't sneak out of the house until about quarter to eight. Then when I got there his car was gone, so naturally, I thought he had gone. So I started to cry. Just then he came round the corner and I was relieved.

I got in and went round to Eastfax Grove then he said,

"Fancy going somewhere ?"

So I said, "Where ?"

"Don't know, the disused swimming pool ? "

"Ok", says I. So off we went.

We parked down by the off licence. We sat down talking and listening to a Wham tape and then he lent over and kissed me (it must have lasted about 2 mins), I gave him a cuddle and then he said,

"Lets' see your stockings and s.belt", so I agreed. By this time I was getting really horny but scared.

So he said, "I like your stockings, they're really sexy and they turn me on' So he started to gently touch me down below.

He said "You don't mind do you ?"

"No"

"Oh"

"That's alright then," says me.

I started to tickle the inner part of his leg, he liked it so
I moved up to his penis and rubbed there for about 10 mins.
Then he gently kissed me again.

So we went back to touching each other up.
At 8-40pm, he said, "I best take you home"

So I said, "Yes"

We were also talking about what I'd like to do to him in bed.
I think Ivan is the MOST SWEETEST PERSON I HAVE EVER
MET HE IS GENTLE AND MEANS WELL, VERY POLITE AND
CONSIDERATE AND HAS A BEAUTIFUL KISS.

His touch is oh so perfect. He said if I met him tomorrow
I would get a kiss so I will.

I REALLY DO LOVE IVAN AND HE'S A WONDERFUL GUY.

I think if one takes this as a literal account of Carol's last
date with Ivan, one can read it for her own fear about the very
dangerous potential consequences of their increasingly erotic
'fore-play'. (Note 16)

When I first read this I thought of it as a pure piece of male
sexual exploitation but now when I read it, what I'm forced to
confront is the tone of caring which is expressed in Carol's recall
of the encounter ; a caring not confined to her solicitations about

him but which is also conveyed in the way she attributes his caring about her and treating her with consideration. I realise that this is dangerous ground.

Is it her 'fantasised' attribution of his 'kindness', that I am picking up on ? And if it is, is this just displaced onto him as a way for her to continue their sexual relationship ? Is it her desperate need for affection, absent in other areas of her life, pre-disposing her to mis-read sexual opportunism as affection ?

Or am I pathologising her sexual curiosity and pleasure seeking through some self-referential set of puritanical beliefs ?

Beliefs instilled through my own working class upbringing, beliefs bolstered by the fear of my own father's patriarchal/protective injunctions upon me about boys/men ; the systematic adherence to which gave me the necessary immunity to heterosexuality, sufficiently long enough to get me into higher education.

However, it is also paradoxical to record the similarities over this type of 'moral panic', between classes at least at the level of informing the practice whereby girls' sexuality is problematised. The conceptualisation of young girls' as utilising sex as substitute affection, is of course, predicated upon the taken for granted opposition between those two activities and the notion that somehow loveless sex is damaging at least for working class girls. Sex, rather like cocaine, is only permitted the responsible classes. Both become distinct liabilities in the wrong hands, as it were.

For the benefit of pursuing the discussion, about Carol's desire to see herself as a 'proper woman', I am taking her account of the seduction as it stands, as a record of her memory.

I am assisted in that, because there is just something totally believable about all the ingredients : her sexual confidence as well as her anxiety, his controlling of the exchange by initiation and closing with the ending, 'I best take you home ', his awareness of her only being 14, used both as sexual stimulation and as a form of sexual censure, her 'surrender' to him in the context of setting the sexual pace and she responding, her pleasure at turning him on and her own fear at being herself turned on.

I think that this is the scenario of Carol's heterosexual education and I also think it is one where she experiences herself as both powerful and powerless. Part of what makes for that feeling of powerfulness is the ability to attract an older man and to be attracted to a so-called 'mature' man. So that the consolidating impression is that one is 'mature' oneself by having a relationship with a mature person. And essential to securing this identity as 'grown -up' is evidence of a positive sexual response to her femininity.

In other words she is 'mature' because she is 'feminine', and she is 'feminine', because she is 'mature' No wonder she wants this experience : its seduction is not only because it meets

erotic/emotional needs, it also is viewed as the conduit which signifies 'becoming a proper woman' : a destiny desired by all girls.

The lethal catch in this process of course, which is that in taking on the identity of the sexually experienced, could actually lead to conception because she is still locked into the other key feature of patriarchal femininity, namely the virgin/whore dichotomy. That well documented split in the category of females out of which flows the idea that contraception signals pre-meditation, which signals 'slut'.

So that despite Carol's preparation for proto-sexual/sexual exploration at the level of pleasure and identity confirmation she had not sought information/advice/products which would have made for safe sex.

I am not disputing the difficulties of obtaining all three elements, but despite the confusions and uncertainties caused by the 'Gillick' ruling and other post-Gillick judgements, she was not a 'wally'. I have after all tried to argue in one section the exact opposite!

In 'Street-Wise' for example, I showed her social confidence and her manipulation of the 'soft urban spaces' and yet I have to bear in mind all the time, that coupled with this 'city toughness', is her sexual ignorance and the socially produced complicity with sexual irresponsibility, a powerlessness manifest in her classic

fatalism. (It is interesting how the AIDS crisis has compelled the advertising of contraceptives).

We note Carol's 'ignorance' not about the mechanisms of arousal, (though predictably it is the male who makes more of the demands in these transactions), but with the mechanisms of reproduction and the prevention of reproduction. This in itself is fundamentally ironic, given the over-determination of women's sexuality by the latter at the ideological level. (See Chapter 8 for an examination of C school's curriculum in the light of this assertion and Appendix C)

Given that I am now reading her diary as a record (something which I've been resistant to do all the time - see my comments upon my own upbringing mentioned before), I now read some of her oblique requests of me as her way of soliciting information (about the workings of the pill, or the experience of having a baby), whereas at the time, I took them as her simply showing me that she was sexually advanced and thus trying to shock or impress or even test me.

It could well be that all and more besides of these and other motives combined but what I now recognise is that one's own response to subjects is hinged on locating that information in an overall sense of the subject's 'game-plan' and at the time I acted upon that sense of testing out her 'authenticity'.

This did not mean that I failed to take seriously her enquiries of

me, I always tried to answer as honestly as I could her questions about my life and things to do with issues that concerned her, but in understanding her I usually assumed her as exaggerating the drama of her own life. And at times this stance did confound or mislead me.

Carol thus occasionally resembled the infamous Matilda who,

'....told such dreadful lies

It made one gasp and stretch ones eyes.

For every time she shouted "Fire!"

They only answered, "Little liar!"

In Carol's case, the penchant for verbal boasting most definately threw me in my interpretation. Possibly my prior experience of being a teacher fed into this tendency. You very soon wise up to the smart arse remark, designed to test your social control stamina leaving you to 'mistrust' the unsolicited pupil remark since much that was given is inauthentic and provocative material, designed to check out one's (liberal) credentials.

My closing remarks upon Carol's diary will contain her last contribution, as well as a postscript, which will both substantiate my claim that I too underplayed the seriousness she attached to her 'getting of wisdom' which as the subsequent course of her life showed me just how incomplete and problematic that process is, for a young, working class girl.

There isn't another contribution to her diary until the following year and given that the content is again another sexual adventure I think this supports my claim, that the chief purpose of the diary is to remind herself of the evolution of her identity as a 'proper woman' and in so doing provide valuable clues to me, as to the dimensions of her investment in that dangerous process.

I noted earlier that Ivan literally disappeared from the scene, according to Carol, (and Michaela), he went to Australia in December, for at least a month. Interestingly Carol does not mention in her 'confession' the fall-out she said they had about her incriminating 'rumour'. Namely that Ivan had been involved in under-age sex. I will comment upon this later.

The next date centres on Adrian, one of the cemetery crew, who I originally saw as being part of the 'platonic' network from which Carol made her sorties out into the sexual world. It came as something of a surprise to me therefore, when Adrian appears as her would-be lover in this episode.

Entry 5.

On the 13th May 1986 I sneaked out of the house to see Adrian. We got up to certain things on the bed, it didn't go all the way up but just about half way. I not sure, but on the 18th May 1986 my stomach felt rather weird.

I don't know if I'm pregnant (this last word has been crossed out) or not, so if we kept it under the hat and wait and see. Around the bottom part feels sore, so I'll just wait. My period's due on the 26th May 1986. If its a boy it'll be called Adrian Lee after the daddy. Girl = Lily Audra after my mum.

This account is remarkable for the directness of the narrative - no embellishment in romantic prose, no affirmation of love! And yet this is a description of (almost) 'doing it'. No eroticism and no sentiment, except that of the fatalistic acceptance about the inevitable result.

This new starker, (in some respects), scenario of her pragmatic resilience in the face of the 'taken for granted' vulnerability to pregnancy, and the sentimental adoption of her lover's and mother's names for the imagined (hoped for/longed for/unpreventable ?) child, leaves me to speculate that what is now at stake in this account is her wish to confirm her own femininity as a potential child-bearer, indicating the irrevocable process of her transformation from school-girl to woman.

This loveless exchange (between herself and Adrian) seems to totally contradict her former re-creations of her self as the seductive female. If she has previously appeared as immersed in the romance of transcendental passion, what is going in when she renders the less than apocalyptic account of almost doing the 'real

thing' ?

Here it is all very pedestrian, nothing more than a crude semi-invasion. Maybe, for Carol, as for a lot of girls/women, this is how it is experienced. After the 'fore play', it's 'down hill all the way'! Carol's reconstruction, if we take it at face value, bears a striking resemblance to what Bea Campbell refers to when she notices that : 'When it came to actually doing it the fun seemed to stop' (Note 17)

This echoing description seems to connect precisely to the joyless semi-fuck and to the contraceptiveless circumstances of the date.

For Carol, the most urgent concern, in her recall of the scene, is the logistics of the penis and the consequences of the 'sex act' which confronts her with the stark reality, lying beneath, the sell of romance - penetration - which signals fear of conception. This anxiety can only be mollified, by the inscription of one's self as a would-be mother.

From lover-temptress sex-object (and subject) to mother in simple progression, all depending upon (literally so) the exteriority/interiority of the phallus. How deterministic can you get!
(Note 18)

Within this narrative, females are seen to be held totally responsible for their own transformation, into 'little mums', so that their 'career' as sexually desirable, active young girls is

domesticated and controlled by themselves, even before they've had any chance to experiment with it. It is in this way that McRobbie's quote about working class girls' resonates here.....It is because they are not allowed to 'do too much too soon ' that they find themselves having done 'too little, too late'.

Last time I met Carol at her behest, she was still living at home, managing to evade school, cultivating sets of male friends, falling out with her female friends, involved in some show downs with her mother and her mother's friend's children (you recollect they were sharing her room) and generally trying to 'make the best of a bad job'. She was talking enthusiastically of her of becoming a garage mechanic (the training for which, she claimed, her auntie and mum would provide). This fancy sat very oddly with the facts of her not even doing metalwork/technical drawing in school. In a sense that minor detail was irrelevant, since she was hardly ever at school! Similarly she was waxing poetic on the anticipated pleasures of leaving home, and having 'a flat of my own'. (cf. this dream working within the 'ambitions' of the girls at B school, discussed in the next chapter)

However, it is hard to see how, Carol could translate her fragmented and incoherent 'plans' into reality. Qualificationless, dependent and unlocated except for her sense of herself as sexually desirable, is not the passport to social and economic independence.

I think her views of the future had to exist as unrealizably

opposed to the possibilities for their achievement, to sustain them.

If you keep the dreams segregated from the reality, you ensure their comforting role, since they are isolated from the world of struggle, disappointment and rejection. You can then keep them intact and unblemished ; as pure nurturance to get you by. (Note 19)

When the desire is tested in the material sense, as the text of penetration shows, (by way of an analogy), all you get is calender-watching and anxiety. Keeping the seduction from the 'sex act' in Carol's life, is like her personal metaphor : 'fiction' is preferable to the 'truth'. A practice with remarkable resonances with the 'fancying' and 'fandom' discourse discussed in Note 12)

The only trouble was that in growing up, the impulsions of reality are more difficult to manage, as the material world of work (or of non work) and the sexual market place honed in to square up to her with their more incursive demands for accountability.

The penultimate news I had of her, was that she had been suspended for semi-permanent truancy and the last I heard of her came from a letter I received from one of her female friends. It stands as the last word I have on Carol :

'Well we've all left school now, except Dottie, who has gone back. But Liz, Amy, Carol, Rita and me have all left.

Liz works at IBM, doing office work. She likes a good drink, she's always down the pub. She's got a new boyfriend called Simon, he's a nice bloke, I really get on with him.

Amy. We don't see much of her 'cos she keeps herself to herself. She's also doing office work.

God knows what Rita is doing ?

But Carol left school before she was meant to.

I don't know if I'm allowed to say anything but she had a miscarriage. She fell down some stairs. Her mum chucked her out, so her brother's girl friend could move in. Poor cow eh?

(Personal Communication from Melly
From 3G Summer 1987)

Chapter 5

Notes.

1. This is in quotes to distinguish Carol's casual attitude to the institution.
2. Ann Whitehead : 'Sexual Antagonism in Herefordshire' in *Sexual Divisions and Society* ed. Leonard, D. and Allen, S. Longman (1976) p169-203.
3. This form of loud and verbal fancying exactly replicates McRobbie's notion of 'hyper-femininity' which she identifies as constituting some of the powerful resistant forms of working class femininity used by girls to intimidate teachers.
4. Cf. the way that Gabbie and Amelia off-load difficult desires onto 'other' girls. This is amplified in Chapter 4.
5. This is a bizarre inversion of the usual. It is normally boys who circulate rumours about girls' 'easiness'. See my later allusion to Nina's irritation about male hyper-

sensitivity : 'making mountains out of mole-hills' in which she is advised by her mother to understand boys' discussion of her 'easiness' as their taking the relationship 'too seriously'!

6. This auntie, was definately the 'good' fairy god mother who always featured in Carol's life, as the personification of maternal solicitude, often in direct and unfavourable contrast to her own 'real' wicked witch of a mother.
7. Nor is Carol the only girl with very extensive self-deception modes. Frankie, re-describing what other girls had told me was a craven phone call to a boy who failed to show for a date, re-presented/represented her supplication as if it was her who'd been playing hard to get! (FN 2 B School)
8. When is the sexual the sexual ? I have not been able to reconcile this linguistic sexism to a feminist account which is trying to critique just such phallogratic notions. To proceed the matter I intend to use the normative definitions available ie. penetration as the sex act.
9. Carol's mother attempted to stop her from wearing a dress of her own choice to her sister's wedding. It was mint green with a low cut back. She advised Carol to sew it up. She then bought her another 'safer' dress, which Carol contemptuously dismissed as 'like a romper suit' being all

'babylike and frilly'. Finally with Carol still adamant that she wouldn't wear the substitute frock, she threatened to ban Carol from attending the wedding at all. Carol eventually went but in a new less 'sexy', third choice dress. Cf the story about Barbara's mother exerting control over her daughter's gender appropriate style. The incidental material which I have on mother/father daughter familial relations suggests that this 'site' is an unexplored but crucial one for any understanding out the transmission or contestation of gender/class/race ideologies.

10. Judith and Gina from B school know of this too. See next chapter for a discussion of 'hardness'. It is important also to keep in mind Barbara's more assertive form of feminine sexuality, which connects to these discussions. See Chapter 7 for how these connections of class, sexuality and gender are argued through.
11. Liz Stanley 'Why Men Oppress Women : Or How Experiences of of Sexism Tell Us Interesting and Useful Things about Women's Oppression and Women's Liberation' Paper presented to the BSA Conference 1982. She instances a different coping strategy in which the women who received 'dirty phone calls' defused the power of the caller by refusing to be 'offended' and took power for themselves, in a variety of subversive ways. By pretending not to be able to hear, for example, thereby getting the caller to amplify his ludicrous obscenities, a mechanism which allowed them to maintain their power and

control of the exchange. See page 26 for her discussion of Transcripts 55/56.

12. I am thinking here of the image of Pat Phoenix, in her hospital bed (a drawing of which appeared in the mass circulation dailies) Apparently the appetite for access to the 'star' even overrides our customary boundaries separating people in times of grief. The niceties of distance, which in reality mark us from them, are ideologically obliterated in these ways to maximise our identification with our heroes and heroines, whilst we can still paradoxically, retain the illusion of our power over them, as we spectate aspects of their lives, (be it cocaine snorting, serial divorcing, etc or even dying)

It is instructive to compare this 'fandom' with the passive longing also incited in the practice. Many of the girls I got to know cherished visible 'longings' for the unobtainable, for older, or cleverer or richer boys for example. Like Doreen of 3G, who had a comprehensive 'pash' on Tony, who she'd never even spoke to but who featured in her day dreams, as a sixth form celebrity. She had distinct ambitions to get his autograph (along with George Michael) to decorate the year book. Carol's practice is even more complex still, since she could not be said to just 'fancy' older men as a dream.

13. For an extension of this argument see Hey 1982. Terry

Lovell's conceptualisation of ideology as connective to actual life experiences is usefully invoked at this stage :
She claims ideology is :

'.....the production and dissemination of erroneous beliefs whose inadequacies are socially motivated. The definition recognises two other categories ; erroneous beliefs which are not so motivated, and valid beliefs which are, but places them both outside the category of ideology'

Cited from 'Pictures of Reality'
BFI (1983) p51-52.

By Ellen Seiter 'Feminism and Ideology : The Terms of Women's Stereotypes' Feminist Review 22 Spring 1986 p61.

I am also reminded of Valerie Walkerdine's insightful examination of the production of desire through the texts which position little girls as good only through their accepting victimisation and servitude. See 'Some Day my Prince Will Come : Young Girls and the Preparations for Adolescent Sexuality' in Gender and General Education' edited by McRobbie, A. and Nava, M Macmillan (1984). Cf also Gill Frith's work 'The Time of

Your Life' on the subversiveness of the boarding school story, in *Language, Gender and Childhood*. edited by Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine, RKP 1985. In the same volume Valerie Walkerdine makes another interesting contribution to the discussions about young girls subjectivity in her article : 'On the Regulation of Speaking and Silence : Subjectivity, Class and Gender in Contemporary Schooling'. See especially note 40, following the essay, which focusses upon her examination of the effectivity of the narratives of masochistic self-denial (the stock in trade of most school girl pre-pubescent stories), as inhering in the operational fantasies of working class women and men.

A lot of the material produced in the pursuit of a less monolithic conceptualisation of the subject has been very influential upon my own thinking with respect to individual girls behaviour, as well as informing my understanding about the way ideologies are negotiated at the collective level too.

14. This is not true of course of the pure form of the 'Permissive Discourse' in which females were said to have the same access to the hedonistic pleasures of sex as recreation.
15. But see the recent developments in the theorisation of desire, in particular : the ICA document 'Desire' which contains selected pieces by Kathy Myers, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey and Julia Kristeva for example, and see also a fascinating intervention in the feminist (lack) of a debate about

- pornography, by Marior Bower in Feminist Review 24 called :
'Daring to Speak It's Name : The Relationship of Women to
Pornography' Autumn 1986. The title of which is
indicative of the iconoclastic precept of her ensuing
re-interrogation of female desire, eroticism and power.
16. The word 'fore-play', apart from sounding like a rather
unorthodox cricket stroke, carries with it the same linguistic
and hence sexual political difficulties. For consistency, I
am using the usual usage here.
 17. Bea Campbell 'Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now
You Don't' Feminist Review 5. p1-18.
 18. Judith, in B school, had a phrase which brilliantly captured
the essence of her practice with regard to the problems of
female sexuality. She once described her relationship to
her boy friends as 'letting men near enough'. A strategy
which elicited the evidence that she could 'turn them on',
whilst still thinking of herself as in control. A form of
'prick teasing' (her words), which pivoted upon her
recognition that being a 'tease' was preferable to being
thought of as a 'slag'.
 19. Norma Sherratt, has a thoughtful account of the way the ideology
of glamour, which is attached to certain female jobs (usually
to disguise their menial, poorly paid low status), works to
mediate the difficulties which girls experience in managing

the struggle to achieve without jeopardising their femininity.

'Girls, Jobs and Glamour' Feminist Review 15 Winter 1983.

She argues that 'glamour' allows girls to retain their hopes whilst making the necessary adjustments to the difficulties of achieving their ambitions. She specifically identifies it as an ideological category which connects to an unconscious fantasy of escapism. This is very suggestive in the context of the prominence of this escape motif as a general fantasy structure in girls' lives and as highly operational in Carol's regime. As Carol once expressed it to her friend Liz :

Dear Liz,

I don't give a fuck about home, I'm leaving, don't forget. When you're 16, you're leaving too.

Are you coming ?

Love Carol.

Sorry about the red ink, it is the only ink I could find.

CHAPTER 6

WORKING CLASS GIRLS' NARRATIVES OF FEMININITY AND FRIENDSHIP.

Contents.

1. Introduction to Judith and her Friends.
2. 'Chucking Everyone Out' : Drawing the Line.
3. 'My Little Friends' : A Note on Race and Class.
4. 'The Way We Look At It Now, It's Too Late' :
From Here to Obscurity - Being One of the Girls.
5. 'Bitching' - More of the Verbals or How Girls Try
To Vanquish Contradictions.

'When She Was Good She Was Very Very Good, But When She Was Bad She Was Horrid!' : Social Divisions of Class, Race and Female Sexual Politics Within and Between Girls' Relations.

Introduction to Chapters 6 and 7.

I want to set out in the following two chapters, an extension to the arguments set in motion within both Chapters 3, 4 and 5. This will entail an exploration of another nexus of female friends, who as fourth year white working class girls will be the core group, whose meanings and practices will inform the ensuing chapter.

Thus, whilst I will be tracking through the major constituent elements in girls' cultures, (female friendship, and to a much lesser extent the inter-meshing narrative of their investments in the heterosexual market place See Note (1) for how the latter works as an ongoing context to the former) ; I will also attempt to move the register of the account into a different level of social analysis, through more explicitly demonstrating that there are dynamics to individual actions which are not reducible to personality or inter-personality.

It is at this point that the social relations of class, race and gender become more urgently addressed and hopefully this ambition is sustained not only through this chapter, but has sufficient coherent force to work forward in setting out a trajectory which is elaborated and answered in the companion proceeding chapter.

Taken in conjunction therefore, Chapters 6 and 7 are designed to consolidate the arguments already suggested about the political character of this institution. And it is in this manner that I hope to show the necessity for the case put in the final chapter as 'Opening Up The Gender Curriculum' - a set of arguments predicated upon a critical engagement with the forms, styles and meanings of female friendship to suggest that the personal and inter-personal is political,

1. Introduction to Judith and her Friends.

Judith and her friends from her caucus, were described to me by way of introduction as 'typical' B schoolgirls. I began to understand afresh what was packed into this bland phrase in the course of our short but intensive relationship.

Christine Griffin critiques this same expression as itself a typical example of the way that girls are spuriously categorised in falsely homogenous categories (cf. Deputy Head of C school claiming girls were more likely to be mediocre than either 'duffers' or 'brilliant' See Chapter 2)

In the context of my contact with the girls and their female staff, the description was much more to do with the affectionate evocation of the host white working-class culture from which the girls and their mothers had been drawn, into the long established school community. These girls therefore were being acknowledged as a 'known quantity', being seen as a product of a very localised, predictable culture.

This is of extra significance, some of which I will unpack, in view of the racism which prevailed within the school : such apparently 'innocent' remarks need re-interpreting in the context of the

following discourse.

2. 'Chuck(ing) Everyone Out' : Drawing the Line.

I have already shown how the instabilities of girls' patterns of relating usually mask the firmness of the orientation point around which girls's networks revolve. Sometimes however, the best friendships which lie at the heart of some broader alliances are fiercely contested, leading to a challenge to the usually rock-steady dependable commitments which have recognisable priority in the management of social relations.

In these circumstances changes to best-friendships have not only personal but group causes and consequences as well.

This was the case in the originating history of Judith's friends. It is impossible to say with total conviction what had most impact upon the decision to end personal and group friendship with Sunila, (an Afro-Caribbean girl) who had been part of Judith's friendship landscape in the third year, whether this was managed mostly by Judith's own volition or that of her friends.

In the simple retrospective inspection of her 'motives' it is of course simply impracticable to separate out her actions from the prevailing pressures exerted by the rest of the girls. Whilst I have access to their rationales, (See below), I want to situate

these, within an understanding which locates the other agenda of race and sex antagonism which was invoked in fragmentary ways with respect to black girls.

The more overt racist terminology and conceptualisation will find fuller and more comprehensive 'taken for granted expression' in the later discussion of Maureen and Frankie, when the issue of girls' self-hatred becomes stage-managed by being off-loaded onto the racially subordinated category of Afro-Caribbean girls in general and specified in this instance through Judith's 'enemies' in particular, ie. Sunila. (There are other ideologies in place too, to do with / the characterisation of Afro-Caribbean male sexuality as rampantly voracious. Note 2)

Conveying something of the intensity of these 'falling in' and 'falling out' processes is very difficult, all that can be attempted is the creation of the emotional and cultural 'atmosphere' surrounding the creation of Judith's network.

It is perhaps necessary to remind the reader of the melodrama incited through the tussles and expulsions which characterised the early days of the 'elite' group in 1M.

It becomes essential to understand the importance which girls place on their identity for each other as friends, and at no time is this more true paradoxically, than when they seem so hell-bent on tearing each other apart!

Thus part of the purpose of citing the following heavily edited transcript, is to ^fty to express the solidity which is being actively inscribed by the girls' own awareness of their current group cultural norms - and absolutely central to that project, is their substantiating each others understandings about the demerits of those girls who are now excluded. This is even more crucial given the fact that two 'outsiders' Sunila and her now best friend Jocelyn, were once 'insiders'!

It is not only a case of Judith and her friends working for a consensual view on this issue, namely to reaffirm group solidarity on the basis of excluding girls as 'enemies' - (I have engaged with this dynamic previously in my discussion of 'mechanical solidity'), this tendency relates to their actual style, which showed in practice that they had achieved a very high degree of mutuality in discourse.

Their 'team work' would have confounded any transcriber, I literally lost count of the times I mis-attributed statements on tape. They often spoke for each other, finishing each others' sentences, talking simultaneously and indeed telling each other what they must think!

It is this 'quality' which is lost, unavoidably, when bare words appear on paper. They did their friendship through the practices of day to day talk, in which the past was as much a point to remind them of the present, than it was a mere piece of history. By 'going back' they could, and did, re-constitute the

present. And as the transcript clearly shows, one influential element in this process of confirmation, was the drawing of 'necessary' boundaries around themselves.

This opening exchange will illustrate the point to some effect I think. I am talking to Judith, my contact at B school, who has introduced me to her friends; Gina (best), Maureen, Nina, and Sally. (Frankie, another member, is missing)

Tape 13

VH. The theme is friendship I have a list of questions but the format of the interview may not follow on. How long does the history and development of your friendship go back ?

M. At this school really didn' it.....
Some people know us from the other school - that we really got together.

N. We two have known each other for ten years (to Maureen)

From infant school want it ?

G. I've only been here a year.

N. I've known Judith for 4 years.

M. I've never spoken to Judith for the first year because she used to go around with this black girl called Sunila. She thought she was hard walking about.

VH. Who thought she was hard ?

M. Sunila!
She did ! She gave Judith a bad image I think, I didn't used to like her (ie. Judith) but now... (Inaudible).....Gorgeous.... Lovely.

VH. When did you get to know Judith ?

M. When Sunila and Jocelyn used to go around and then when Gira came to this school.

G. And I started to get friendly with Maureen. She was in my class and I started to go around with Judith, so we all started to go around together.

M. With Frances - there were loads of us, about 12.

J. It was started from the end of the third year. Going into the Fourth year - and then we just split

and all sort and now there's just us lot.

VH Why did you split up ?

M. Because we chucked everyone else out we don't want.

Then there follows an elaborate and shared historical reconstruction of Sunila and Jocelyn's past 'sins' ; from their 'mouthiness' (Judith/Maureen), rejection of support (Mauren/Sally), theft (Sally/Mauren), inappropriate incrimination of others, (Judith) - in fact all the classic ingrediants thought necessary to naming and making of a good enemy. (Note 3)

But I want to go further and suggest that a specific racist post-hoc rationalisation is being articulated here, principally by Maureen, the ferocity of which has a great deal to do with getting Judith to disown a previous (non-racist ?) friendship involving Sunila. A lot is packed into the description of Sunila as 'hard' but unlike the attribution when applied to white girls, (See my discussion of this word in the previous chapter on Carol), it has a particular edge when Afro-Caribbean girls are so invoked.

It carries the double fear of female sexuality and racial difference, both combining to construct in the white racist imagination and in the practice of the superordinate white girls, a vicious defence against their own self-loathing through the

projection of 'dirty' sexuality onto the subordinated and stigmatised 'other'. (Note 4)

The next part examines these processes in greater detail and section 5, returns to the theme in an attempt to further place the divisions as socially produced and interpersonally maintained.

3. 'My Little Friends' : A Note on Race and Class.

As I stated at the opening all the girls I interviewed at B school were white. This decision to bond with white girls was consciously made with a view to comparing white girls from different social classes, in the event this comparison was not made in any explicit or 'pure' way, though it is my intention that the next chapter is constructed as the other side of the paper to the arguments about class and female sexuality made here from the perspectives of working class girls.

It also needs to be made clear that what I have to say about white girls' racism is extremely partial, partial in the sense of its' unsystematic analysis at an institutional and macro-social level. It is only documented here in the institutional context of girls' friendships, and then only with regard to the detailed articulation of one such mini-system.

However, despite these qualifications, (on applicability), there is no way, that it can stay out of a consideration of the social culture of Crossfil's B school, anymore than it can remain outside of considerations of gender.

For example, I will never forget the occasion, when accompanying

Judith through one week of her timetable, I took part in a double french lesson. Half way through the afternoon, the two adjacent groups re-combined in one room, to facilitate a vocabulary quiz. All the black girls from both groups sat together and all the white girls took up the other table to make the two competing teams.

And neither teacher made a current, or subsequent observation to me or to the students about the segregation!

These 'separate tables' symbolised for me at least, the much more race specified dynamic at Crossfil's school. The race politics of which appearing much rawer to me, than was the lower key antagonism expressed in different ways at C school. The wider class mix of the latter institution, no doubt 'mollified' the cruder excesses of explicit racism, whilst the gender of the antagonists at B school was in itself undercut by the numerical dynamics which meant that black Asian girls were in some older years an equal numerical grouping.

In expressing it this way I am not 'excusing' the sharper forms of the culture of race oppression, present inside the girls' school ; that would be to collude with the racism which conceives of significant numbers of black people as a 'threat' in and of itself, I am simply trying to map out the prevailing institutional differences in ethos, against which to understand the race exclusiveness of groups of girls.

If I don't want to understate the ethos of white racism, I don't

want to over-dramatise it either. B school was not a violent environment. But of course as a white woman, I did not have significant access to the experiences of the black girls there.

I had just enough to convince me that the sociology of disaffiliation traced within Judith's group is of some other use in having a purchase upon the phenomenon whereby friendship bonds reproduce racism at the interpersonal level which then feeds into, having fed off, racism at the social and ideological and institutional realm.

To return to my conversations with Judith's clan, I want to show how racist positionings policed these friendships to recursively produce that racism from within their dependencies on white girl friends. I am keen to examine with them, the way they understand the values and virtues of having 'good' friends. Whilst discoursing upon the powerful needs for each other expressed within the group, Sally reveals that she has, on occasion, used black Asian girls as 'contingent' friends in the absence of her white peers

VH. What do you think to the sort of value of friendships - What's the good thing about them ?

M. If I didn't have all these friends I think I would crack up.

- J. Everyone needs friends.
- G. I need someone to talk to.
- V. What do you feel like when your best friend's away.
Say there was just Judith here and you four or five
weren't here ?
- S. I ain't got a best friend anyway.
We'd just hang around with Pakis wouldn't we ?
- J. I'd hate it. It's terrible.
- M. I don't
I'd just sit on my own!
- G. I did when I first came here.
- J. Gira used to hang around with Razia.
- S. Remember when Jocelyn used to hang around with
Sunitra, remember that. I hated her. In the first
year.....
- J. She's still the same now.
- N. She's a right snob.....

M. As long as there's two of us in we'd meet at break time and dinner time.

N. If I was the only one in school I'd either bunk or I'd go with Jonnie and Sadie and if they weren't here I'd go round their house and see what's the matter or I'd just go.

V. What would you feel if you were on your own ?

N. It's lonely.

G. I'd stay for two lessons.

M. Even if we're not in the same lessons.....

G. (Interrupting)

We meet someone at break or lunchtime.

There's always one of us in. There's one of us in each others' lesson.

Sally's 'admission' is disowned most vehemently by Maureen, whose 'common-sense' racism is unchallenged. Indeed it provides the framework through which the others' 'fall from (white) grace' is understood. Thus it is Gina's past affinity with Razia which also requires 'explaining', since she now is anxious to revoke it.

But it is Sally who is disciplined most severely by the group.

Anxious also, to dis-identify herself from the earlier 'slip', she seeks to re-position herself as 'one of the girls' ; first by showing her dislike of another black Asian girl : 'Sunitra, remember that. I hated her....' and by the revocation packed into her later contribution to the discussion :

S. I came to school once and not one of you were in at break. I just went out and at dinner time I just sat in the common-room all by myself. There's so many - all the coloured people stay in there and that. They just.....

J. Well you've got Sunila or Jocelyn to talk to
(Reminding her of her lack of total disconnectedness with their prior friends - another instance of boundary drawing. See note 5)

S. Yes that's right...all my friends...
(sarcastically, laughs)
My little friends.....

M. (or) the Asians.
(Sardonically)

We can suggest at this point that part of the antagonism expressed by the girls is mediated through their own class

understandings about the assumed 'snobbishness' of the black Asian girls.

This hostility to 'boffins' is a very powerful locus of the girls' own positioning within a classed environment and acts to control both their own 'ambitions' and to critique other girls.

(Note 6)

Indeed Gina herself had fallen victim to the same assumptions made about her :

J. I was the first one out of all of us to start to talk to her. Remember that first day in the

G. Yeah, but I was trying to to talk to you - when I first came I did all my work because I'd been expelled from my last school. Like I was really grafting.

M. But we thought, 'Oh she's a right snob'.

G. Because I was doing that, they thought like, 'Christ I ain't talking to her!'

The punitive attitude to all 'workers'/'boffins' is particularly invidious as far as Gina was concerned, since at that time her father was beating her up because of her past truanting behaviour (behaviour on her part which resulted in her expulsion from her

private school to B School.)

Another irony here, is that it was her friends, who actually broke her confidence to tell the staff about her position, leading to the intervention of the social services.

We can note that the aspirations of the black Asian girls, which have historically and frequently been viewed as 'unrealistic', stems from and feeds into the racism of the white culture. I am not in possession of statistical data to demonstrate unequivocally the class composition of the Asian families who selected this school for their daughters but, I am certainly of the opinion that it was precisely from the category of small businessmen/women in the form of small-shop-keepers for example, that the majority came. →

Having in previous chapters identified bonding (and its' corollary unbonding) as a particular feature of girls' cultural performances - given their emotional volition, I have suggested, from the psycho-analytic account of the complexes of experiences of love and hate for the mother, we have also subsequently noted how powerful these investments are and how as a consequence they continue to be, both with respect to the nuclear family of our own birth and the processes of producing nucleic relations of our own creation.

Part of this chapter is concerned to identify those mechanisms which connect to these psycho-emotional underpinnings, to produce the many divisions which can enable us to read girls' relations with each other in more categorical ways. Part of this has featured a focus upon race and its' integral relationship with issues of class and sexuality. The last conversation revealed how multipliciously these three dynamics intersected each other.

I have disclosed how these working class white girls' police their own race and class specific friendships. Gina's 'loneliness' at the outset in B school, is both a product of her being suspected a 'snob', an ostracism which no doubt encouraged her perhaps to make an alliance with anyone who would have her ? - with the resulting friendship with Razia, a relationship now seen as requiring urgent 'explanation' because of the compulsions of the

racism which identifies the white girls as the superordinate and preferable category. Similarly Sally's 'admission', 'We'd just hang around with Pakis' is seen to 'offend' the protocols of the group as stated in white supremacist insults of Maureen, who expresses the most vehement racist position which sets the base line against which all other views about non-white girls are compared.

Sally feels she has to exculpate herself from her previous views, later on in the discussion, as I have already remarked she makes explicit and racist reference to the divisions between herself and the Black Asian girls : 'There's so many - all the coloured people.'

Maureen's unchallenged right to set the racist boundaries, means that she can continue to patrol them to try to show Sally that she has crossed them, and the price of Sally's collusion in racism, is the continued recognition of her as one of the 'in' group. Sally's particular vulnerability to being controlled in this way, (I am not offering this as an apology but as part of an explanation about the cultural reproduction of white girls' racism), is that as she acknowledges herself, 'I ain't got a best friend anyway'.

Indeed her allegiances to the wider group were later critically examined by Judith impartial, who found along that she was being 'bugged' by Sally. (The reasons for this have already been highlighted. See Chapter 4)

For the moment Sally had to be reminded of her 'unsound' statement,

viz. 'We'd just hang around with the Pakis' and taught by the group, in general and Maureen in particular, that this was definitely not a shared view. The consensus consisted instead of an understanding of other races as 'contaminating', as 'other'.

Her ironic commentary shows that she has committed an error of considerable magnitude : there is no way she could be both their friend and have 'Asians' as 'little friends' too.

In this context no wonder the girls didn't even share tables!

4. 'The Way We Look At It Now ...It's Too Late' :
From Here To Obscurity : Being One of the Girls.

This section will try to situate the girls' resistance to 'cleverness'/'studiousness' within a general consideration of their class inflected (and race mediated) attitudes to school, and to those girls who are said to be 'boffins'. By investigating it in this way it becomes apparent, that it is their own culture of friendship which is instrumental in identifying itself, in a low key oppositional resistance, to the meritocratic ethos of academic and institutional life.

If Willis' 'lads' seem to positively delight in being seen to be 'bad', then Judith and her clique prefer not to be seen at all.

I have remarked earlier that Judith's friendship clan, along with many in the school, (and at C school), had a laissez-faire attitude to the norms of school attendance. A sort of take it or leave it, (with an emphasis on the 'leave it'), which if it wasn't outrightly hostile, nevertheless frequently became a hostility, if teachers were too keen, in their pursuit of the 'disappeared'.

It was a stance with which many of their mothers colluded, sometimes

using their daughters for child care supervision, domestic attendance for meter men etc. I even heard once of Nina's mum, demanding her services to accompany her to a hospital appointment, 'because she was lonely.'

Therefore, their reaction to school was not so much the product of anti-school antagonism, more the end result of the girls' inveterate antipathy to being thought a 'snob' which they principally understood as directly antithetical to their social interest in each other, to their collective celebration of friendship through the mediums of 'having a laugh', and of generally centering your school life on your own social world, rather than on conforming to the demands of your teachers.

Unsurprisingly their fascination with the 'personal' seldom surfaced within official lessons. Again we have to ask the question why not? (This will be addressed later in the final chapter). And it throws more light upon girls' preferences for the humanities in considering the greater scope they provide for the recognition of the emotio-social aspects of human culture which perhaps is what partly constitutes their feminine appeal, as documented in the distribution of subjects areas on gender differentiated lines,

If the 'personal' is so marginal in school, and having witnessed over 200 hours of lesson experiences, the girls' accounts of them as boring, (not to mention male centred), is not without foundation!

Their opting out on the ad-hoc bases that they do, makes perfect sense. They would often hold a 'team talk', at break at their rendezvous point, (always the same location), and check out each other's actions plans for the day. Sometimes an active dislike of one particular teacher prompted a 'bunk', sometimes it was just nice weather, making the park an attractive option and occasionally someone elected to scive for fear of reprisals against her for unfinished homework. And frequently it was jointly done by them all just for the hell of it, because they had their own urgent business to attend to. This was particualrly the case when boy friends were giving them trouble. Then these break or lunch time meetings would often over run the allotted time of break, necessitating an adjournment to a nearby house, if one was available.

Judith, was a prime practitioner of the 'take it or leave it' mode. In fact, her teachers commented to me, that they had never seen her at school so often - (this was when I was being her shadow for a week!) It is important to remember that if she often 'left it', she actually liked school and was indeed, very fond of some of her teachers, who in their turn were also fond of her.

But these personal affiliations were never in themselves sufficient to fundamentally undermine her scepticism about the price to be paid in terms of breaking faith with a class specific experience of being 'one of the girls'

To convey some of the mismatch between school and working class school-girl priorities, I will cite an instance when both Gina and

Judith began a discussion which became quite heated, it was about the difference between 'maturity' and 'immaturity' and to what extent 'bunking' evidenced the latter.

Judith's perfect inversion of the logic of Gina's argument (which is itself a rehearsal of a classic concerned teacher pose ie. that of accepting the need for deferred gratification signals wisdom), demonstrates how important it is for her to hold onto her own criteria of 'sensiblyness' at the same time as also arguing for the privileged pleasures of friendship, fun and sociability.

Judith's insistence on her 'rights' to the latter, without jettisoning either her femininity or maturity, makes for a very tenacious if contradictory piece of self-defence. (Note 7)

Furthermore, what is also deeply puzzling, is the oppositions set up between their own option system ie. to 'opt out' and their still holding out for a 'career'. (cf Carol's dreams of a 'room of her own' and the material facts of her low status in job market terms)

To particularise the contradiction I initiated a conversation with the two of them to check out to what extent their aspirations (own flat, good job, car), were realizable in terms of their attitude to school work.

The conversation then developed its' own energy out of Gina and Judith's disagreement. I cite extracts from our last tape below.

- VH. If you've got these plans like for a career.
what part does school play in it like getting
you from where you are now to where you want to
be ? (Note 8)
- G. The way we look at it nowit's too late.
(giggles)
- J. It is too late (emphatically)
- V. You reckon ?
- G. We should have grafted from the third year. I
mean you can mess about in the 1st, 2nd, year but
you've got to get down to it in the 3rd year.
- V. So you think you've blown it at school ?
- G. I think I have anyway.
- J. No way I'm going to pass that French exam.
We're not going to pass any of them.
We don't do maths do we ?
- G. We go to the lesson but we don't do it.
And he doesn't make us.

V. You don't do it. What do you do then ?

G. Talk.

J. We just sit there and talk.

When asked to specify the value of this 'talk', both girls take it as read that 'talking to yer mates' is more interesting than 'settling down to work'. To Judith this is self-explanatory and totally defensible - those who do work, do so ''cos they've got no other friends', whilst for Gina it also poses anxiety, as a result of her recognition of the gulf between desire and practical reality, a firmer grasp of which was no doubt due to her family politics : her father's authoritarianism. Gina thus takes the line that their 'bunking' indicates immaturity , a view which incites Judith's equally robust rebuttals :

G. We are immature because we wont work and we've got our exams coming up.

J. That's not immaturity Gina, 'cos we don't want to work!

G. Yes it is! because I mean we talk about having a good job and that and having a flat and that....when we leave school.

J. Yeh but, just because we don't pass our French exam or our maths exam doesn't mean to say we're not going to get a flat or anything when we leave school or get a job.....

G. Judith, if we don't get any exams we ain't going to get a job.

Despite what might seem to be the compelling logic of Gina's argument, Judith persists in refusing to acknowledge their preference for their friends as being either 'stupid' or 'immature'. She instead neatly turns the argument around :

J. Yeh, but why go to lessons if you know you don't have to go. If you know you don't really wanna go.

G. But that's why we don't go 'cos we know we can get away with it.

J. Yeh, but we're not immature then are we ?
We're sensible!

G. Yeh (sighs)

Gina still finds this hard to reconcile to her own split feelings around this, until Judith pointedly reminds her of her active complicity in their co-choice to 'opt out' :

J. No, you're being stupid if you go to a lesson if you know you can get away with bunking it. That is being bloody stupid.

G. Why bunk it ? Why bunk it ?

J. 'Cos you have to sit in there and do the work Now why bother doing the work if you know you don't have to.

G. You're being sensible if you sit in school and do the work.

J. Yeh, but why don't you then ? Why don't you sit and do all the work if you want to be sensible ?

G. I don't wanna.....

J. Well, there you go then, you're stupid and you're

G. Yeh, I'm stupid and I know I'm stupid!
(resignedly)

The underlying tension which such dialogues represent relate ;

1. to the personal dilemma of Gina in managing the different expectations of her father and her mates.
2. they evidence too, the general sense of marginalisation of the personal within school which such resistances are responses to.

These working class girls differentially defend their 'talking about something really interesting' as constituting for them an indispensable part of their social and interpersonal identity - which is seen as in contradiction with the class values of the school and the overlapping requirements of 'proper' ie. sensible femininity. No wonder they are left with no option but to embrace their 'stupidity' - as Judith tellingly asserts :

J. Yeh, but you like being stupid. Don't ya ?
(Giggles)

Like everybody else does! (giggles)

5. 'Bitching' - More of the Verbals or How Girls Try To Vanquish Contradictions.

I have focussed upon the negative and indivisible dimensions to girls' bonding in this chapter. I have for instance critiqued the racism and class chauvinism, endemic within the practices of these working class girls : A race and class parochialism which I have sought to show as stemming from their own oppression which is then enacted upon others even more disadvantageously positioned (ie. black girls) or which is manifest in their defensive creation of an ethos amongst themselves which actively punishes aspiring working class girls.

At times both sets of divisions work symbiotically together to construct an archetype which they define themselves against : the asexual, black Asian 'boffin', which is the stereotype which seems to invoke most contempt and it is against this imputed 'passivity' that their femininity is best measured. Just as it is also posed against the alleged 'hyper-sexuality' of Afro-Caribbean girls. By these means white working class girls try to immunise themselves from the messy nature of sexuality by dumping the 'bad' onto these conveniently placed more oppressed girls. A process which allows them as white girls to avail themselves of the illusions and realities of their privileges

We have noted this projection before in the domain of the homoerotic.

For by doing this, girls reproduce the fallacy that they are somehow free from original sin (ie. being born female in a patriarchal society). But the 'burden' of femininity is as difficult to dump as nuclear waste! For even within the solidarities of friendship the 'invisible worm' of the sexual double standard is perpetrated by girls upon each other ; though significantly I have never heard it invoked by a best friend to critique her best friend.

And it is this fragmentation, induced by girls' subordination to patriarchal judgments about their sexual conduct which is one of the single most corrosive impediments to the creation and maintenance of an effective counter collectivity because it feeds so successfully off the racial/class divisions with which it articulates. (Note 9)

It makes for an uncomfortable truth, that girls dish the dirt on other girls. Listen to what Frankie and Maureen have to say about one of their closest friends, Judith :

F. And 'er Rickie wanted to go out with Judith, cos he wanted to give her one.

M. So she must have had a bad name. (quietly)

It makes for discomfoting reading to see in process the splitting of girls into good/bad/ : dirty/clean actually being elaborated by girls themselves and even more depressing when these splits are elaborated through racist ideologies. The very fact that they can also be expressed within an ostensible close caucus of friends adds persuasively to the argument about the powerful effectivity of these divisions to circumscribe girls' lives.

It is after all, one thing to argue that girls are oppressed and quite another thing to recognise the force of those cultural processes of exclusion and denigration which they practice amongst themselves as a result of their implication in the processes of oppression and domination.

The interlocking of racism and sexism is a particularly indigestible phenomenon. I have conceptualised the two poles to these racist characterisations as working to produce the white racist images of Black Asian girls as conservatively quiescent sexless snobs, and the Afro-Caribbean girls as 'hard' over-sexed 'bitches'. But the practice and ideology of these definitions is not as pellucid as it sounds. (Note 10)

If I appear to be dwelling on the 'negative' to the detriment of the 'affirmative', it is partly to recollect the sense that this is necessitated because girls do 'mess with mister in between'!

And although space has elided a great deal of my other narrative which featured material to do with girls heterosexual/social regimes, this other story is determinant upon their homosocial selves in comprehensively obvious ways.

It is the inescapable force of that determining reality which is witnessed here, and it is of course no accident that it amongst those girls who are most dependent upon male approval, support and values who express the strongest antipathy towards 'other' girls.

This is something I (and other commentators) have noted before. Its' very obviousness almost recommends its being overlooked in this instance.

And this is possibly so in the present case, ^ebecause I have been aiming to produce a case for the taking seriously of female friendship and in so doing have tried to expose the reader to its' redemptive features ; partly to countermand the dismissive and hostile treatment it has attracted both within texts (if it has been discussed at all!), and within school and other cultural and social institutions. And partly, because it has shown itself to be an outstanding resource in the making of female self-esteem as well as it constituting the materials for female support and invaluable intelligence about relationships, boys, sex and men.

However, if it has these positive qualities as experienced by ^hte girls, it also operates by invoking patriarchal and racist values. It is to these least attractive aspects of female culture which I

should now like to return.

I have described the contradictory themes which play across the friendship cultures of girls. I have noted the utility of the mechanism of 'deficit dumping' ie. all the 'bad' bits of femininity, social and sexual competitiveness, placed upon the 'other'. Thus ; lesbian desire, active heterosexual desire, active academic 'desire' is something only 'other' girls do!

If competitive relations structure their social domain at every turn, no wonder girls resist to produce themselves as 'winning' something. It is assumed as a necessary condition for personal survival. But any process of winning is predicated upon 'others' as losers. At this point I want to shift the dimensions of this argument by moving back to unpack more of the psycho-analytical dimension to this.

I want tentatively to suggest, that girls are psychologically predisposed to manage the anger invoked through their inscription in subordinations which oppress them, through the practices of splitting via the inter-related strategies of introjection and projection. Definitions which are culled from the psycho-analytic vocabulary of Melanie Klein. (Note 11)

Recent developments in the feminist appropriation of her work suggest that she might have highly valuable things to say about the particularities of the mother-daughter bond which re-opens the debates about so called female 'passivity'. Janet Sayer's

account of her work (which I shall merely hint at rather than fully examine), returns to the power of the mother in provoking defensively organised splits in the child, as protection against the anger of having unfulfillable needs 'unfulfilled'. In Klein's account this is precipitated by oral dis-satisfaction in weaning, rather than through the dislocation of 'penis envy'.

This aggression, inadmissible in terms of its' conscious expression towards the mother, on whom one is so indissolubly dependent, finds an outlet in the practices of projection through, 'idealization' the 'good mother' becomes saved, (as Marion Bower suggests to be re-attached through the mechanism of romantic fantasies to the father/lover in the relocation of the girl's love object Bower 1987) and the 'bad' becomes introjected through the de-fusion of these aggressive and sexual instincts, producing what Freud termed as 'female masochism'.

I am drawn to this new emphasis on Klein, first because it offers an account which reminds us of female aggression. As a mother I am newly sensitised to this 'other side' to mothering, both as an experience of intense love and intense hatred, although I know that there is no simple transparency of meaning in predicting the social form the psychical takes, but I do think there is a richly suggestive area for future work in the concepts proposed by Klein's model.

Theories which might have a social message in terms of the replication of those intensities (of love/hatred for exam^fle),
^

within close same sex and opposite sex relations. Indeed I have already indicated that I think this is indeed the case. Quite how the psychological connects up to the social is of course a highly problematic theorisation. But it is of some importance to remember the attention she paid to the psychic mechanism invoked in dealing with all consuming hatred/aggression - when we are seeing before our very eyes in the all too clear here and now the productivities of aggression simultaneously created and stage managed through the social structures of race/class and sex antagonism.

Sayers, for example, specifically cites the 'illusory' nature of the characteristic way women psychically process aggression, using Klein's model, she shows just how self-limiting are the projection and introjection reactions, since they both make it impenetrably difficult to sustain a sense of wholeness which owns all of our selves, the good, the bad and the ugly : Sayers argues that it is germane to re-consider Kleinian analysis as a useful way into understanding the need for an integrative dynamism, which allows femininity in particular to 'own' aggression/anger as not only the emotional detritus of 'mothering' but as the explicable fall out from the social subordination of gender oppression :

'By thus making conscious and working through the anxieties about losing others.....Kleinians hope to enable patients to recognize that hostile feelings do not have the dreaded effect of destroying either the analyst or the helpful aspects of therapy.....Patients, it is hoped thereby grow confident of having sufficient

goodness within themselves to be able constructively to repair any damage done by the outward expression of their anger.'

And she links this individual strategy (ie. the therapeutic scenario) to the social condition of femininity :

'If the above techniques are effective in undoing the depressive and paranoid anxieties that otherwise impede women's ability to act constructively rather than self-destructively on the anger produced in them by their social subordination, then they are clearly relevant to feminism and its' concern to remedy the ill effects of this subordination. Indeed, in so far as Kleinian therapy is effective in this respect it is surely relevant to all oppressed groups insofar as the disqualifications of their aggression by those in power in society causes them to deal with their oppression in phantasy rather than reality through paranoid projection and/or depressive introjection of the anger and rage it produces in them'

J. Sayers 'Melanie Klein, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism'
Feminist Review 25 Spring 1987 p34.

I want to draw the readers attention to the way the girls take up the competitive relations within which they are placed to

re-position themselves (see below) as demonstrating a remarkable degree of similarity to unconscious projective motivations (Note 12) and I would add that their 'projection' is itself socially constructed as well as being psychically informed from their imbrication in the cultural denigration of femininity, personified most forcibly in the tabooed status of autonomous female sexuality.

Here Judith and Gina, desperate to be the 'good', proportionate to how they say their 'enemies' see them (as the bad!) doing their damndest to split themselves from contamination, whilst simultaneously defining other girls as pure poison. Given the classic instantiation of girls' as 'bitches', I now want to examine, with the aid of one substantive conversation I had with Judith and Gina, about their membership of a mixed gang, (the Riverbridge), the relationship of this stereotype to the narrative of rivalry played out before me. Commentary is interspersed.

To confuse the issue, the two of them had said to me initially that they were the 'only two girls' in the gang and they claimed that they held a special place within its' culture as sort of 'chosen' ones.....I have some of my own ideas as to why girls get 'taken up' by male groups in this way - as sort of evidence to undermine any attribution of homosexuality ? Anyway they did seem to see themselves as 'special', though on the basis of the evidence they supplied this looks like a case of ambitious wish-fulfilment.

Therefore, when they began to expand on the sexual politics of their own involvement I was totally surprised by their revelations of a whole company of girls who seemed to have been equally involved in the 'toings and froings' of the mixed group.

We had been discussing the male group members of the 'gang'

Tape 18.

J. The boys we used to go about with used to think they were high and mighty - it was mostly all boys really.....

G. There were a couple of girls....

These 'innocent' last remarks signal a tremendous upsurge of energetic denunciation - I intend to edit the ensuing relevancies from the transcript together to convey something of the paranoid violence of the girls' depiction. They read just as if printed out from any girls' ~~magazine~~ magazine, as the archetypal representation of girls as each others enemies in the front line of romance.

These 'couple' become something of a whole 'monstrous regiment of women', with whom Gina and Judith 'deal' as if their very lives depended on their swift despatch. The irony of their also being judged by the same terms which they use to summarily censor others, is totally lost on them : so alienated are they from the

expression of a non-oppressive notion of heterosexual femininity.

It is an exemplary instance of girls 'doing the patriarchal dirty work for themselves', and it shows the integuements of social relations of race and social class around the issue of sexuality for these white working class girls.

The bland 'couple of girls' comments give way to a set of 'character assassinations' which make the cabinet room look like Play School!

J. But they were a bunch of idiots anyway.

Weren't they ?

G. They'd been out with everyone of them.

J. Every single one of them!

V. Who (were) was this...mn...?

J. The girls ? Carly - and she's the ...

She's the biggest.....

She's been to bed with everyone of them.

G. Every single one of them!

V. Who said...who said that ?

J. Oh she admits it! She's not shy about it!

G. Or embarrassed.

J. She's proud of it.

G. And she's nothing to look at...she's enormous..

J. Ugly, fat cow.

G. And she wears..wears the most...

J. Horrible clothes.

G. To make her look bigger.

J. Yes...she wears big, baggy clothes to make her look bigger.

G. And there's Lynn and she's short and stubby.

J. A tart...(giggles)

G. Yeh...I tell you she put....

J. Plastered in makeup.

G. One inch foundation on, let it dry and put

another layer on...she's caked her makeup on.
There was Louisa, she's cross-eyed and buck
teeth...She used to think herself lovely.

J. She was pretty if she didn't have cross-eyed and
buck teeth. She'd be quite alright.

G. And she used to go shoplifting from BHS.

J. I know! Nick her knickers from BHS. (laughs)

G. She used to nick 16 pairs of knickers at one
time!

J. From BHS (laughs)

J. And there's Bobo.....

G. Yeh Bonnie, just put Bonn

J. She was a Paki lover (laughs conspiratorially)

G. Yes...she went out with a Paki.

J. (giggles) Lorraine Victor went out with 'blacks'

G. Lorraine ?

J. Yeh, Lorrie...

J. Lorrie V....

G. She went out with all black boys.

Totally fazed by the litany of anti-feminist, racist rhetoric *
(* I'm not certain if this is the right word in the circumstances,
there is no language which will be of sufficient critical^a_l
countervalue to place this account - the same problem occurred in my
consideration of Carol - see my excision in Chapter 5 section 2)

I was at the time I think, trying to concentrate on the numbers
involved simply as a survival strategy in coping with their
information.

However, this level of detail is profoundly unimportant in the
context of what they were saying and how they were saying it. I
want to understand their stance as premised upon their attempt to
become more powerful in the context of the heterosexual market
place.

For the Crossfil girls, just as we saw in the exemplary practice
of Carol, the biggest agenda item, was that of managing the
attractions, compulsions and dangers of heterosexuality -
represented most urgently in the question of whether to 'do it or
not ?' (Note 13) Since the issue put so crudely becomes one

of sexual access, no wonder that a vast amount of their time was devoted to finding a 'nice genuine' boy. If boys are 'only after one thing' and the 'thing' they are after is you! - it is an understandable piece of pragmatism to want to protect yourself as best as you are able, from the compromising difficulty of needing male approval, whilst avoiding the obverse - girls literally can't win!

But what they can and do do is to 'make the best of it' : and one of the most convenient ways to achieve this is to make the worst of other girls similarly positioned, hence the above abuse.

At one point in the tape the two girls express what I take to be the prime moment in their membership of the Riverbridge gang - when they represent themselves as the enviable source of jealous recriminations. As this is articulated it becomes clear that the enjoyment of this position is crucially undercut by their being the target themselves of the dreaded 'bad reputation' which they then without a trace of self-awareness impute as stemming from a 'jealousy' offered as the prime reaction of the 'other' girls.

J. At one time there was only me and Gina going around with all the boys (giggle) and that was good wasn't it Gina ?

G. Yeh, but like...it was bad image wasn't it over

Riverbridge..not image but a bad reputation didn't
we ?

J. I didn't go over there.

G. No, but...at that time...the first time we went
over...

V. Because you were two girls and so many boys ?
Who gave you that image ?
How did you know you had a bad image ?

G. I don't know J. W. told us didn't she ?

V. And what was the bad image about ?

G. I don't know she never said.....
She just said 'You're getting a reputation over
there.' We only went over there once didn't we ?

V. From who ? The people who live there. ?

J. From the girlsthe other girls isn't it ?

G. I think it was just....jealous really.

J. ...jealous!

- G. Cos there was a lot of good-looking boys there....
wasn't there ?
- V. Really ?
- J. Mm...we used to go around with a lot of good
looking boys.
- V. Of these ? This group here ?
- G. We used to go down the road and no girl dare
come up.
- J. I mean the boys used to come up and put their arms
round us like a mate...they used to come up and
say 'Alright Jude' 'Alright Gina,' like that and
put their arms round us and we didn't even get
one dirty look....No girl dare even blink at
us.
- V. Why ?
- J. I dunno...(laughs) we'd do 'em over wouldn't we
Gina ?

The girls are simultaneously able to refute the criticism of
themselves as 'bad' with instant common-sense recourse to the
ideology of jealousy without seeing that they are acting

competitively towards other girls as archetypal jealous rivals.

And this double think is secured through the common sense racist and sexist categorisation of girls as ; 'ugly', 'tart', 'fat', 'Paki-lover'. It is these latter descriptions which are meant to stand simply as truths drawing their veracity from the imperatives of racist and sexist discourses.

The coherence of patriarchal/racist ideological domination is shown in this instance as positioning girls as either 'jealous' or as 'bad' : nothing enters this discourse which allows for girls to see each other as 'sisters under the skin', and needless to say it is extremely depressing and distressing to see the fragmentation of the knowledge of girls shared subordination being so enthusiastically endorsed by the two girls, who are, as we note, also if not equally, its' victims. (See my earlier comment upon Maureen and Frankie's view of Judith's 'bad' reputation.)

Paul Willis's work is usefully addressed at this point, since his model of cultural production and reproduction is an interesting one with regard to the above detailed processes. (Note 14)

His examination of masculinity and class seeks to show the cultural and social processes invoked by working class boys in the perpetuation of themselves as the macho workers of hard industrial (as opposed to mental labour), an elective set of identifications which more successfully inscribes themselves in capitalist class relations than the most mechanistic of imposed dominations.

We can perhaps also see that girls taking up of 'rival' roles with respect to other girls, predisposes their reading differences between them as the obvious common sense 'causation' of their antagonism rather than their shared or similar subordinated positioning (inside Patriarchy and Class relations) as necessitating the construction of those differences as significant.

Just as boys discount mental labour via the pre-existent convenience of the association of this with femininity, so girls dismiss other girls by invoking the all pervasive force of heterosexual acceptability, rather than attack the source of their joint weaknesses in the face of this control. (Note 15)

Oppressed groups because they move within a frame composed of mystificatory ideologies and practices reproduce the relations of of domination and subordination to conceive of an illusory transcendence through being on the 'right' side of the dividing lines. And because this pseudo-transcendence delivers material and ideological benefits to its producers (and reproducers) it provides sufficient power to ameliorate/mediate/disguise the damage of the same grisly contradictions to which they are also prone.

Boys damn 'other' boys for being 'ear'oles' and girls get into the 'separate' tables of the vilification of 'other' girls.

I want to end this chapter by arguing that these convoluted positions and practices revealed in adolescent working class white

girls' forms of femininity and friendship, are totally explicable with reference to their material situation. It is their oppression which produces both the reactive formation of homo-social exclusivity, and it is also the case that this bond works contrarily as an indices of both their powerlessness and powerfulness. 'Girls bitching' sits upon the fulcrum between the two provenances.

The 'ties that bind'/'drawing the line'/'being one of the girls' establishes a sense of solidarity and self/other validation as utterly resistant to the vulgar fragmentation to which they as girls are incessantly subjected to (Recall the work of Julian Woods in this context particularly), but tragically it is also and equally true that the investments in closing in on each other, evidence girls' own comprehensive implication in the identical expression of these same splitting and subordinating processes.

Thus it is that girls' cultures come to mean simultaneously, 'best of friends' and 'worst of enemies'. Or what another commentator, described as the function of girls friendship which seemed designed more to keep other girls out than to celebrate those that were in!

Chapter 6.

Notes

1. The workings of the heterosexual market place, have been examined in some scope within the preceding chapter. It has not represented the dominant focus of this thesis for reasons of editorial emphasis, but if it doesn't constitute the major point of analysis, it is only because of the needs of organisational clarity and the determining priority which I gave to the salience of female friendship cultures. However having said that, its provenance and power are as complex as the homosocial worlds the girls inhabit. A flavour of these same forces is therefore all I can hope to suggest as its' valency in the Crossfil girls' lives :

These can be seen in a brilliantly opaque exchange between two of Judith's friends who are conducting a note conversation about Nina's less than reliable boy friend.

1. Dear Sally,

I do feel a lot for him, you know I do sometimes.

I wish I hadn't started seeing him because when he doesn't bother with me it hurts so much.....

Sally, Mr Parkinson keeps looking[^] at me, the stupid git, he is so thick!

Love you lots, and more

Nina.

To which Sally gave the memorable reply :

2. Thanks Nina, I know that you like Jonnie a lot and I know he hurts you, but the best are always cunts.

Nina concurs :

3. Quite true darlin.

Is this an instance of what Willis (unfortunately) called a partial penetration - in which girls' critique the boys behaviour, only to subsequently valorise it, through a form of social rehabilitation, seeing his mean behaviour as proof of his undiminished attractiveness ? The ideology of masculinity scores a double bonus here. This piece of feminine masochism

will be addressed later in the ensuing notes. But it is fruitful to link this to the ideology of romance as explored by Ann Barr Snitow : 'Mass Market Romance : Pornography For Women is Different' Radical History Review 20 Spring/Summer 1979 who posits the argument that male 'hardness' is one of the chief problems which female romance addresses as its raw material which it tries to educate in trying to make sense of the fear and animosity which characterises the antagonistic gender relations underpinning heterosexuality. Thus male indifference becomes inscribed as the proper but highly coded emblem of male passion, 'treating them mean - keeping them keen'. This startling tendency to invert the meanings of masculine practices constitutes I would argue, the successfully achieved subordination within which girls are positioned and seek to position themselves.

Cf. Valerie Walkerdine's important contribution to these arguments about the volition and productivity of such 'undesirable' desires in Walkerdine (1984) in which working with Rosalind Coward's work on representation she draws attention to the meanings attaching themselves to the codes expressing female sexual submission. See especially the analysis on page 176.

2. All the girls in Judith's group insist contradictorily, that black boys have a 'bad' reputation as sexual 'studs' ; act 'hard' etc, whilst they personally know some 'very nice black boys', from the nearby boys' school. Characteristically

though, they reserve their worst insults for white girls who 'go out' with black boys. This they understand through the values of white boys who call such girls 'wog meat', 'black boy lover'. They see these 'sexual deviants' as putting themselves outside of the white heterosexual marketplace because as they say, the white boys 'won't touch them anymore' Another extension of the way these race and gender politics interlink will be attempted in section 5 of this chapter.

3. See Saskia at C school, accused by her then best friend Anna, of being ; a 'snide' , a 'skank' and her being also and more eliptically sanctioned as behaving 'naughtier than she should have been'. It is this latter attribution which Note 12 tries to identify as coincidental with the inscription of little girls' 'goodness' mapped in the discourse analytics of Walkerdine's work (1984)
4. See Chapter 4 for a different though related expression of this practice.
5. Sally was still on speaking terms with Sunila and Jocelyn.
6. Cf. Iris and Sonia and Laura and Natalie of 1/2M who mostly understood the middle-class girls in their class as 'snobs' or 'boffins'. The next chapter will add to an understanding of middle class girls' reactions to this placement as 'the boffins bite back'.

7. Indeed the two are complexly related, see the discussion of femininity and adolescence as 'mutually subversive' discourses in Barbara Hudson : 'Femininity and Adolescence' in Gender and Generation eds. McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. Macmillan (1984) in the context of my grappling with Carol's struggles about her age, her femininity and her sexuality. The insecurity for girls around these issues no doubt informs their famous 'touchiness'. Others (less sympathetic) to girls' situation, see this perceived 'moodiness' as inherent in femininity. See the observations in L. Davies : 'Pupil Power : Deviance and Gender in School' Falmer Press (1986) p70 particularly, as well as the anecdotal evidence from school staff at C school who said that they 'prefer to teach boys', since they are less 'fussy' and 'can take a joke better'.

I want to suggest that a crucial element in girls' fragility to criticism is because they have a less substantial sense of themselves, and are as a consequence more vulnerable to attack in this way. Allied to this is the need to see just how important 'goodness' is for girls cf. to boys. Being a 'bad boy' is commensurate with certain accounts of masculinity, whilst being a 'bad girl' is categorically not!

8. They had both told me their 'plans' : Judith wanted to work at the airport, whilst Gira wanted to work for a local hi-tech firm because 'they have company cars'. These ambitions also involved them leaving home and setting up a flat together.

(cf Carol and Liz Chapter 5) This escape motif is a very common working class fantasy, even more fantastic given London's housing prices.

9. I will say more on this need to confront and change this block later in Chapter 8 'Opening Up The Gender Curriculum'
10. As already mentioned the theme of promiscuous black (Afro-Caribbean) sexuality, laces a great deal of the racist discourse of the girls. As Lynne Segal cogently affirms :

'For in the mythology of sex, the "beast" of male sexuality is also the "beast of darkness", the "black beast". White men's and women's guilt and fears over sex have been projected on to all Black people, creating the myth of the Black male superstud, and the lewd and lascivious Black woman.'

Lynne Segal 'Is the Future
Female ? Troubled Thoughts on
Contemporary Feminism' Virago
(1987) p102.

At the level of detail, Frankie and Maureen seem particularly compelled to express an active repulsion in respect to this luridly oppressive myth of Black hyper-sexuality, which also reveals their fascinated attraction to its doubly tabooed

nature. Thus Sunila is both feared as 'hard' and despised as 'smelly' - Frankie's 'wash yer crutch out yer dirty bastard' will stand as sufficient commentary upon Frankie's construction of Sunila's sexual 'looseness'. Both girls had been speculating upon having to share a room with her on a field trip outing. This concentration upon 'smell', is of course, a major organising feature of racist language and values. It is also a recurrent motif of sexist parlance too. (See later Note 15 and Appendix D)

In a differentiated way, Frankie and Maureen undoubtedly revere black boys who they view exactly as 'the super cool studs' : 'They all think they are tough guys.....they are it!' as Frankie puts it, in the imagery (and tone of voice) nevertheless showing undoubted approval. Given their attraction to the illicit, as catching them in this contradiction they then are required to 'magically resolve' it through disowning their own erotic/social curiosity by shovelling it off onto black girls and onto those 'deviant' white girls who cross the sexual/racial divide. Thus Frankie and Maureen go on expansively about those 'dirty whores' -

'If I was Candy I'd definately.....Oh dear, I bet she has to give herself a good Brillo pad every night, don't she. She's been round all the Indian lot, all the blacks.'

My argument is that their investments in reproducing such

abuse is directly proportionate to their own sexual fascination, which has to be held in check precisely because of the viciousness of white patriarchal family and heterosexual relations, relations which are capable of vicious retribution. Frankie had told me, for example of an occasion when her brother had threatened to 'beat her up' if she ever came home with a black boyfriend.

When Maureen et al. attack those girls for presumed sexual liaisons, are they perhaps rehearsing what they would want to have opportunities to do themselves? It is their own ~~own~~ regard about their 'reputation' which elicits their complicity with racist vindictiveness, as Maureen puts it :

'Once you've been out with a black bloke, you find that the white blokes don't really want to know yer....they don't like to think that they're sharing their woman with any black blokes I suppose'

My emphasis.

This account is not an apology for racism, nor even an adequate account of it. Instead it suggests a multi-layered narrative which takes us some way towards recognising the indivisible nature of race/class/sexuality/sexism within certain fragments of white working class culture.

11. The remainder of the ensuing argument about the psychological is based upon two 'companion' articles : 'Daring To Speak Its Name : The Relationship Of Women To Pornography' by Marion Bower, and 'Melanie Klein, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism' by Janet Sayers. Articles which appeared in Feminist Review 24 and 25 respectively. I use the word companion only to indicate my reading them in tandem so to speak, not to propose any intentionality on their author's part for their interest in Melanie Klein to be seen as co-work.

12. I want to allude here to Valerie Walkerdine's work on power and desire (1985), with the benefit of a reworking of Lacan's notion of subjectivity allied to a Foucauldian theorisation of discourse as productive of power and powerlessness, she seeks to understand the psychic investments which young girls in particular bring to their identifications with more powerful 'others'. I am fascinated by the way she describes girls as struggling to obtain power through an identification with their teacher, which calls for an active suppression on their part of 'horridness'.

A denial of their 'badness', easily consonant with femininity as 'sugar and spice'. This is how she expresses the position :

'.....in a recent study an overwhelming number of girls of all ages gave descriptions of their ideal girls which included the terms "nice, kind and helpful". Moreover,

many girls expressly mentioned "naughtiness" and "horridness" as pejorative categories. They strove to be "good", to not require "telling off"..... These girls respond to the power invested in the positioning of the teacher as necessitating either an active suppression and/or its conversion into helpfulness. Here then is no reaction to frustration, no rational argument, but the painful suppression of conflict which appears in the girls' accounts in two ways. Firstly, it is displaced onto boys who are "horrid", "annoying", "bullies", and "bad", and secondly, it is the object of masochistic self-mutilation.'

My emphasis.

There is just so much of interest to me here. The overlaps in her understanding with the Kleinian psychoanalytic frame and my investigation of the social and cultural construction of female friendship are many, various and obvious. The mechanisms of splitting through suppression or disowning speaks volumes to the social practices in which as we have seen girls play an enormous role. And whilst Walkerdine's concern here is to look at splits across the gender divide, I think her account can be extended to include those same psychic (and social) mobilisations working within femininity itself. There is just so much one could say about this level of analysis, both as it prompts a sophisticated theoretical

ambition to register the 'upside' and 'downside' of feminine friendship and for the way it crystallises into a core the perplexities of subordinated femininity, of how in this light it could offer some understanding of the baroque array of self-inflicted wounds (literally and metaphorically - I knew of girls I taught and who I researched into who deliberately cut up their arms with razor blades as responses to arguments with their mother!) As well as contributing to a grasp of the motivations and impulses which incite girls' other-inflicted wounds - 'bitchiness'

13. As periodically referenced throughout this thesis the detailing of the girls' heterosocial/sexual involvements has been systematically all but eliminated, but nevertheless, it shadows them in their homosocial world.

Indeed it forms the 'other country, where they do things differently there', and to which they return for irresistible excursions. The girls who Judith knew, all had varying degrees of involvement in the culture of 'dating'.

Certainly they all shared a comprehension of its' dynamics as orchestrated through the orthodoxies of male predation, female passivity, of boys 'wanting results', of girls' being 'easy'. Or alternatively as expressed in their differentiated positions : of the dangerous practices of 'getting carried away' (Sally and Nina), of 'Turning them

on but never letting 'em touch yer', (Judith).

No matter what their solution to the mismatch between desire and desirability the transaction is conducted as an exchange premised on female sexual servicing to a possessive form of hypocritical hyper-masculinity. And this is as true for middle class liasons as for working class ones. The next chapter evinces the same occlusion of heterosexuality. But the omitted evidence is so continuous with the narratives of working class girls sexual narratives as to be the same story in all but detail.

14. Thus in talking about his 'general thesis of the contradictory cultural forms in which labour is prepared', Willis makes the following assertion :

'This is also true of the preparation of labour power amongst working class girls. It may be suggested that specific ideologies about sex roles - from familial models to mass media stereotypes - are taken up in the school context in specific kinds of practices which have implications for the diversion of cultural penetrations and for the subjective and collective development of a certain sense and definition of labour power. Wheedling aound male teachers or challenging both them and female teachers with a direct sexuality, for instance, may help girls to think of their own vital powers as applicable,

not to "work" and "industry", but to complex and
contradictory sexual manipulation, comforting and familial
construction of the "home".'

P. Willis 'Learning To Labour' Gower (1977) page 153.

One only has to personalise this in the characterisation I have
given of Carol to see the validity of his insights here.

15. Cf. We saw how Saskia was finally banished through the
heterosexual put down. Whilst we are acknowledging the
worst of femininity, I may as well note one more account of
it to bring this chapter to an end. A particularly
unpleasant piece of local colour at C school was told to me
by Iris and Sonia. Apparently girls who ere unlucky enough
to have fallen out with their female friends and who also
evidenced the fact of their current menstruation (by being
excused showers!), were often 'informed on' by their female
'enemies' to male peers.

Chapter 7

MIDDLE CLASS NARRATIVES OF FEMININITY AND FRIENDSHIP : 'BEING CLASSED AS ONE OF THEM'.

Contents.

1. 'Being Comfortably Off': Introduction to Three Middle Class Rich Kids.'
2. 'Goody Goodies' and 'Brandy and Orange'.
3. 'Jailbait' : Middle Class Accounts of Working Class Femininity.
4. 'Slagging Each Other Off'.

Introduction : 'When She Was Good She Was Very Very Good -
But When She Was Bad She Was Horrid! : Social Divisions,
Sexism and Classism Within and Between Girls' Groups'

This penultimate chapter is to be seen as another extension to the argument which constitutes the epicentre of the ensuing project, namely that female friendship like femininity itself, is an unavoidably ambivalent and hence complex cultural form. My aim in the previous chapter (which in many respects forms the companion piece to this chapter) was to move on from a consideration of the aspects of the 'good', (Chapter 3), to aspects of the 'bad' (Chapter 4), to the 'ugly' (Chapter 6), following this narrative renders this chapter as forming an answering dialogue to the class positions described in the chapter before. By concentrating upon some themes simultaneously produced within two distinct groups of social actors, ie. working class girls and middle class girls, I hope to further complexify the reader's understanding about the effectivities of the conflicting divisions which fissure girls' lives at every point.

1. 'Being Comfortably Off' : Introduction To 'Three
Middle Class Rich Kids.'

When I first made the initial contact at Eastfax's C school, the teacher I was liaising with suggested that I approach two networks of girls. One comprised of the infamous Sandra J and her friends - you may recall her as the informal sociologist cum 'wally watcher'- whilst the other group featured the 'elite' trio of highly academic and motivated middle class girls ; Suzy, Lara and Barbara.

After the disasterous encounter with Sandra J, the contrast in the reception I received from them couldn't have been more marked. From the beginning the trio were extremely helpful and welcoming and nothing in the course of my field work was as 'comfortable' as my relationship to these girls. (Note 1)

Such disparities are not simply the result of 'personality' quirks of course (despite the assertion that Sandra J was a 'psychiatric case'). They are reflective of the opposed class positions in which the girls are positioned.

To Sandra and her friends I was a 'nosey parker', one of the battery of officials who surveyed her and her mother's life. Whilst to the 'trio' I represented confirmation that they were everything the school had said they were ; bright, articulate and personable.

I want to investigate in this section in particular and in the rest of this chapter in general how those relations of class antagonism are played out amongst middle class girls in the school.

And at the same time I want to indicate the ways in which their own (bourgeois) individualism allows them to construct their own lives in terms which block their understandings about the effectivities of power to deliver them class privileges which also elide the realities of gender oppression. To do this necessarily forces me into representing the complex inter-relationship between class and gender in their lives as it is lived in the pseudo-egalitarianism of the sixth form in over-simple terms. A decision determined by considerations of space.

Hence I will have to condense the shifts and twists in the narrative of their homosocial and heterosocial/heterosexual lives to concentrate upon those moments which speak to issues of class, sexuality and femininity.

There is no way therefore, I can convey the multi-layered culture of sixth form relations, but I want to assert from the outset the way in which for these girls their occupancy of this culture meant a much fuller engagement with the in-school construction of heterosexuality than was evidenced by their working class/younger peers.

Carol's, heterosexual realm specifically excluded her working class male peers. And the girls at Crossfil too, usually treated

'school boys' with derision : 'Couldn't buy his own bus fare' as Maureen put it. No, the requirements of both glamour and material necessity usually and preferentially suggested older/richer boys/men to these working class girls.

Working class girls at both schools were much more likely to have exogamous relations, (obviously this was the case at B school), in contrast, I both sensed and observed, a greater willingness on the part of middle class girls to identify with boys from amongst their own year and class groups.

In part, this socialising was the product of the middle class investment incurred in sharing the academic values of the school and the joint academic success which flows from negotiating those values by both the girls and boys.

In terms of the overall clash of cultural values held together under the rubric of any comprehensive school, middle class students are made to feel and probably do feel themselves to be the 'elite'. An embattled 'elite' though, who are made incessantly aware of their identifications as 'teachers pets' or 'swots' or the despised 'boffins'.

It is unsurprising, in this context, for the knowledge of gender hostilities to be suppressed in the class solidarity which is produced and which itself is contributive to the class antagonism of which it is both a cause and an effect.

In many respects contrary to orthodox views about class privilege as ameliorating gender domination, I actually thought that these middle class girls were in many respects more vulnerable to misogynistic practices (Note 2) simply because they were so immersed in the meritocratic discourse which lead them to be male identified in a way impossible for working class girls. If you construct other boys as your 'friends', as platonic co-equals, as part of the inner circle of the 'community of scholars' - you are far more open to dis-illusionment when you had been viewing the other as both support and immediate allies.

This is an issue which I will continue to explore in this opening section since it has a direct and continuing impact upon these girls views of themselves, their views of their male friends and their perspectives upon other girls.

These important and qualifying remarks are germane both to the ensuing commentary and essential anchoring points in the schematic reconstruction of the identifications negotiated by these three high-flying girls. It is not so much that their female friendships constituted less of an important element in their lives, it is just that they were already positioned in the same space - as successful academically - as the middle class boys with whom they shared this history. In terms of the politics of class based school power relations of domination and subordination they were therefore similarly positioned in relation to the pains of privilege as well as to its' copious pleasures.

I'd like to show what these positionings do to these girls and how class constitutes elements of their understandings about why they are seen as 'different' whilst simultaneously and paradoxically allowing them to construct other girls 'differences' as self-evidently emanating from a socially unacceptable form of 'slaggy' femininity.

The irony is of course, that it is the notion of femininity itself which is the patriarchal medium through which these antagonisms are enacted and which fundamentally facilitate the forms of the competitive relations. Just as I tried in miniature to show how Saskia got her 'come-uppance' via the heterosexual put down, and noted how Judith and her friends, fetishised Sunila's unacceptability as sexually 'loose' (expressed in the racist and sexist formulation of black girls' sexual smells), I will note this working of patriarchy through other power to disguise its' domain, in the continuing effectivity of male definitions of femininity to hegemonise the social relations of girls as articulating with class and race divisions.

It is in these contexts that we can best appreciate the absolute sovereignty of the best-friend nexus. If it is 'other girls' who are loose, smelly, snobs, boffins, snides, skanks and slags - then one of the best mechanisms to determine an identity divorced from all that 'out there' is through the establishment of a mirror who will reflect back to you evidence that you are none of those.

A 'best' can serve that essential purpose admirably.

These preliminary reminders about the domain of female friendship are rehearsed again here mostly because of the need to suggest a narrative continuity of girls investments in each other as mutual support which differences of class (and race) do work to dilute the recognition of.

It is not my claim however, to suggest that these differences don't matter. I want conversely to emphasise the extent to which femininity is so saturated with class/race/age specific definitions as to render the effectivity of femininity itself as invisible!

It is to the making of one such obliteration of a recognition of 'shared' oppression inside subordinated femininity that I'd now like to turn.

I propose looking at aspects of class identity and gender identity in contradiction within the trio and how the girls attempt to manage these difficulties. Part of my argument will take the form of identifying those strategies which they adopt to walk the tightrope between femininity and 'cleverness'. It is at this level that ideologies of class and gender are mobilised, just as they were operationalised within the struggles about their differential attitudes to heterosexuality which was discussed in Chapter 4 in *Forbidden Desires : Desiring Girls : 'Coming Out a Lesbian'*

2. 'Goody Goodies and Brandy and Orange'

A teacher, when asking me why I had chosen to study this group in preference to 'ordinary' girls. (She did not at that stage know the full scope of my work), told this story of her encountering Lara at a local pub after a school play performance. It was a custom for the staff to buy the student performers drinks :

'And what would you like dear ? ' she asked.

'I'd like a brandy and orange, please.' came the quick reply from the urbane 14 year old.

Certainly sophistication seemed to be their outward hallmark, a sophistication borne of material and cultural good times. All three of them had been on school ski-ing holidays, and they were all quite fluent in at least one other language. They all had the 'taken for granted' luxury of clothes allowances from their parents. All of them were highly involved in the school drama club as leading actresses.

Barbara and Suzy had specific ambitions 'to do something with the theatre'. Both Lara and Suzy were contemplating Oxbridge entrance examinations and part of their lower sixth year was spent preparing for these.

To all intents and purposes therefore, they shared something of the 'goody goody' profile identified by Suzy as her 'image'. Certainly their teachers were very enthusiastic about their attitude and academic abilities.

The girls' apparent self-confidence is noted by teachers and their male peers alike. The girls had a wide outer circle of male friends in the same year group with whom they shared aspects of a similar timetable. And from amongst this network they had formed what they originally referred to as a 'platonic' bond with three particular individuals : Paul, Duncan and John, who formed their inner set of heterosocial alliances.

One of these boys, mediating between the boys and the girls in this inner circle, had actually expressed regret at what he called the girls' 'amazing sophistication' which he saw in distinction to the 'underdeveloped' culture of his male friends. And the girls themselves had embraced this description in their amusing commentary on the boys' inept dress sense, poor social organisation and impoverished homosocial bonds. All areas in which they felt the boys needed quite distinct and extensive coaching. (Note 3)

Feeling 'superior' or 'snobbish' in relation to other equally privileged middle class peers is one thing, but feeling this 'difference' in the context where you are a minority is another.

Very early on in our discussion, I had sought to tease out meanings

of 'style' in relation to their self image and sets of identifications. I had not myself been aware of any simple polarities 'dressed up', so to speak, in the uniform of sub-cultural groups. So their responses proved something of surprise.

V. Do you remember the time you got criticised for the way you dressed ? I don't know if it still happens now so much 'cos you're in the sixth form and a lot of people seem to dress very similarly.....'em you were called 'tramps'

B. Hippies.

V. Hippies....and other critiques and you said very powerfully on tape I remember 'It's as if they hate us. They really hate us
What do you think they hated about the way you dressed ? What was that about ?

B. We didn't conform. (This is nothing if not ironic)

S. They didn't understand it I don't think.

They thought it's something different and you don't understand and if it's in the minority I suppose, then you sort of... to be immediately against it.....I suppose...I don't know....maybe also people really didn't like our image. 'We're the middle class rich

kids. We've got brains. We've got money. We've got weird clothes, you know we're..', I think it puts a lot of people off. It did it annoyedeverybody!

Here Suzy becomes her own semiotician, decoding her 'image' in the classic terms of sub-cultural commentary through seeking to understand the impact of the trio's 'trendiness' in more class conscious terms.

Earlier, her understanding was very much that of restating her superiority as the possessor of a more independent sense of 'taste' which they all agreed as the antithesis to the collective culture expressed in the despised 'copying' which they saw in the 'cloned' outfits of their working class peers. (They had been talking of the split between the 'casuals' and the 'trendies' which was fiercely fought out in the third year, prior to my presence at the school).

In the above account she seemed to have grasped something of the resentments which her superordinate position provoked, in those girls against whom it was expressed.

This 'class' knowledge stands in absolute contradiction to the lack of explicit identification of its' provenance within the lives of working class girls. I simply cannot recall one occasion when girls even used the conceptual language of class per se. The nearest I've come to it, is in the ubiquitous terminology of 'snobs', 'boffins' and 'swots'. As Angela McRobbie notes it is

'remarkably absent' from the discourse of working class girls. The only time when I saw it expressed in different (though) still oblique terms was when I had been talking to Sonia and Iris of 1M, when they casually referred to middle class girls in their class as 'not their type of girls'.

This description hinged for them on the material fact of where they all had their respective dinners. Thus when I probed them for the reason, Iris rejoined :

'Because they got their own money and they like going outside and going over to the bars and they haven't got a (free dinner) ticket.'

Here we see them understanding power directly through their inability to go where they like and to eat what they like.

In this sense these two working class girls have literally 'learned their place', without specifically questioning the disposition of power in circulation. 'Their type of girl', just gets on with it presumably.

Suzy's partial (Note 4) ability to 'see beneath the skin' so to speak, shows something of her greater 'political' awareness which I want to argue later, provides her with more purchase on the feminist values which informs this research work.

However, the word 'partial' is crucial here, because before I go on to show something of the positive capacities of this form of self-reflection to develop into something more substantial - enabling Suzy to more effectively resist aspects of the heterosexual protocol, I'd like to indicate how these girls are persistently implicated in articulating and operating classed notions of femininity.

The differential and shared investments they bring to this process have an identifiable impact upon how they understand ; their relationship to each other ; to the boys from their circle and the working class girls they observe around the school and perhaps more significantly to how they experience their own femininity.

3. 'Jailbait' : Middle Class Girls Accounts of Working
Class Femininity.

I think it is important to make clear right from the beginning that the way girls spoke of 'other' girls provided a meta-discourse upon their own fraught relationship to the conundrum of feminine sexuality. (Note 5)

This intensification of the contradiction around heterosexuality was a direct result of their increasing awareness of the serpentine coils of desire worming into their own best-friendship to challenge and undermine its' solidarity and coherences. (See a detailed discussion of their homosocial jealousies in Coming Out a Lesbian)

At the social level all the girls registered a change within the boys they had previously known as 'friends'. So that Suzy described them graphically in the fifth year, as coming back from their holidays as 'if they were on heat!' The days of innocence giving ways to the days of experience in exciting but also dangerous succession. Once one had crossed the Rubicon of 'dating' in which the ambiguities and safety of flirting had given way to the certainties of 'going out' with someone in a 'couple', the 'sacredness' of a boyfriend seemed to be complete. As Barabara confirms :

'That's the thing it's always different
if there's a boy around'.

This 'sacredness' of boyfriends is clearly understood by both Suzy and Barabara particularly, as having a differential impact upon their powers of negotiation, their sense of self-esteem and self confidence. Since they take up diametrically opposed relations to the heterosexual imperative it is all the more experienced as an intrusive and problematic pressure.

In this 'hot house' atmosphere, where the powerful bonds of their tripartite female friendship met the forces of both desire and opportunity, it is unsurprising that their management of the heterosexual address to their femininity took on distorted modes.

Not least because any female's sense of acceptable femininity is insecurely located in the patriarchal realm as that space co-terminous with most expressions of male heterosexual practices.

Thus the very fact that we are discussing the privileged offspring of the metropolitan intelligentsia, should not obscure the fact of their oppression in the face of patriarchal forms of power, even if they fail to note how their material position and class values conspire to occlude both the effectivity of that power and their recognition of it.

One principal means whereby this 'mystification' is constructed is

in the way that working class girls more 'sexualised' forms of heterosexual display, (à la Carol for example) are read by these cooler more 'sophisticated' girls. I want to propose that their hostility to these more overt forms is created out of the endemic anxiety all girls show in the face of their own struggle to be thought sexually attractive without being thought of as sexually loose.

Within the discourse of these middle class girls such a hermetic coupling is all the more successfully achieved because of the prodigious evidence of the former ie. 'vampish' behaviour and the latter ie. bourgeois priggishness allied to female vulnerability.

I want to demonstrate these processes at play within one particular sample of text in which the two girls Barbara and Suzy are ostensibly critiquing the fashion styles of their 'inferiors'. I will put this together with the two girls quite opposed views towards the wisdom of having a boyfriend, to suggest the utility of class to carry the displaced irresolvable definitions of femininity.

The position of Barbara as a self-accepting 'desirable' girl was relatively unique in my investigations within both schools. Only Carol, paradoxically the girl most likely to have been given the label as 'jailbait', occupied a similar self concept. (Note 6)

And indeed it is precisely the similarities between them both in terms of their attitudes and practices which is principally responsible for the class antagonism invoked.

Suzy's low self-esteem, in terms of her appearance, couldn't have been more different. Like her friend Lara, both equally saw themselves in highly negative terms ; as 'wide' and 'dumpy' respectively. Suzy recalls this dissatisfaction with her body shape as originating in her childhood, citing a huge scene she had with her mother at the age of 5 as evidence!

Barbara's intolerance, in the face of their joint dismissal of their 'looks', evinced by her bemused irritation was partly prompted I think, by the implication that her own untroubled self-confidence actually positioned her as 'different' from them . A distinction to do with her being much more willing to engage in and initiate relationships with boys.

A problematic self-confidence therefore, since it not only marked a separation from her friends (ideologically and materially) it also carried with it the suppressed meanings of her sexual predatoriness (and fears that she was possibly a 'slag')

Early on^{is} our discussions, it was made very obvious that Barbara did act more assertively in relation to boys who she sensed 'fancied' her, so much so that my understanding of these serial relations is that these boys found her 'sophistication' a little too intimidating! (cf Carol).

If Lara was interested in being a girl-friend because, she was frightened of 'being left on the shelf', as she expressed it to her

friends, and Suzy's resistance to Duncan in particular and boys in general exposed what she termed her 'sort of vague anxiety', then Barbara had the opposite reservations. Going out with boys made her feel better about herself. In contradistinction to Suzy, who she accused of not going out with boys, 'because you don't like yourself enough'. A view from which Suzy did not dissent.

These positionings in the face of the 'being attractive enough' discourse I want to argue feed directly into the girls attitudes towards boys and to other subordinated girls and towards themselves

For example, I want to assert that Suzy's cleverness functions both as a source of her self belief as successful academically and also feeds her self doubt, by throwing into question her femininity, (which is what I think is packed into her fears of being thought 'too wide' See Note 7) - It is therefore this split which produces her paradoxical celibacy as protection from the 'compulsory heterosexuality' which is supposed to seal a girl's approval in male eyes.

It is thus her awareness of the power of the 'male gaze' which ultimately lends to her 'celibacy' a political dimension, allowing her to read it as a positive choice, rather than as a defensive rationalisation.

Conversely, I want to indicate Barbara's fascination with heterosexuality, as working to implicate her more and more in the

class identifications of her privileged position, away from the 'semi-feminism' of Suzy. I want to do more than assert these themes, I want to show them in operation in the way the girls come to sets of understandings about their own and other girls behaviour.

One of the major preoccupations which we all struggled over in the course of our year's discussions was the definition of 'feeling feminine'. It wasn't that I even thought it had an answer in those straightforward terms (Note 8) but I was certain these girls were no different from other girls in assuming that it did.

After all this was one of the biggest if not the biggest item on the 'hidden curriculum'.

At one point Barbara, Suzy and myself were looking back at an earlier transcript, and Suzy newly confident of her belief in the Orbachian position of body image, interrogates Barbara's views :

S. It's really funny this bit (looking at the transcript)
You say 'If I wear skirts, but you don't feel feminine if you wear trousers'. And I say 'But how ? You're a female.'

S. Then your say 'When I say feminine, my interpretation of feminine is other people being attracted to me by being feminine', but I say 'You're attractive anyway and people are attracted to you all the time.'

B. (Responds in citing Suzy's similar view)

And then you can....say feminine as 'em knowing that that you are a woman and making sure that everyone else knows.

S. But why is it...why is it...why are women (this is the thing about the article again) (Note 9) supposed to make themselves look attractive for other people...

I think a lot of women want to, but the reason they want to is because the whole society is conditioned so that woman (are) filmed through vaseline..

To Barbara, it is simply the desire to 'please yourself' but Suzy sees more to it than that, arguing that for a woman 'pleasing yourself' is indivisible from 'pleasing others'. Barbara is on dangerous ground here and she senses it, backtracking to insist that:

'You can't just make a sweeping statement that it is just for blokes cos I don't think it's true.'

Suzy's appropriation of feminist arguments allows her to problematise the investment Barbara has in making herself attractive. It is at this juncture that the simplifications of Suzy's position produce a puritanical disavowal of female sexual

adornment, which is fed by her own protective 'celibacy'.

From being on the defensive inside the same discourse on heterosexuality, (She had actively resisted the chance to become Duncan's 'girl-friend' - by stating 'And I know I've got what I want at the momentbasically'), she is now positioned to attack both those processes whereby femininity is made as the object for male consumption, and inadvertently, also empowered to question female, and specifically Barbara's role in its continuation.

Suzy's assertiveness is constructed from her exploitation of one of the principal contradictions within femininity itself, namely that in actively engaging in the 'making yourself attractive' practice you could be vulnerable to the accusation of being a 'slag'.

And as mentioned ad nauseum, it is this reality with which all girls have to deal. Even Barbara's copious self-confidence cannot front the fact out.

Indeed it is precisely because Barbara 'feels' her 'femininity' as a form of 'tartiness', that Suzy's critique hits a raw nerve. Thus 'being attractive', being actively engaged in producing your own 'femininity' or as she herself puts it, 'Knowing that you are a woman and making sure that everyone else knows', for Barbara was complicit with her as experiencing herself as too sexual for her own good. This will be shown in action in the following transcript.

Much earlier on in our taping sessions these girls evidenced a form of fashion snobbery which speaks volumes to the above contradiction. They were all vilifying the mass fashion market shops and in so doing all colluding in the process which presents 'other' girls, in this case, unmistakably working class, as 'jailbait'.

They began to talk of their own shopping preferences.

S. I think it's quite elitist Warehouse, well it's not elitist....

B. I just don't feel ashamed going into there.....

S. (giggles in slight shock at Barbara's snobbery)

B. (undaunted) Because I get ashamed going into places like Chelsea Girl and even....

V. Why ?

L. Well. it's tatty and horrible...

The girls continue to expand on these differences.

B. And it's just the sort of people that go in there that I don't like being....don't like being classed as one of them....

V. What kinds of girls go in those shops, do you think ?

B. (5 seconds silence).....

Well.....'em I just think when someone says 'Top Shop' to me I just think of....a blonde with a white mini-skirt.

S. Yes.

B. And white shoes on...Oh it's just so clichèd and stereotyped but that's the sort of clothes that are in there and..... and tarty clothes I suppose...

The need to position other girls as the despised 'other' is a phenomenon which runs throughout this thesis (See in particular its racist form within the discourse of the Crossfil girls discussed in detail in Chapter 6 section 5 'Bitching- More of the Verbals or How Girls Try to Vanquish Contradictions)

This classed reading of working class forms of sexuality as 'voracious', (a particularly resilient strain in middle class consciousness see Note 10), gives us privileged access to the struggle these middle class girls have to conceive of their own femininity in non-incriminating ways. Through this theme, middle class girls can also revenge themselves on the abuse to which they have been subjected by actually embracing the 'elitism' which such abuse provokes.

But it is a fruitless attempt to offload forms of predatory feminine sexuality onto the subordinated girls, if only because any account of female sexuality which is not supine carries with it the patriarchal imprint as unacceptable.

And as I will show~~x~~ below, Barbara knows it herself!

I want to conclude this section with a definitive statement of this paradox as articulated by the girls themselves.

Again access to Barbara's subjectivity is through a discussion of clothes.

B. Whenever I want to feel.... Because I wear trousers so much I get.... I start to feel sort of tomboyish and cos if you wear trousers I wear flat shoes so I walk in a certain way (mimes clomp, clomp) and then what happens I completely hate all my trousers and I've only got one skirt that I like.....

S. Every now and then you get amazingly feminine...white stockings.....

B. Yeh! White stockings, high heel shoes and a skirt and I feel really brilliant but just for one night, cos then I think I feel such a slag so then I go

back to all my trousers...

Leading me to ask the obvious question :

V. What is in the word slag for you ?

B. (5 seconds pause)

Well, it used to be.....slagused to be people who wore tons of make up. lacey tights and tight skirts but I wear lacey tights and I'm not a slag..... 'em....I always think a slag is someone who doesn't speak very well, a really horrible voice. Like a fisherwoman....who's just out to....'em

S. I think of a slag as someone who'sjust there's lot of them around this school. They walk around sort of clicking their heels, sort of their bums swaying from side to side and they're caked in make up. And it's so obvious that they are out to 'get the boys' really. That's it! That's what I'd say a slag is.

The fact that there are other less powerful girls around allows these middle class girls to identify with their class privilege which fragments the seminal recognition that there is something about the making of femininity itself which gives itself to be read as 'slag'. That Barbara actually can see that the 'definition' doesn't hold, 'I wear lacey tights and I'm not a

slag', whilst simultaneously experiencing herself as one,
'Then I think I feel such a slag', only intensifies the need
she has to see 'slag⁹ness' as the province of 'fishwives'
^

4. 'Slagging Each Other Off'

I was so intrigued (as well as being appalled), by the reproduction of these divisions that I tried to test out from the trio if they had ever thought that the abuse they received from the 'casuals' signalled working class girls attacking them for insufficient femininity.

As Suzy expressed it, 'I remember being shocked in a way 'cos it never really occurred to us that we looked like tramps (laughs)'. I speculated further, 'They weren't accusing you of not being feminine enough?' And she concedes, 'I suppose that was part of it, though they never actually said, 'You don't look feminine.'

The significant conclusion to be drawn from this is the utility for both groups of the sexual conduit for the expression of that class antagonism. What we see is the way middle class girls project sex onto working class subordinates (to produce excess) whilst the opposite process is going on within the representation of middle class culture in working class ideologies, (to produce a lack). It's not so much that middle classness is attacked per se. It is its designation as sexless which is scorned and it is this deficit which lies behind the use of the word 'tramp'. (Note 11)

Further as my note 7 indicates, there are very powerful associations around the meaning of cleverness as asexuality and as unfeminine. No wonder then that these ideologies fuel the antagonism to continue to reproduce differences. A loop which is secured precisely because of those fears (of sexuality , of asexuality,) which these constructions represent and against which they appear to pose as 'solutions'.

If working class girls are constructed as 'too feminine' and middle class girls as 'not feminine enough', it is because of the oppressive notions of feminine sexuality working through class relations in such a way as to disguise its provenance. And as I've tried to show that process is a two way loop which winds back upon itself.

Chapter 7.

Notes

1. This 'easiness', is of course, produced from out of my own class and race identifications and history ; as a working class girl who was 'promoted' out of my class origins through being 'clever'. The corollary to this is the distress which I felt in receiving so public a rebuff from Sandra J, which is very much related to the deeply inscribed memory of my being rejected by my working class female peers as a 'snob'.

These complex and contradictory sets of identifications and alienations are no doubt to be read into my chapter on Crossfil's girl too. I think I have already instantiated the autobiographical and personal presence within the reasoning processes of this project, as one of the arbiters of its' coherences, especially with regard to the ambiguities of Carol's dramatic script.

As such this thesis is unquestionably as revealing of my values as those of the subjects it attempts to encapsulate and understand both individually and collectively.

2. Barbara for example, once told me about how she was said to have been the object of sexual speculation in a discussion initiated by her current boy-friend, who was boasting to his male friends about the intimate details of their relationship. Part of Barbara's anger was rooted in her genuine shock that he could break her trust in this way.

By comparison the working class girls I spoke to, understood boys/men exactly within the terms of the male sex drive discourse : 'boys are only after one thing', 'men are like that', etc. etc. In this sense they seem to have less illusions about heterosexual realities.

3. The girls endorsement of their own sophistication in these terms shows a keen sense of their own 'superiority'. And they acted explicitly to counsel some of their male peers, their would-be suitors, in some of the social graces. Suzy, once recalled purposefully that 'They wouldn't have a hope in hell, if they didn't wear nice clothes'. Neither was this counsel confined to the visible, indeed girls' adeptness at 'mothering', 'inadequate' young men, led Suzy once in some exasperation to view Lara as Paul's 'social worker'!
(Cf. to Carol's role in relation to Mary).

4. 'Partial', because, she is after all, a product of those middle class values which produce her as 'entitled' to her

superordinate status, by virtue of her 'hardwork/brains'. She can simply reproduce this ideological frame uncritically - making her class antagonists into versions of the 'undeserving poor'. In actuality it is Barbara, who is more vocal in her replication of bourgeois values, in which the working class lifestyle is specifically cited as 'feckless' and hedonistic. I want to examine in general outline, with reference to their positions about female sexuality, this coding of class relations in the proceeding section.

5. Cf. Chapter 6 on the operational regimes of racist ideologies and practices within white working class girls' cultures. Note the way the theme of sexuality is played out, through its splitting into hyperdeveloped (Afro-Caribbean) and under developed (Black Asian) forms. This association between conformism/'boffinhood' and asexuality or insufficient femininity will re-appear later in this chapter. It is intriguing to note how it parallels the findings of Paul Willis, whose own study (Willis 1977) articulated how the 'ear'oles' were emasculated through their identification by the 'lads' as 'despised pen pushers', 'teachers pets'.
6. There is not time to explore the questionnaire responses which I elicited about self-image (and other aspects), except to note the overwhelming evidence of girls' profound sense of unhappiness at what they looked like. Very few of them evidenced any sense of themselves as being validated in their physical selves. And this negativity was read for

all ages, races and classes.

7. I have not been able to provide detailed proof of this but the assertion is made on the basis of comprehensive data. Again I want to allude to the importance of Valerie Walkerdine's work in this regard. See Walkerdine (1985)
8. In a memorable critique of the reactions to Cindy Sherman's photographs, Judith Williamson argues that Sherman's parodied film stills ask us to :

'....recognize a visual style (often you could name the director) simultaneously with a type of femininity. The two cannot be pulled apart. The image suggests that there is a particular kind of femininity in the woman we see, whereas in fact the femininity is in the image itself, it is the image - a surface which suggests there is something behind it, prevents us from considering it as a surface.'

Judith Williamson 'Consuming Passions' : 'Images of Woman in The Photography of Cindy Sherman' Marion Boyar (1986) p92.

This insight into the 'illusory' image of femininity also provides another fresh impetus to my unease with the

applicability of the subcultural obsession with surface style to discussions of femininity, see Chapter 2.

9. Suzy had told me of her reading an article on body image from one of the Sunday supplements, in which the latest book on eating disorder by Susie Orbach and Louise Eichenbaum was discussed^v and illustrated.

10. See how the ideology of male working class sexuality as voracious animalism mobilised the fear of the Victorian bourgeoisie which fed into the moral purity campaigns. See in particular A.S. Wohl 'Sex and the Single Room : Incest Amongst the Victorians' in *The Victorian Family* ed. A.S. Wohl (1978) P197-216.

11. Mandy Llewellyn's brief paper 'Studying Girls at School : The Implications of Confusion' from *BERA* journal 1978/79 was one of the chief prompts to my own work.

It was in an attempt to similarly tackle and explicate the 'confusions' which girls' cultures undoubtedly are, which persuaded me of the need, like her, to problematise the slightly cosy valorisation of female friendship groups.

A glorification attendant upon the erstwhile invisibility of these cultures, from study or other serious attention. It is this neglect I believe which has inevitably informed the expression in the few accounts available.

(Llewellyn specifically finds McRobbie (1978), as too idealizing. See her note 17.) No doubt my own opening account suffers from the same tendency.

In the case of clothes as signifying and carrying the confusions, I want to say that their importance and interpretation can only be obliquely referenced here.

If in Chapter 2, I was somewhat sceptical of the notion of clothes as politically^a transparent, my subsequent field work has somewhat undercut this position, leaving me with a feeling that there is still a lot more to be said about the visual differences between girls and how these get taken up as part of girls' school cultures. To the extent that I have no definitive argument to put on this form of feminine display I am ensnared in some of the same confusions.

CHAPTER 8

OPENING UP THE GENDER CURRICULUM

Contents.

1. Introduction. : 'Chalk and Talk'.
2. 'What Century Are We In ?' : Part One : Talk.
3. 'What Century Are We In ?' : Part Two : Chalk
4. Sightings of the 'New' Boy ? - 'Changing Your Ways'.
5. Contexts, Contradictions, Continuities and Conclusions.

1. Introduction : 'Chalk and Talk'

This final chapter moves on from a concentration upon girls own lives within school, to look outwards to ways in which their presence in the public realm of institutional life is already impacting upon the gender politics in which they are engaged.

Part of its' narrative contextualizes the strengths and weaknesses inherent in girls' relations with each other, to suggest a need for their experiential worlds to be sensitively addressed in the ambitious (though problematic), new equal opportunity initiatives being applied within the more responsible local education authorities.

I think that we need to be open to learning from girls' own semi-'solutions' to their oppression, (which is one of the major ways I see and understand their best friendship pattern as functioning), if we are to make any headway at all, in encouraging them to move beyond the accomodative 'making the best of it', which girls' own 'collusion' with class and race divisions reveals.

Not that I think lecturing them on their 'unsisterliness' helpful, anymore than I consider the simplicities of moralism to have advanced the necessarily difficult task of moving forward to build

from the 'fragments' within the increasingly segmented women's movement. Both cultures have a lot to learn from each other in this regard.

A major point of this concluding chapter is to set out a practical agenda which begins to see girls' problematic reaction to social divisions as the 'raw material' with which those concerned to change things, have to actively understand as the fractured base from which they and the girls both start from.

And a central focus of this grasping of the nettle will be a commitment to the argument about the overwhelming need to open up the curriculum to issues of gender - to explore the taken for granted social relations of girls with girls and boys with boys, not to mention their relations with each other.

By a piece of sheer good fortune I was made welcome in a series of lessons within C school which offered one of the few, if not the only place, inside the institution, where planned discussions about 'personal' sexual/social matters took place.

My invitation was extended by the form teacher I cited earlier, with whose class (1M/2M), I spent a great deal of my lesson participant observation time. By fortunate co-incidence, she also taught RE and a Personal Relations block of lessons within the Personal Development Curriculum. Her series of lessons, modelled on some of the themes and material from the Nuffield Humanities Project, covered such topics as Abortion, Race and Homosexuality

as well as raising issues to do with heterosexual dating, including the sexual double standard and the division of labour between the sexes.

This ad hoc 'social' curriculum testified to the rather tokenistic nature of much of the 'innovative' material at C school - that such interesting and engaged discussion flowed from contexts and subjects so marginalised (indeed doubly marginalised in the sense that the categorisation suggests they are to be read as social 'problems') within the mainstream ethos and curriculum of the school (and society), indicates her considerable talent at legitimating her informal way of working. A methodology which allowed students to discuss the issues in open forums after some initial preparation.

I hope to show how students took advantage of the opportunity, to express their own attitudes within this safe open space to show something of the contested nature of gender politics. Before looking in some detail at what they said and the way they said it, I need to state from the outset that all the classes I saw were 4th year mixed ability groups and that they contained children of different races, social classes and abilities. In that sense, they were truly comprehensive. This gives their dynamics an ambience and complexity which would not be so obvious in the more homogeneous sets or groupings.

2. 'What Century Are We In ?' : Part 1 : Talk.

The lack of a coherent sex education policy is not the simple fault of administrative weakness nor only of the lack of resources. It stems from a fundamental failure of teacher confidence encouraged by the problematic nature of discussing matter which is steeped in cultural taboos. None more so than 'sex' which despite its' prodigious presence within popular representation and its' presumed centrality within popular consciousness is apparently not to be spoken about in front of the children (except within very circumscribed conditions).

I think this 'fear' of sex is central to the social relations of sex. It is this ignorance, and fear which has as its material base the biological differences between bodies, which feeds into and underpins, the antagonistic relations between the genders.

A determination which is especially strong within the cultures of sexual novices : ie. adolescent girls and boys. (For a vivid illustration of this see Appendix C)

Thus any understanding about the mysogyny which advertises itself so loudly within these inter-gender exchanges, draws some of its' reason from the anxiety which that difference provokes in males

and the power they have to reconvert that into controlling and defensive strategies. (This is the same sort of 'permission' to oppress which we saw as working within girls cultures too)

Lynne Segal sounds the right note about the particular effectivity of sex and its' problematic place within masculine identity - she is commenting upon her own reactions to pornography :

'And it angers and disturbs me also because it is such a tragic testament to the continuing truth about sex in our society : it is still, despite a hundred years of sexology, experienced as basically dirty, offensive and wrong. It is still, too often a source of despair, frustration, guilt, anxiety and rage, rather than of pleasure and fulfilment. This is true particularly in men, where dominant images of male sexuality and male aggression so easily fuse together ; sexual performance can serve - is perhaps sometimes all that can serve - to shore up a subjective sense of identity and power.'

Lynne Segal 'Is the Future Female ? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism' Virago (1987) page 109.

I want to argue that the fragmenting of sexual information or rather more likely the overdetermination of the information by heterosexual reproduction not only denies girls the necessary

minimal opportunity to contest the inordinate pressures placed upon them to make themselves available for male definitions of heterosexuality. (Note 1) : but this abdication, leaves boys unchallenged in their place as having the upper hand in the exploitation of this sexual ignorance (as another form of social power) which passes as the status quo.

What I, and other commentators before me have found, is that even when the sexual is present within a school as part of a formal educational objective it is so closely identified with reproduction as to reduce the framework within which it is considered to a male definition of sexuality.

A reductionism best exemplified in a 'popular' book on biological reproduction which excises the clitoris, presumably on the assumption that it is surplus to reproductive requirements. (Note 2) If girls don't know they have one, they can hardly be expected to celebrate its' (copious and autonomous) pleasures.

Conversely, in a regime where the phallus is so over-valued, no wonder boys worry about its' length, its' state and its' abilities. (Note 3)

And in a climate in which the clitoris is 'disappeared', no wonder too that girls have such dependent needs for male approval.

The facility with which such reproductive (not to say reductive) forms of sexuality are made available, is premised not only on the

increasingly illiberal alliances between the state and right wing pressure groups (the two are becoming increasingly indistinguishable! - see the set of articles within 'Countering Heterosexism', a Gen publication by the Women in Education group), but it is also crucially linked to other patriarchal forces with a much deeper hold upon our collective imaginations.

If male ignorance about their own bodies is sometimes alleviated by the more established masturbatory culture which surrounds them, then male ignorance about female bodies is as nothing compared to female ignorance about the same. This 'shyness' has its roots in the particularly misogynistic form which 'sex as taboo', takes in a patriarchal bourgeois society. I have glanced at girls' self-hatred before and located one of its sources as the presumption of female bodies as dirty and polluting - I examined these cultural themes and saw their particular provenance within the policing of determinate heterosexuality in Chapter 4 which looked in part 1, at lesbian 'slurs'.

What I think is also true of a particular instance is translatable into the general realm, where girls distrust of their own bodies, shaped by sexual ignorance, and endorsed by a wholesale cultural psychosis, seeks to represent the reality of female bodies as inalienably suspect/smelly/dangerous and deficient and via these means condition girls to present themselves for subordination to males, to male judgement and to male definitions of 'doing it'.

Thus opting out of the sexual, except with reference to babies,

means opting into patriarchal (and racist) constructions of family life (not to mention sexual pleasure), a 'choice' which obliterates the terrain which has to be tackled if students are ever to fully engage with the inalienable complexities which make up their own and others sexual and social selves.

I would also argue that this is a necessary condition to the fuller expression of Equal Opportunities because not only is it the case that it aims to promote debate about the way femininity and masculinity are lived but it is the essential ground work to begin if one is serious in offering all pupils the chance to more effectively contest their own subordination to (or complicity with), (hetero)sexist and racist forms of sexual/social ideology and practices. (Note 4).

That the ability to do this is not ensured by good will alone, (even assuming the opening up of sufficient curricular space and teacher style, let alone political permission), is palpably true. I am not simplistically advocating 'being nice to each other' as some sort of voluntaristic self-help.

But I do want to contextualise the issue about 'empowering' students within the widest possible recognition that if sexual identity is one of the most crucial but most resistant of places to critique, (not only by virtue of the nature of the unconscious but of the many institutional and social forces invested in that very 'ignorance'), then it is indeed the case that unless we include it into our EO agendas we might as well share the poor expectations (of success)

as our working class, black, and girl students.

I have chosen to preface this part of the discussion (about masculinity and girls' critique of it) by way of a more ambitious assessment of the factors which have to be addressed if this critique is to gain a substantial foothold within girls' own cultures and within school life itself.

It's part of my project at this point to indicate that girls already have taken up many feminist meanings within their own cultures - (See Janice Winship : 'Girls Need To Get Street-wise : Magazines for the 1980's'. Feminist Review 21 for an intelligent appraisal of the gender bending that is now part of the iconography of some young peoples' fashion style and reading). And whilst I wouldn't want to propose the straightforward transposition of her argument to the sexual values expressed by the school students I interviewed - indeed I'd be very hard pressed to do so on occasion), there is something of value in her recognition of 'gains' in girls' sexual and social self-confidence, which it is important to attribute to the impact of the women's liberation movement.

My concern in linking, (admittedly in a very discursive way) , the maximisation of this 'post-feminist' common sense/equal rights ideology to the concerted effort that needs to be placed on new definitions of the sexual within 'Sex Education' is again a practical one.

That is, no amount of Equal Opportunities will 'work' unless the

'hard nut' of masculinity is cracked! My argument insists that this is best done in conjunction with those elements of proto/pro feminism already evident amongst girls rather than ideologies and practices imposed as the pre-constituted agenda of their elders and betters.

Being sensitised to what girls say and what they mean (not necessarily the same thing as Angela McRobbie reminds us, (Note 5), is emphasised here as a codocil to alert readers to the complex ways in which feminist issues get taken up by girls (and their mothers Note 6). Put more concretely - when a girl says 'I'm not a feminist but...', you can almost guarantee an expression of feminist values.

In disclaiming a feminist identity girls are distancing themselves not from the legitimacy of their 'rights' to justice and fairness and opportunity but from the anti-men stance which they understand as being the pre-condition for this feminist identity.

For young girls/women massively engaged in making sense of the deeply problematic notion of femininity : a task intrinsically linked to managing a heterosexuality in deference to masculinity, it is manifestly absurd to expect them to embrace the term. Its' like expecting Samantha Fox to become a political lesbian.

I could continue to support the claim for the broadening of the Equal Opportunities agenda with reference to the field notes and transcripts gleaned from both schools about girls' sexual

vulnerability, sexual ignorance and sexual fear but space considerations and narrative clarity prevail (See Appendix C for further evidence).

Nor is it merely a question of the pragmatics of space, mention needs to be made of the pragmatics of political realities and if the problems to be tackled are enormous and obdurately resistant to rational argument, it becomes even more important to acknowledge the the 'real-politick' of wider society.

Of particular note in this light is the way that the issue of homosexuality and of its' perceived 'threat' : both to the state of the 'credibility' of ILLEA's other EO policies (Note 7) and to the easily invoked sanctity of 'family life' which is one of the major focuses within the appeal of the anti-progressive and authoritarian coalition as it seeks to discredit the councils of its political opponents.

One of the main thrusts of the radical right is to re-express patriarchal modes of sexual absolutism through a redefinition of the acceptable social forms of its' domain : white, heterosexual coupledness is implicitly re-valorised in opposition to the explicit description of 'loonyiness', as categorising the obverse : black, left, lesbian, single mother.

If you think I overstate the case read a 'review' of my book 'Patriarchy and Pub Culture' published in 'The Times' (March 18th 1987), in which just these connections are made in the course of an

ostensible definition of what is 'lunacy' : viz :

'This is the link between anti-racist mania,
hysterical feminism, homosexual propoganda and blind
Marxism '

Digby Anderson ibid.

For further evidence see Polly Toynbee's so called 'talking to'
Linda Bellos in 'The Guardian' (May 11th 1987 and subsequent
correspondence 19th May)

I now want to turn to exemplify the previous talk with reference to
the 'chalk face', a turning towards a series of lessons, ironically
in which talk predominated. The evidence will be adduced from my
participant observation in these series of lessons and will draw
upon my verbatim notes of their content and form. These lessons
will show that whilst male sexual identities are frequently
invoked as resolutely 'hard and fast', in terms of the orthodoxies
of hyper-masculinity, such definitions are not hegemonic
despite appearances to the contrary. Indeed it could be argued
that the 'knee-jerk' of the one is predicated upon the insecurities
produced by the continuing assertion of alternative/reôcnstructed
definitions of what it means to be masculine and feminine.
(Cf Note 3 for an elaboration of the general trajectory and the
following pages for more detailing upon this argument)

2. 'What Century Are We In ?' : Part 2 : Chalk.

The mixed class jostles into the room. They settle down. They collectively ask whether they can continue with the 'argument'. They had been discussing who does or should do the housework and child care last week. They have their questionnaires in front of them and they look at their ^sreponses.

They had been asked to see if a range of tasks were to be considered as more suited to one sex or the other. The specific point of discussion is the allocation of cooking to men or women.

Gary Cooking can be done by both men and women

Wayne (Disagreeing)

 It's for women only.

 They have to do it.

 Men are masters.....

 (Unequivocally)

Elaine (Interrupting)

 What century are we in ?

(reconstructed exchange from notes made during lesson

Another class debating the same point produced the following stronger statements :

Malcolm (Thoughtfully)

I am a vegetarian so if I want to be
I have to do the cooking.

Celia Women have done the cooking because history has
put it into us.

Zandra It's been forced upon us by male expectations.

Aidan (Clicking his finger in approval of male
dominance)

Eli Why should men expect to be serviced ?

Gabbie (Giggling)
'Cos they're hungry!

Victor Cos it's feminine.

Zandra It's a load of crap!
Women have their own lives to lead.

→

Reconstructed dialogue 4 year PD FN 4 supplement)

I've extrapolated these points from a 10 lesson series to focus on the ways both girls and some boys choose to express their own views in ways which do not just reproduce standard ideas about the 'natural' division of the sexes.

There was certainly quite substantial proof within these groups that girls were very familiar with the case for asserting their own 'rights', and that they 'shared' a vocabulary of criticising the more chauvinistic sentiments of their male peers. Such expressions as, 'sexist', 'macho', 'medallion man' were used in riposte to the more vulgar examples of male assertiveness and whilst it seldom closed down the flow of sexist speak, it did at the very least, offer girl students a public discourse which they could invoke to 'place' such male rhetoric.

I stress the word 'shared', because in these particular lessons, unlike most of the senior school curriculum, mixed abilities characterised the student roll. It was particularly interesting to see 'alliances' in operation between working class and middle class girls and between white and black girls, and an almost complete absence of dissent amongst the girls as they resisted the wilder excesses of very vocal knee-jerk male opposition. It was not just a case of self-interested male bonding setting the tone, the girls too as a group fought back to discount the 'extremism', that such issues usually provoke.

It was characteristic that the middle class daughters of professional mothers would be the most articulate and prominent spokeswomen and this was indeed reflected in the distribution of discussion amongst students. In some ways their effectiveness in countering the more 'unreconstructed'/illiberal of their male cohorts represented an interesting case of the further contradictions which exist inter-class and intra-gender. Their 'power' to more effectively challenge boys, working class boys in particular, came in part from their class experiences as familiar with and confident about open abstract reasoning and debate. It is no accident I think that the working class students I taught, always referred to a 'discussion' as an 'argument', whilst the middle class students shared my presumption that it was a discussion.

I don't know what precise conclusions one can draw from these findings but I think they show something of the emotional, social and cultural meanings and expectations which different social classes bring to open discussion. It is inappropriate to rehearse the detailed 'arguments/discussion' around the complex interplays which are said to exist in the realm of class discourse/power but I want to situate my own experience and indeed my own observations inside a frame which whilst it recognises the institutionalised power of patriarchal values also reflects evidence for the contestation of that gender based power by the counter force of the institutionalised privileges of class.

I am not saying that in the concrete instance cited above that some girls' class privilege 'cancelled out' working class boys sexual privileges, that would be to reduce the complexity via a reductive distortion, as if somehow these girls' confident facility with language was sufficient in and of itself to dismantle the force of the ideology of gender and the values and behaviour which are linked to this.

But I am continuing to claim that in some way class vitiates gender domination and that this vitiation, (this is true also of the social relations of race and age), whilst being part of my abstract model of how social reality is constructed, can be registered in the particular texture of a concrete situation. I know that we need to know much much about these complex interplays, though interesting work has started in this area. I cite my fragmented evidence to show both an intellectual commitment to the project and to sketch potential resources for a practical intervention into the Equal Opportunities debate.

A great deal has been spoken about the need to recognise the emergence of multiplicitous subjectivities intersected by all sorts of interpellations as classed, sexed, aged, raced subjects : (See in particular Rosalind Coward's work and the more unqualified proponents of this post-structuralist paradigm Charlotte Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau Note 8).

But little thought seems to have been given to linking this theorising of identity to institutional life in any detail, instead

general arguments have been extracted from this position suggesting the need for more nuanced appeals to those fragmented/friable 'subjects' than the simple articulation of presumed class coherencies.

Whilst it might be unmanageable to bring in this level of theorising as some 'solution' to the question as to 'how' class vitiates gender for example, (or vice versa), it does on the surface seem to offer a model which does not reduce the latter to the former and even if one continues to suspend judgement about the viability of the model (See my introduction especially the arguments about 'effectivity' as propounded by Stuart Hall cited in Chapter 2) : it does provide a necessary corrective to the class fundamentalism unavoidably present in the texts and politics which stem from marxist explanations.

It might seem perverse to make this detour into the abstract realms of social/political theorising at the point in my text where I am at 'the chalk-face' as they say. Equally and also paradoxically I note my recognition of the salience of class at the same time as the thesis insists upon endorsing the case for a more decentred analysis which displaces class as the central pivot. A tension especially focussed as the narrative in the two preceding chapters has so clearly re-introduced the power of class as determinant upon perceptions of femininity.

But in making these connections I am still retaining an agnosticism before the Mouffe et al 'model', as a practical guide to political

action, whilst recognising the validity of its intellectual provenance. I mention her work here to keep open the question about the determining/determinate relationships between social forces, to remind myself that if as I've demonstrated gender to be most unequivocally one of them (I am not claiming to be the only person to discover this!), I also realize that class, race and age relations too play determining roles even if I have not elected to specify their effectivities (at the same level of detail).

At the particular level of classroom politics I was prompted to re-express my general theoretic sympathies by the practical emergence of an inter-class alliance articulated by girls in response to the intra-gender patriarchal allegiances of boys. (Though even this description belies the reality as even my small extracts show ie. there were boys who 'opted out' of predictable values and who took on more pro-female position).

It is relevant to observe that some of these 'softer' forms of masculinity ensued from boys coming from the same cultures as their female class mates, but also and in some respects of more interest is the emergence of different expressions of masculine style shown by some boys who were not from middle class homes.

All of which actually supports my arguments : ie. that the disposition of power whilst it has determinate sources in gender, class, race and age relations : does not map out in

discrete form to reproduce unvitiated nor unmediated categories of either 'pure' domination or 'pure' oppressions.

This 'seepage' of social relations produces possibilitiesⁱ for alliances of various qualities and around various interests. I allude to this here as a way of connecting back my own privileging of gender as an explanatory frame to my equal conviction that economic relations of power 'mess up' any simple appeal to gender solidarity as surely as men 'mess up' femininity for us, as well as for them. (Note 9)

What this translates to at the practical interventional level within the specific site of a school is that feminist aims of mobilising the collectivity of girls can not be extracted from tackling simultaneously the differences which exist between girls if they occlude the project of 'sharing' and that maximising the potentiality for the creation of allegiances has to have as its' initial point, the expression of a realistic assessment of the divisions which do exist with a consideration of the best strategies to address them.

Not that I see the reconstruction of the school as the salvation of the economic and social relations of oppression which have their site elsewhere in the distribution of power which flows from economic relations. However one must struggle where one is placed if the sea-changes in culture are to have any impact upon the material and political geography. More short term considerations also compel professionals in school and educational contexts to take

responsibility for the sexist and racist cultures which are flourishing and to make some interventions to engage these forces.

This progressive counter-hegemonic consensus has to be 'worked for' rather than naively assumed as emanating from the ascription of pre-determined class/race or gender positions.

That there are formidable obstacles to these coalitions : namely the very ideologies and practices which inhere in and which sustain the present status quo, should not prevent us from seeing movement and alterations within the disposition of forces as a result of the complex contestation as well as the contradictory reproduction of such power.

By tying such abstract political discursiveness down to its' exemplification through an interpretation of a series of lessons of fourth year classes in a suburban London comprehensive, may seem as if I'm using a theoretical sledge-hammer to crack a very insignificant empirical nut but I want to hold onto these glimpses of the shifts within sexual and gender meanings, to see if the 'new boy' is emerging as signifying both the value of the feminist project as well as making visible the consequences of girls 'doing feminism', (even if they would disavow it!) and of boys re-doing masculinity.

In so doing the way in which the former has impacted upon the constituency of boys/men to produce the latter can be publically

acknowledged. If in so doing one can publicise those fissures within masculinity which show boys unafraid to express 'tenderer' feelings then, infinitesimal though it seems, boys may be encouraged to be more open with each other, which would go some way to releasing girls/women from their monopoly role as the private suppliers of emotional nourishment.

By paying attention to these shifts (just as Janice Winship counselled to the women's movement in her understanding the new gender meanings finding expression in magazines like Mizz etc), those people concerned to create a culture in which it is more likely that equal opportunities can be properly nourished, can have access to a way of thinking about their practice which contributes to these ambitions.

After all it is obviously vital that masculinity changes as well as femininity - and creating spaces within schools where boys don't have to be boys, might make them easier to live with - both in terms of each other and for girls.

For if, as Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin state :

'Organisational sexuality is for men characteristically a mix of homosociability, latent homosexuality, homophobia and heterosexual phallocentrism, given structured form. (Then) men's sexuality towards women has to be seen in the context of, in relation to, and

even as the result of men's sexuality with each other.'

Leading them to conclude :

'Accordingly, an understanding of supposedly "normal" straight male heterosexuality, in organisations at least, necessitates a consideration of the relevance of homosexuality, homosexual desire amongst men, both as a constituent part of that "heterosexuality", and as something often feared '.

J. Hearn and W. Parkin "'Sex" at "Work"'

Wheatsheaf 1987 p158.

If this is the case and I think the overwhelming evidence from the subtext of heterosexuality which has run throughout this thesis, supports the assertions in Hearn and Parkin's work, then creating contexts in which these 'fears' can at least be acknowledged has surely got to be preferable to the unchallenged offloading of 'difficult' aspects of male identity which males do to each other and to girls (under the guise of masculinity!) currently.

And finally in this preamble to the ensuing ethnography although I am not pretending such advocacy is the same thing as accomplishing the ambition, I am keen to insist that feminist and anti-sexist struggles have to not only defend what little they have won, but

also refuse the simplification of wider and more radical aims into the reductive packages often called 'equal opportunities' ; packages which on close and critical inspection constitute nothing more than defining the problem as one of girls lacks. My emphasis on the 'problem' of masculinity is especially posed to encourage a reconstitution of the ideology of equal opportunities away from a deficit model of what girls 'lack' to a prioritisation of what masculinity has too much of!

4. Sightings of the 'New' Boy ? : 'Changing Your Ways'.

That gender is as plastic as it is solid can be demonstrated not by the usual exotic journey to Melanesia, courtesy of Margaret Mead, but much closer at home with reference to our very own Prime Ministerial gender-bender, Margaret Thatcher - who seems to have stretched the definition of femininity into such new territory as to represent herself as having transcended it.

When Dennis Healey referred to David Owen as, 'Mrs Thatcher in a trouser suit', he knew what he was talking about! (Note 10)

However, it is to the more fluid definitions emerging within boys' own cultures, that I should like to show as exhibiting some elasticity of their own. I do not want to over-romanticise this, especially in the context of the rabid homophobia and mysogyny which their discourse also (and more predictably) exposed.

But what I think this suggests, is that the competing presence of such disparate views is in some senses mutually interdependent. (Note 11). And further, that the articulation of positions, which for clarity's sake I will call, feminist, pro-feminist, anti-feminist and pro-masculinist positions. And for brevity's sake

- the post-feminist 'new' and the atavistic 'old' have to be contextualised within the generalised opening out of gender politics facilitated by the transformative projects of women's and gay and lesbian politics.

Thus, whilst I have argued that schools are disingenuous in their avowal of sexual innocence and are conversely complicit both in the propagation of a deeply oppressive account of sexuality as ~~as~~ heterosexual reproduction, (see Appendix C), but this is not the whole story. Indeed my understanding about school structures is not of a monolithic block of social engineering, even if the exigencies of conducting a narrative frequently reduces the complexities of social realities to propose that as the case.

I also consider that counter values permeate from the students' own agendas and resources which either exist as continuous with or as opposed to the formal curriculum and that these other 'voices', (if indeed they are other), can represent challenges to the prevailing *staus quo*. (It is after all in that way, that one has to begin to see the value of my arguments about the viability of female school friendships).

If these 'hidden pupil curriculums' can have positive virtues, they can also of course, represent statements of extreme sexual, racial and class coerciveness, designed to offend the most gratuitously unreflexive of school ethos's - a disposition which should remind us once again that 'alternatives' are also implicated in the raw material of history, (frequently with the emphasis on

the raw!)

I mention this inconclusiveness (and the contested nature of) values not to propose an indeterminate amount of possibilities as to who sets the sexual political frame of a social institution, nor to imagine that what gets into the frame is some sort of cornucopia. Indeed it is rather the reverse ; it's not so much what gets in that is singularly powerful - what is omitted is also substantially responsible for the obsessiveness which pertains in the masculinist pre-occupation to protect itself from desiring relations intra-gender.

It is in the deletion of homosexuality as a sexual choice or as a legitimate state which is in part doubly implicated both in the misogynistic force of male heterosexuality and the particular equivocations within contemporary masculinity.

For what I think is true for girls, in Rich's statement about the 'compulsory' nature of heterosexuality, is equally, if not more true for boys.

If, as I want to argue, boys are being 'squeezed' between the developing confidence of girls' neo-feminism and the fears induced by the logic of their own practices ; viz. that to produce themselves as 'less than a man', makes them the 'weak woman' who they continue to define themselves against, we could expect that when they are in situations where they are called upon to recognise that there are other ways to 'do' masculinity, they give vent to

sentiments which make Sylvester Stallone sound like Bruce Kent!

It is the abandonment of self-defined activity and its' replacement by a category of persons (homosexuals), who are viewed as simultaneously predatory, (and paradoxically as deficient in masculine aggressiveness), which I think particularly frightening to boys/men. It is the production of themselves as sexual 'objects' for other males which homosexuality instantiates, which is more than most boys can literally handle! An inversion of one of the most important sites of their power, a resistance to which informs the quality of their paranoia with regard to male homosexuality. That they view homos^oxual males as contradictorily active/passive, shows just what massive investments they bring to their insistence on keeping the two categories separate : ie. within the stereotypical boundaries which are said to constitute the sex/gender system.

If you want a cultural cinematic equivalent to this proposition, view again the archetypal and much acclaimed fifties movie 'Rebel without a Cause', in which the cult of masculinity as competitive macho encounter is celebrated in explicit opposition to the equivocating 'hen-pecked', suspect maleness of James Dean's screen father. (Jim Bacchus). See in particular the scene where the son seeks advice about how to be a 'proper' man in dealing with the challenge issued by Buz - in which his father's 'improper' masculinity, ie. 'femininity' is coded in him actually wearing a frilly apron to await upon the 'demands' of the 'domineering' mother.

James Dean's speech to his father is addressed to the 'taken for granted' mysogyny which makes it necessary to produce non-domineering masculinity as the despised femininity, which although apparently an attribute of the 'opposite' sex, is actually feared as lying beneath masculinity itself just waiting to don its' frilly apron and give the show away.

Isn't that why so many boys/men parody femininity in drag ?
Like some form of primitive magic they ward off the reality by the inoculation of a ritual. (Note 12)

And doesn't the empirical demands boys make on girls for 'understanding' in the softer safer spaces of romance, speak to that sense of outer 'front' and inner 'needs' ;
masculinity/femininity, strong/weak as one of the most potent dichotomies holding together male heterosexual identity ?.

In returning to the specifics of the boys who contributed to the written and oral discussions about sexuality and relationships and in so doing if you think it eccentric to show how pervasive neo- neandarthalism is, within the same sector as I am supposed to be excavating findings of the 'new' boy - I want to make the connection that it is not until we understand the one, and the cultural relationship between them, that we will have a better chance of creating circumstances which are more likely to encourage the former to develop into the other.

By looking at the 'knee-jerkings' of highly homophobic boys, we have some sort of purchase on the way they live out their masculinity amongst themselves. It's my contention and I have argued it elsewhere, that this besieged quality in adolescent masculinity is visited on girls and on women and that it is high time it was addressed by males themselves. By therefore noting the few spaces in the texts, (ie. lesson discussions where macho-linity split), I want to show how that process has started.

Intriguingly, the most 'reconstructed' of male comments about maleness, seem to have been prompted, by the most extreme masculinism. (Cf. how 'feminism' was produced by the anti-feminism of the boys).

I want to focus upon one principal item on homosexuality which prompted a barrage of hostility. The mixed classes were shown edited extracts from the film, 'The Naked Civil Servant' about the life of Quentin Crisp. John Hurt plays the 'outrageous' eccentric with effeminate bravura, in which the pleasures and pains of Crisp's highly sophisticated autobiography are given sensitive treatment.

Exposing a mixed class to this representation of homosexual masculinity was rather like what happens when politicians are asked to 'condemn' the latest piece of terrorism. And sure enough their reaction was utterly predictable (which is not an argument for preventing their seeing/discussing such different sexualities).

As I have argued earlier I think that a teacher has a responsibility to create safe spaces where all sorts of values can be investigated within a rigorous critical but supportive framework which connects up this sort of discussion ideally to the actual manifestly anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-heterosexist principles and ethos of the rest of the school.

If this administrative and pastoral culture is not available for the above then I think it is extremely difficult to contest 'controversial' questions, because what seems to happen is that these invariably ad hoc investigations into questions of 'difference' give 'permission' to groups to 'do' power at the expense of those differentiated.

I want to suspend this argument a minute and return to the material evidence selected from the class exchanges. I want to suggest that whilst there is some truth in the 'dangers' of 'ad-hocery', there are also reasons to believe that even within circumstances which promise nothing except the most vitriolic re-affirmation of orthodoxy (in this case that of undisputed masculinity), other challenges to this hegemonic position are also given a chance to make themselves heard.

I'll show this in action below, where I try to reconstruct something of the learning context within several classes who all saw the same film.

One of the classes were discussing their responses to a questionnaire about the film, 'The Naked Civil Servant.'

Q1. If you met Quentin Crisp what would you make of him and what would your reaction to him be ?
Why would you feel these things and react in this way ?

Dave. He's a shunter.

Thomas. I'd beat the vaseline out of him!

Colin. I wouldn't know what he'd do next.
He might want to 'feel us up'.

Thomas. They look like women and I wouldn't want them to come too close for comfort.
They're all chads, shunters, backshot.

It is predictable and consistent with the homophobic tones of their supporting writing of which the following will stand as an example of such male hysteria :

I'll abbreviate the questions to expedite the matter more quickly :

→

Answer 1.

If he came near we'd kick the vaseline out of him.

Question 2.

On the nature of the male homosexual stereotype.

Answer 2.

Homosexuals look like women and would come too close for comfort.

Question 3.

On the superiority or inferiority of different sexualities.

Answer 3.

Heterosexual is normal.

Question 4.

Is homosexuality a disease ?

Answer 4.

I'd agree with him, once a homo. Always a homo.

If you were a homo you'd catch aids.

Question 5.

On the discriminatory and different ages of consent for heterosexual and homosexual liasons.

Answer 5.

Yes, it's fair. We don't want to go to an under 17 disco and be touched up by some faggot.

Question 6.

On the blessing of homosexual unions in church.

Answer 6.

This is stupid and unreal.

Question 7.

Should homosexuals foster children ?

Answer 7.

This is also stupid as it is bad for the child, when he or she grows up to find it's parents are shunters.

Question 8.

The justice of anti-gay and anti-lesbian discrimination.

Answer 8.

This happens because they don't want a faggot in a top job. This is fair.

Question 9.

Are lesbians more disliked than gay men ?

Answer 9.

They are wellnasty things.

Question 10.

On discovering your friend to be homosexual.

Answer 10.

Just accept it as long as they didn't try it on.

Understanding so self evident and self-declared homophobic

heterosexism is actually called for, despite the very 'obviousness' of the text.

It is the same principle I applied to the 'quieter' texts of girls' cultures, where the whole status and secretiveness of the message defied it being taken seriously - requiring that it be read 'against'. Here the reverse is the case for it is within its' very bombast that one can sense the fear.

I stress this fear, not as an excuse for such utterances, indeed they connect up to institutionalised repression which costs non-heterosexual people inordinate material and psychological distress in the forms of ; discriminatory employment practices, housing policies, family law enactments as well as fuelling 'queer bashing', the fear of which can not be seen as constituting its' equivalence.

It's not so much fear itself which is the problem. It is the ability which forms of power give to certain people to act on that fear which presents itself as formidable. Thomas's sentiments are one the one hand grimly transparent, 'kick the vaseline out of him!', and yet they also show a breach in his impenetrable defences which seems to show, how in another light, he can be more oblique in his attitude. In the context of his manic masculinism (reminicent of the invective tones of Sun Speak), his throw away last line :

'Just accept* it as long as they didn't try it on'

reads like a Marxism Today editorial! (* actually he had spelt it as 'except it'), which I think provides a useful clue into explaining this disjunction. Not that his 'change of heart' is a total break with the position loudly put in the rest of his answers, ie. he is still keen to qualify his 'tolerance' with the caveat, 'as long as they (ie. the homosexual friend) didn't try it on.'

By removing the 'other' in the persona of the eccentric Quentin Crisp and by moving away from the generalities of 'otherness' as out there by posing the sexual politics of homosexuality as being about a hypothetical situation between friends ; Thomas can ease up, (just a little) and personalise the 'other' in so doing re-integrate the 'sexual' into an understanding of a whole person. (It is instructive to compare this form of 'accomodation', with the way female best friends manage doubts about their own sexuality. See Chapter 4).

It is the notion of boys as homosexual rather than as people who have a homosexuality which terrifies boys in particular. And this hostility is produced in direct reaction to the boys' resistance to a positioning of themselves as powerless sexual bait.

The boys' speech is larded through with very precise statements about this possibility, as another class member puts it when she was trying to express the feelings she would have about male, as opposed to female, homosexuality - this is what she says :

'They're normal, also sometimes very shy.

Lesbians are the same as homosexuals but it seems alright for men because they're the opposite sex, but because we are female, we feel a bit different towards it'

This is precisely the claim I am making for boys too .

And this is how Colin, David and Ian phrase their answer to Question 9 :

'We don't care about women being lesbians because we are blokes and we don't have to worry about women's reputations'

The 'problem' of homosexuality is seen by them to reside in the vulnerability they feel to being the object of a presumed rampaging male desire, which they conceive of as having the effect of turning them into women. Paradoxically therefore, the same group of 'others', who are stereotyped as women are also seen as having the capacity to 'feminise' others by their ability to 'touch you up' ; 'try it on' or whatever.

And it is because male heterosexuality is predicated upon objectifying women in the same terms that such heterosexism when it is expressed is almost as much a commentary upon male

heterosexuality as it is about male views on gayness.

It is axiomatic to note that most girls views on these issues were 'relatively' liberal, leaving them freer to express a far less persecuted sense of self.

On reactions to gays.

'We would be used to seeing people like this because we go down the King's Road and Kensington and there are many there. We know one and he was sweet to us. We've got nothing against them, if they want to be like that, that's up to them. As long as they keep to themselves to their selves.'

Joanne and Emma.

In the middle of all this, the best of which one could only call 'repressive tolerance', (to use Marshall McLuhan's words) and the worst of which has roots in the same discourse of neo-fascism (Note 13), we hear a different voice.

On discussing the presence of homosexuals.

They make me feel vulnerable.

Unfortunately as I mentioned before I did not tape any of these

lessons. So Luke's 'still small voice of calm' appears to be stiller and smaller than it actually was in the lesson.

For a start, he was listened to by the rest of the class, being of considerable charisma and high status. What is also of interest is that he was a working class boy too. Nor was his dissenting 'difference' a singular occurrence, it was registered within other pieces of work I'd also like to explore as well.

In the supporting written work Luke and Lauren combined to discuss their written answers. Lauren writes them up.

Answer 1.

Boys would feel vulnerable to him (ie. Quentin Crisp) and possibly scared, I wouldn't react at all, I would just ignore him.

Answer 2.

Yes I have got a stereotype view. I think the average homosexual would look more than likely feminine, with a feminine voice. He wouldn't talk to women as much as he would to men. Luke wouldn't feel vulnerable in front of a women lesbian.

Now, I may be accused of making, 'a mountain out of a mole hill', indeed the rest of their co-responses are full of the crazy contradictions which are endemic in so many of the positions articulated in the sexual realm. Thus, although they claim homosexuality is a 'disease', they go on to say, 'it's just a phase that they are going through', to conclude in flat contravention to this, 'but some people don't get over that phase and stay homosexual'. The aetiology of that argument is as elusive as the homosexuality they are trying so hard to pin down.

And yet there is something in this boy's presence which broke the consensus on macho masculinity, his was a new style, indeed part of his unusualness was his ability to work comfortably with a girl in the first place! And part of his confidence was not so much that of the class clown but of the self-mocking type which showed a maturer sense of the excesses of the male pose.

In the average school setting where to be seen as anything less than 'butch' earned one the dozen or more names for male homosexual (FN 4 on IM boys list), to admit to 'vulnerability' and to get away with it (no body in the class scoffed or challenged his and Lauren's views, when they were discussed openly), says something about this boy's power and his personality. Maybe both elements in his 'charisma' came from his own self esteem, not as the mega-stud of male fantasy, but as having the ability to successfully relate to girls, which would then ironically feed into his status as a 'real' man with boys ?

I don't know for certain, this is sumise, but they are intriguing thoughts that just as girls 'need' men to become 'real' women, (eg. you recall the obsessive quality of this theme in Carol's diaries. Cf Amelia's more innocent avowal of the same concerns) so boys 'need' girls before they can feel totally free from the 'contaminating' self-doubts about their own sexuality. (note 14)

The point of this is not to claim it as 'proven' but to suggest that this is one more argument for seeing how double-edged are the male investments in homophobia and mysogyny as well as noting the non-unitary nature of masculinity.

To corroborate this interconnection further, I'd like to cite one final piece of 'post feminist' evidence. I do it both to show that Luke's difference is drawn upon the same roots as Michael's (You recall his domestication), and that despite their contrasting class backgrounds, these two boys represent some small sign that reconstructions in masculinity are not confined to Ken Livingstone but are also there to be seen by the naked eye, in what promised to be a most inhospitable environment. After all fourth year male adolescents are a long way : socio and geo-politically speaking, from the trendier ethers of the fore-closed County Hall.

As part of the Moral Education option within Personal Development, students were asked to write replies to hypothetical 'agony' letters. To finish this section of the chapter, I'd like to quote Luke's response :

Problems to solve.

Sample problem

Dear Friend,

I manage to get girls to go out with me once, but after that they never want to know me again.

I treat them nicely and give them a good time.

I think I'm alright, why don't they appreciate me ?

How can I keep my chics (sic)

Wayne.

Luke's reply.

Judging by the way you ended your letter 'Chics' it doesn't sound as if you care much about girls apart from their body, I suggest you change your ways. I'm not surprised no-one wants to go out with you.

Luke.

'I'm convinced it's not her though, it's the company
she keeps, particularly that. Do you remember her ?
That's where the trouble lies'.

(quoted in Robert J. Meyern *ibid.*)

5. Contexts, contradictions, continuities and conclusions.

This thesis has tried to establish the ground work for
acknowledging the importance which female friendship has for girls'
sense of their own definition of and articulation of femininity.

A femininity constituted from the girls' sense of their powerful
need for close reciprocal alliances, reminiscent of their prior and
continuing emotional identifications with and against their mothers.

I have attempted to show its' cultural domain via the demonstrable
over-determination of it in their self-esteem and functioning
competency. I have argued that its' powerful pull works both to
police girls' sexuality as heterosexual identified and as a
cogent critique of the male world. It is a cultural form which is

thus assertive and defensive, contesting and recursively productive of the sex/class and race divisions within which it operates. It is at one and at the same time a tremendous counter-patriarchal resource whilst being complicit in an elaboration of a regime of inter-girl surveillance as brutal (if not more so than any male domination) (Note 15)

I have sought to understand these 'investments' which girls bring to the processes of friendship and have mapped out something of the good, the bad and the ugly consequences of their so doing. My argument has highlighted the cultural parameters within which white girls, pubescent and adolescent, working class and middle class have had to negotiate their feminine contract in a determinate social institution.

Integral to this whole process of 'growing up' has been their twin location within their homosocial worlds and the heterosocial /heterosexual market place. For reasons of narrative clarity and the necessary disciplines of retaining a traceable focus I have emphasised their prior positioning within the world of 'compulsory homosociality' - a concentration on female company which was the direct response to my noting its obviousness within their lives.

An obviousness which I sought to show as being overlooked in the models available for examining social dissent. (Note 16)

Thus it is this female network in general and in particular the privileged form it takes in the impermeability/exclusivity of

best friendship which I have suggested, as offering girls the only space to 'be themselves', to learn their 'hard lessons' and to seek some accomodation with the 'harsh commercial realities' of academic, race and sexual divisions.

It is paradoxical then, not to say counter-productive, for schools to pathologise this institution, (See the opening quote), and to continue to wilfully misunderstand and misread what girls' 'bitchiness' is all about. Girls' infamous 'touchiness', much commented upon in the literature and in 'common sense' discussions on 'what girls are', is nothing other than that crucial recognition of the power of the word, the look, the label to do them harm.

Especially if it is seen to have issued forth from a putative friend. When the power of the word combined with the meaning of friendship combine as in the latter case, no wonder there is an explosion.

At a pragmatic level therefore, schools have to realize that all the good they think they are doing in appointing young female teachers to positions of authority (good role models etc. etc), run the risk of putting those staff in direct antagonistic relationship to girls who need 'disciplining'. And this is especially true of working class girls to whom young, 'successful', female staff represent a competitive threat as exemplars of achieved femininity. You recall Carol's 'difficulty' at this point.

This is not an inconsequential matter - for, it is the fragility

of female self-acceptance, which is open to attack through the mechanisms of 'slagging a girl off'- a vulnerability produced out of female subordination to patriarchal definitions of feminine 'goodness'. Girls are only likely to risk their 'good name' as passive and invisible, if their 'reputation' is already under threat. It is just this provocation which is the last straw leading to their being 'disciplined' for fighting, for 'bullying' (Note 17) and for 'trouble making'. Therefore a careless female intervention into the realm of emotional relationships can compound the local difficulties.

Schools are seldom sufficiently sophisticated in their appreciation of what is at stake in these struggles, no teacher that I spoke to ever got their head around the simplicities of the strength of the attachments girls have to each other.

In any case, as I've tried to show, school priorities are not those of their pupils, even less of their female pupils. This is produced out of the very real material difficulties of holding together so many contradictions, not to mention unwilling pupils, (ie. they often amount to the same thing), in so pressurised and under-resourced a space without the benefit of a police force - a combination which tends to produce an degrees of authoritarianism deeply antagonistic to nuanced responses.

And yet, as this last more policy based chapter indicates, there is an absolute urgency of schools addressing these issues of gendered perceptions of sexual and social identity if only because the

process is going on in an ad hoc fashion anyway. Sexual meanings are in the process of being pulled apart/reasserted simultaneously.

It is absolutely germane to this recommendation of interventions in this territory, to facilitate girls more critical understanding of their own cultural repertoire ; in other words they need to pose questions of their friendships, they need to look at issues of their power respective to other girls, to boys, to adults.

They need supporting through a recognition of their differentiated but shared positioning in the face of the sexual double standard. They need to be able to articulate their own understandings about the peculiarities of male culture so as to begin to erode the competitiveness which they enjoin on each other in respect to the oppressive demands of that culture.

At a practical level girls need sex education in learning about their own bodies potentiality for sexual pleasure outside of the imperatives of reproductive, married 'bliss'. And this is even more crucial in this post-Aids environment.

We need to work for a new definition of femininity as self-respecting which is predicated upon the girls valuing of each other in their best friendships, so as to allow the possibility that this 'private' validation is given public acceptance and recognition as an empowering and important human quality. Equally the 'downside' to racist formulations and class antagonism has to be placed

within a critique which renders problematic the notion of 'difference', of the power relations within which some differences get validated whilst others become stigmatised.

Coterminous with this, boys have to be positioned with respect to new definitions of doing masculinity which make male friendships more sustaining of each other so that their 'intimate' lives are not things which they leave for females to 'solve'. The splits in masculinity which require the nurturing and emotional servicing of femininity need to be seen for what they are - real and problematic weaknesses which boys visit upon girls, husbands upon wives.

I know there is all the difference in the world between good intentions and achievable action consequences, between text, talk and action, but I think there is a very serious policy implication here in the prioritising of friendship and definitions of femininity and masculinity as absolutely essential to the task of working through any Equal Opportunity ambition. (See Appendix C for a fuller restatement of this argument). As I have sought to convince the reader, the culture of the school should feature as much on the EO agenda as any amount of new non-sexist, non-racist curricular materials.

Creating spaces in the institution which can open up the curriculum to interrogate and express the sexual, racial and class antagonisms of which it is composed presents the only possible circumstances in which students can begin to see the necessarily tortuous connections between their own values and the values of others and

can learn the very hard lessons that such values are not inscribed in stone, are contestable, are in other words, social products.

Chapter 8.

Notes.

1. See this process at work in the positioning of Carol, whose sexuality, despite her apparent assertiveness, is still fundamentally tied to definitions of her as passive :

'He wouldn't be able to feel anything up top.'

This much commented upon form of objectification, See Lees (1987^v), McRobbie (1978) and Woods (1984), was the absolute stock in trade of the sexually 'active' girls in Judith's social network. For example, Nina, defined a 'genuine' boy as someone who 'would'nt push him too far on the first night'! (She really did say that).

Her friends' discourse is littered with the language of sexual servicing, boys' demanding girls' do things to them, for them. Ironically, it was often only the girl's own sexual self-disgust (invoked in the context of genital sexual practices), which acted to 'protect' girls' from such blatant

(potential) sexual exploitation.

2. Stevi Jackson's researches, published as 'Childhood Sexuality' Basil Blackwell (1982) is a useful source of these and other arguments. See also a recent contribution to the debate AnneMarie Wolpe : 'Sex in Schools : Back to The Future' Feminist Review 27 Autumn 1987.
3. Richard Dyer (quoted in Andy Moe : 'The Sexuality of Men' Pluto, notes the difference between the material penis and the ideological phallus :

'The fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus. The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality of so much male imagery. The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaw,.....all straining after what can hardly ever be achieved, the embodiment of phallic mystique.'

On a more mundane level I offer the following 'embodiment' of this in action. Early one morning as I was on my way to begin my field work at C school in Eastfax, I saw the following graffiti in a bus shelter. It proved prescient and apocryphal at the same time, in the characteristic way that public statements about male practices so often are. (For example I have long thought that the determinedly aggressive addition

of OK! to affirmations of power, eg 'Skinheads rule OK!',
manifestly apologetic),

Thus I cite the following utter sexist (and innumerate)
trash :

The 4 F's of Life (erased through)

1. Find 'em (ditto)
2. F.....(ditto)

The 8 F's (erased through) 6 F's of Life

1. Find 'em
2. Follow 'em
3. Feel 'em
4. Finger 'em
5. Fuck 'em
6. Forget 'em

Whilst totally offensive as cultural 'bricolage', it is also best understood as so utterly over the top, as to suggest that in it's very desperation to appear as self-evidently what the well-hung man about town already knows, it betrays another agenda of fantastic insecurity within masculinity itself.

This classic representation of the supine feminine, parallels the phenomenon Lynne Segal, mordantly observes :

'Pornography, far from being the manifestation of men's power over women, would seem to suggest as Andy Moye argues, sexual anxiety and paranoia amongst men. It depicts not men's actual sexual control over women, but rather men's neurotic and debilitating obsession with "the netherworld of phallic failure"'.

Citing Andy Moye (page 62. The Sexuality of Men)

4. Obversely I have been very aware of how fragmented and contradictory, not to say downright perversely fluid are some girls' sexual and social values. Space is not available to map out the immense tensions for example, around Suzy's class laden expectations of 'self-fulfilment' expressed in the form of the classic bourgeois demand for individual transcendant human happiness, which is in reality actually intersected by her developing awareness about the structured

blocks to its' achievement. A tension best exemplified in her unease in face of the pressure to 'go out with a boy'.

5. See Angela McRobbie tackling the delicacies of negotiating the politics of feminist research in her important article : 'The Politics of Feminist Research : Between Text, Talk and Action' Feminist Review 12. p46-57.
6. One complexity that I am aware of is this fascinating overlap between working class girls' 'hardness' (espoused in aspects of the public style of Carol and Sandra J) and the confident assertiveness of academically successful middle class girls.

Thus not only are Carol's 'larrupyness', and Sandra's 'mouthiness', observable material facts as well as ideologically propositional - they do represent disruptive forces within the smooth running of a school - representing potential discipline problems, as well as revealing the non-unitary nature of femininity. Class-inflected accounts of girls' 'loud-mouthedness' testifies I believe to the proto-feminist resistances already present within working class girls' lives. And that despite concerted efforts to reduce femininity to a depository of 'sugar and spice', there is co-existing a harsher reality made from out of a more embattled engagement with female brutalisation and subordination, which takes on a character which is not so much enclosed within McRobbie's concept of 'hyper-femininity' as at odds with it. Furthermore the way that different

classes of girls tackle their subordination, often occludes the extent to which they share similar strategies.

For example, the condemnation of male bombast and male evasion of housework was universal - it is rather that the style of their attack took on distinct identities. I have not got space to more fully explore this but the 'battle axe' persona of strong, working class women, (a stock theme in most soaps incidentally, Lou Beale, Ena Sharples), was referenced by these 'stropky' working class daughters when they spoke admiringly of their equally 'stropky' mothers. Both Judith and Gina, copied and admired their respective mothers' robust refusals to put up with being put down.

I am invoking these issues here because I think it is vital to 'get into' these overlaps in gender politics produced by different classes/races. If there is to be a sustained challenge to critiquing the oppressive forms which sexual identities take, these details are useful clues.

Offering opportunities to deconstruct the 'obvious', must feature if 'Equal Opportunities' is to connect to the divisions as well as the similarities which pervade all girls' lives. Noting that 'class' style is just that, might be a useful point of departure, in the search for the 'seepage' in femininity which occurs between classes and races.

7. As I write ILEA, has withdrawn a book from its' resources

for schools list : 'Jenny lives with Bob and Martin'.
Giving as the reason that, 'It might be read for the wrong reasons'! This withdrawal has to be understood within a climate in which Dame Jill Knight's ammendment to the Local Government Bill specifically outlaws the 'encouragement' of homosexuality in schools!

8. See the article in Marxism Today 1886/87 as the prime representation of this form of analytics.

9. This complexification is also obviously true of the dynamics of race, which has its' own separate history despite its' integuments within class and gender relations. Lynne Segal provides a helpful summary of the complex theorisations about race, in her review of the fortunes of the socialist feminist project :

'But it has not been easy to make theoretical connections between race, class and sex. Black women themselves are in disagreement. There is even disagreement on how and whether to employ such an obviously complex category as "Black", with its false overtones of a physiological rather than a cultural understanding of "race". Some Black women employ a primarily class analysis of race.....
Others would say that race oppression is

autonomous, distinct from class oppression,
and that it is at least as basic as (or
more basic than), sex oppression in capitalist
and non-capitalist societies.'

Lynne Segal 'Is The Future Female ? : Troubled Thoughts
On Contemporary Feminism.' Virago. (1987) p64.

10. Ros Brunt has a lucid and entertaining account of the
deployment of femininity in facilitating Mrs. Thatcher's
political project, 'Thatcher Uses Her Woman's Touch'.
Marxism Today June 1987 p22-24.

11. In a review of Sue Lees 'Losing Out : Sexuality and
Adolescent Girls', Cynthia Cockburn makes the same
point, in identifying what she sees as an omission
from the text :

'The second thing one misses here is a sense
that young women are in fact economically,
legally and psychically better off today than
they were. The very rawness of the conflict
may be itself a kind of fightback, a renegotiation
of the relationship between young women and young men
now that different, separate and unequal roles are
no longer altogether taken for granted.'

This observation touches upon some of my interpretations of what is going on, though I think it is still extremely difficult to characterise the nature of the struggle in terms which don't either suggest a feminist millenium or masculinist dystopia.

12. For example, I shall not forget in a hurry, the 1st year drama festival I attended, in which the drag act of an 11 year old almost brought the house down. The performance consisted of this young lad, strutting up to the male head of year and giving him a kiss, then de-wigging. de-frocking himself to thunderous applause, wolf-whistles and the loud rejoinder of the staff member concerned.
13. Kurt Theweleit's book, 'Male Sexual Fantasy' is premised on the explicit connection he makes between fascist sensibility and sexual repression.
14. I have not elected to extend my discussion on masculinity further, I sense already that I have 'intruded' it upon the scene, to disrupt the prioritisation of femininity, but as I have claimed, it is a change in masculinity that I am prioritising as a 'solution', to the wilder excesses of masculine practices. It is not that I think critiquing masculinity alone will undo

female oppression, conversely neither do I think that simply addressing the low expectations of working class girls extracted out from a wider awareness of their investments in their identity as wife/mother, will achieve anything like the desired effects. What is called for is a set of educational practices which open up the contradictions already in place within class, race and gender relations. I am particularly drawn to Walkerdine's views with regard to the positioning of girls :

'For example, our education system in its most liberal form treats girls "as if" they were boys. Equal opportunities and much work on stereotyping deny difference in a most punitive and harmful way.The "clever" girl is positioned as though she could and can possess the phallus while she has to negotiate other practices in which her femininity is what is validated.....A denial of the reality of difference means that a girl must bear the burden of anxiety herself'

And she goes on to argue :

'For in fact, it is virtually impossible, in our times at least, for the girl to retain positive identifications in both dimensions (femininity/ cleverness), both of which are necessary to the maintenance of her sense of coherence or identity.

Yet the deleterious effects of non-acknowledged contradictions depend upon a circulation of denials - of difference, power, and desire - within the very practices which regulate and position subjects.

In a sense then, rather than perpetuating the denial operating in the spurious circulation of needs, fulfilment and happiness, a recognition of struggle, conflict, difficulty and pain might actually serve to aid such girls'

V. Walkerdine : 'On the Regulation of Speaking and Silence' in *Language, Gender and Childhood*. eds. Caroline Steedman et al. RKP (1985) p224-5.

Certainly I can see how insightful this is compared to the naiveties perpetuated in the name of equal opportunities.

It also excites me because it touches upon the heart of the this thesis namely : why does it matter so much to girls that they have friends, of which the 'best' is seen as so crucial ?

Her conceptualisation of the production of self-regulating rational (because unsexed, ungendered and unclassed) subjectivity, via the suppression of difference, desire and power - at the cost of individualised painful splitting - as determining of a reactive struggle to achieve identity coherence, is precisely what I take to be a

crucial underpinning to their mirroring investments in each other as one of the conduits of that sense of completion.

In this sense one could say that, 'the company she keeps' is ironically as much about the individual construction of femininity as it is about the social ethnography of cultures of friendship. But perhaps, ultimately the point being that the two of them are, as I have sought to show, inseparable.

15. As I may have mentioned before in another context, the most hurtful punishment I ever received about my own class transgression was that of being called a 'snob' - especially since this message was delivered to me by my erstwhile best friend.

16. I would in retrospect, probably have found a less tangential point of entry into the conceptual field, if I'd have started from the literature on school ethnography, in preference to the work by CCCS. on (sub)cultural studies. This latter departure point was partly determined out of my original (and subsequently reformulated) wish to track what I took from Angela McRobbie's vocabulary as something called 'gender disaffiliation'!

I rather recklessly thought that moments of 'pure' dissent would open out before my very eyes.

Therefore it is not surprising that I went to a model which is predicated upon analysing visible signals of resistance - however, I hadn't quite bargained for the extreme (not to say impossible), difficulties of separating out gender disaffiliation from gender affiliation! I hope to have registered some of that cultural tension in my accounts of female friendship.

17. The Guardian (date uncertain - 1987) had a most interesting article on bullying, which although devoid of a gender component suggest the need to see this a not only a serious social action at the level of individual experience but as the stock in trade of school pupil social relations bearing directly upon an understanding of them as part of the way 'difference' is articulated and dealt with within the pupil nexus.

CHAPTER 9 SOME ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS

1. Bringing it all Back Home.
2. Notes on Notes.
3. The Ferocity of Female Bonding.
4. The Paradoxical Importance of 'Carol' to the Research.
5. Just Good Friends?
6. Schooling the Friendship.

Introduction

In this concluding chapter I draw together the major findings of this research in a way which points forward to new areas of work requiring more investigation. It is schematic, being divided into six elements and these approximate to the major narratives of consecutive chapters.

1. BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

This final chapter brings together in more explicit form the major findings of this work. In doing so it initially returns to an investigation of my own investments in tackling these issues and by tracing my autobiography I show the personal generative source of the two chief concepts with which this thesis first engaged viz. cultures of dissent and female friendship groups.

It is as if in writing out the story of female friendship I reactivated buried truths of my own childhood and family past which subsequently acted as reference points for the current ethnographic data I was uncovering and puzzling over.

Thus if the perceptions I have of the quality, productivity and solidarity of these cultures, remains underplayed it is because I wasn't fully conscious about the significance of these experiences in my own life as a felt subjective truth. It has been through other processes of analysis that I have grasped the pertinence of this material, both for what it says to my own self understanding and about the recursive phenomenal form of feminine bonding.

Early on in this thesis, there is an unresolved tension especially manifest in Chapter 2, between the extensive attention paid to cultures of subcultural dissent only to push it aside with a stern conviction that it was a toy for the boys! One could interject at this point, if I was that convinced about subculture's patriarchal contamination, I could have more fruitfully spent my time discovering more appropriate conceptual models with which to debate.

In part this compulsion to denounce reveals an academic training - dealing with the opposition in order to situate one's own original work and I wouldn't subsequently demur from the judgements contained within this literature review ie. namely that accounts of social reality which fail to address the politics of gender are disinformative.

But what I think is missing from the narrative is a sufficiently strong explicit statement about the attractions of these accounts, not so much in terms of narrative detail but as a framework located in the world of social actors making and contesting meaning about their world ie. the recognition of the power of the cultural spoke volumes to my own experiencing of the transformation of personal class-based expectations primarily through my exposure to a challenging educational cultural process

When Angela McRobbie wrote in 'Feminism for Girls : An Adventure Story' about the culture of 'semi-feminism' created in what she terms as 'the delinquent lower middle class ends of the old grammar and new comprehensive schools' made from the exploration of poetry, social issues and school drama, she connects to the excitement I felt at the vaguely bohemian alternatives which these social forms seemed to represent.

Whilst the milieu she expresses differs from mine significantly on the issue of class, I am invoking a small fragment of my class mates from the working class secondary modern who transferred with me to do O' levels at the local technical college, the breaking of the safety of traditional destinies (of gender or class) certainly took the cultural form. There were new heroines to read about in the literature, to see in the films and to hear about in discussions.

In reaction to these new possibilities it was female peers who established a counter-cultural pull in an attempt to monitor and control what they saw as my deviance from class affiliations being fundamentally committed to rejecting the meritocratic divisiveness which I was so busy to enact.

Thus whilst I might have been fantasising about the attractions of escape (here the beat poets, the plays of Wesker come to mind), I was living out the reality of class/gender intimidation. This took the form of hard justice administered by my then best friend, who delivered to me the verdict that I was becoming a 'snob'. This ostracism was conveyed to me by some of my female classmates through a sequence of sexual insults which echoed throughout the remainder of my time at this college.

It is therefore fascinating and depressing to see how this class/gender symbiosis still functions to police the aspirations of girls. And it is one of the reasons why I have been compelled to think through definitions of class, because like McRobbie argues it is impossible not to see that femininity is so dominant in female subjectivity that class as class is almost obliterated. My struggle to reconceptualise class in girls lives is incomplete and a lot more work needs to be undertaken into the way class and gender identity are constructed and lived in girls and women.

It was this original narrative in my own life felt at the time as an ideologically loaded mixed emotional and relational event featuring explicit class and gender propoganda, (snob, ugly.....etc) counter balanced by the exotic pleasures of new knowledge and the consciousness of academic success.

These twin poles of pleasure/pain vivified in the delight of difference artistic bohemia and a world beyond Rochdale (my first serious boyfriend was a poet - bearded and sandalled too!), co-existing with the anguish of rejection from a dearly loved friend were the original split universe I was consciously and unconsciously musing upon when I entered upon the ethnography.

I was seeking for some way to try and map the struggles of class and gender relations in girls' lives and given that these abstractions were primarily reconstituted for me through the medium of best female friendship, I think I was searching for a way to unlock the power of female bonding as a way into unlocking the power of gender and class in my own history - since the two were remembered by me as emotionally and psychologically indistinguishable

In other words I wanted to know something about the mechanisms and the meanings of my own class disaffiliation and how that process was handled by my peers.

This fascination with female friendship is I think proportionate to the dislocation I suffered in the face of its withdrawal. And conversely the fact that I was prepared to sacrifice these particular bonds in the pursuit of my own ambitions suggest equally an interest in exploring the power of alternatives to secure that transference.

It is in this personal context that I can more easily see why the thesis appears to be looking in two opposing directions (at least at its inception), both towards the solidarities of class based homosocial conformity - and to the promise of more imaginative cultural solutions vis. female friendship and subcultural forms - but I think this writing works through these apparent oppositions to arguments which trade more in the ambiguities of female cultural forms recognising their potential to be a more overtly challenging social force.

This writing out of the hidden agenda of this research point in other directions as well - namely the influence of early female child rearing practices upon the continuing emotional identifications which girls persist in reliving through their homosocial alliances and the ideology of romantic, heterosexual love. I will return to these themes later when I will underwrite what such conclusions suggest as areas for further study. Before that I would like to continue this concluding chapter by expressing in clearer form the process I used in gaining access to the highly excluding and privatised world of female friendship.

2. NOTES ON NOTES.

I noted in chapter 2 and 3 how the research took shape in terms of investigating the cultural meanings of girls' friendship through my observation, of the elaborate and ritualised exchange of notes which flourished unheeded particularly amongst younger girls.

I was again reminded about instances from my past - as a teacher I saw their furtive circulation as minor irritants - now as a researcher they became sources of major importance. When I first spotted them as a constant accompaniment to the lessons and interactions of the girls in 1M/2M I was curious about this hidden means - since I guessed, correctly as it turned out, that it would be an excellent conduit into the secret separate realm of girls' social domain - their small scale dissenting space they had opened out of the public realm of boys/males/authority.

Because I was situated with them - I literally sat next to them in the body of the classroom I used to hear snippets of their talk, glimpses into their worlds a million miles from the formal demands of school life. It was a world dominated by stories of friendship, the incessant discourse was of the girls' importance for other girls and these notes were one of the only means of making visible (for those who could see) this feminine consciousness which had such a hold upon girls' collective imaginations.

These correspondences made manifest one of the main organizing principles of their lives - the making /breaking, retaining, servicing and celebrating of their best friendships. These investments played an especially important part in the social practices of young girls whose claims to each other, being newer, took on a necessarily rawer and more contested form.

My two-pronged research remit, pulling in two apparently competing directions simultaneously towards girls and cultures of gender disaffiliation found a settlement upon the terrain of these notes which acted to stimulate my awareness and understanding of the contradictory vocabulary of these friendships as demonstrating solidarities and divisions. The notes both revealed a culture predicated upon intense homosocial loyalty in which boys were significantly absent and an equally strong sense of their presence in the sense of the presumption and reinstitution of heterosexual norms as working to curtail the fears over the legitimacy of these girl-girl loyalties.

This tension commented upon particularly in my analysis within Chapter 4 echoes the ambiguities of meanings attached to female friendship - it is both lived privately as massively important whilst publically it is comprehensively derided as inferior to male friendship and heterosexual relations. One of the most significant findings of this research has been to specify one girl-made solution to these cultural tensions in their underground practice of note-writing.

A solution through which they can rehearse their own self-defined struggles, privately in their own space and work upon the contradictions between their needs for each other (and to a lesser extent their feelings about boys) and the social messages which compel them towards a form of asexual heterosexuality as 'proper young women'. Given the ambitions of reconciling these pressures the wonder is that they can write their own discourse at all ! No wonder that when it emerges it often crystallises the oppression which prompted its subversive nature in the first place. Chapter 6 is a rich source of the sexual divisiveness which flows from girls' positioning with respect to the patriarchal injunction.

Therefore my hunch that I would find important seeds of female meaning buried in the treasure of these notes proved substantially correct and I don't believe I have even begun to deconstruct other important themes within their narratives. There are more angles to cover, other stories to tell ; about family politics and female subjectivity.

The actual material act of accessing this material followed on quite naturally from my field work practice of participant observation I knew I had arrived sociologically speaking when they even sent one to me

The logistics of recording and trying to retrieve these transactions involved my making copious and detailed notes for each lesson often as the business was going on underneath my eyes.

I tried to identify the chief correspondents, the number of individual pieces of communication and the eventual outcome of the exchange. My field notes are full of entries like the following ;

English Lesson 7-8 May 20th 1985.

Note 6. From Saskia to Erin. 16 items in all put into bin at end of the lesson * Must remember to retrieve if I can.

I had to overcome (as I mention in the main thesis), a certain squeamishness about firtling around in litter bins, partly out of hygiene considerations but also because I'd already been carrying the burden of being a suspect person - sociologists are not school teachers' favourites. Stories of my fixation upon the detritus of waste paper bins would not have aided my credibility.

Nevertheless I persisted since I became so intrigued by the hidden world opened out in these notes - for here was the written story of girl' very private lives sustained against the official domination of the public space of classrooms by boys/males and authority. I wanted to know more and garner as many of them as I could.

To this end I didn't go 'public' on the importance of these to my work on girls' lives - I didn't therefore tell the girls or speak to them of this matter until late into the time at the Eastfax school.

I didn't want to risk drying up the supply, but when I had obtained enough evidence subversively I felt it safe to broach the subject with the girls and a few teachers I had by then come to trust. Then girls volunteered to show me some they'd kept in cupboards, told me of their memories of notes they'd either sent or received. Teachers helped by handing over to me notes they'd found after lessons and the girls themselves talked to me in some detail of their preference for this form of contact.

All of which confirmed my earliest impression that these seemingly innocuous narratives told intriguing private stories creating a storehouse of collective meanings about what it is to be a friend and how that preoccupation takes shape as an essential continuity of relational identifications within female subjectivity.

3. THE FEROCITY OF FEMALE BONDING

The sense in which this major finding still surprises me testifies to the power of the ideology of male supremacy to surpress the social realities of female social relations. There is a commitment in this work to insist upon female-centredness whilst all the time situating the specifics of female experience within the relations of sex, class and race antagonisms. This necessity impacts upon the style of the work I believe, to produce rather defensively expressed conclusions just as girls' subordination to boys produces defensiveness within their own homosocial cultures. In part this tendency is reinforced by my own narrative style which is a discursive approach strongly descriptive in character impelled by a determination to engage the reader in an imaginative identification with the 'characters' in the 'plot'. This literary mode is the chosen means whereby I work through the conceptual themes.

The thesis moves forward through the 'story-line' which elaborates the connections and the perceptions which are drawn into the process of writing in an incremental and exploratory fashion.

Working this way sometimes results in these valuable conclusions being almost thrown away remarks, insufficiently located or amplified they are sometimes left there within the wealth of narrative detail. A major aim of this final chapter is to remedy this inconclusiveness by affirming the significance of the central outcomes of my work on girls.

It is necessary at this point to remind the reader of the scope of my initial hypothesis which I will abbreviate to the term - the ferocity of female bonding. I speculated that this need for a continuity of feminine attachment originated in mother/daughter identification which is then subsequently re-enacted in girls best-friendships and takes another (heterosexual) form in the investments they bring to romantic love and marriage.

I would now like to make an even stronger claim for this fashioning of female subjectivity in a female relational matrix, namely that it gives girlhood a qualitatively different dimension significantly absent from how boys are inscribed into ways of doing their masculinity. And a crucial aspect to this female specific dimension is the emotional facility girls show in getting close to other girls.

This human expressive capacity is brutally suppressed in young males, leading to a form of deprivation which paradoxically impels them to demand that from females but as this need is assumed unmasculine weakness boys/men have immense investments in extracting it from girls in the privacy of possessive forms of love.

They thus have an overwhelming stake in sustaining the ideologies and practices of a sex/gender system premised on the polarities of feminine/masculine. Cynthia Cockburn in a recent edition of *Marxism Today* calls for ;

'A change of structure.....a breaking out of the complementarity in which the gender order has us straight-jacketed.....Men as lovers of strong women, men who are not afraid of "mother", nor afraid to "mother", and for whom other men are as likely to fill the need for emotional support and softness of touch as women are.'

A process which she argues has to be fundamentally built upon a remaking of male subjectivity which has no investment in dividing itself from what it so deeply desires but fears.

The fetishistic nature of the encounter of the genders in heterosexual romantic love is structured therefore directly out of girls' experience of intimacy coupled problematically with boys' inexperience of the same.

It is this clash of values which I believe produces a uniquely mystified institution. I have argued elsewhere about the nature of what girls bring to these relations (See *The Necessity of Romance* 1982) but what I failed to register at the time was the genesis of this romanticism.

And this is partly because as females we are encouraged to see relations with other females in deficit terms, as inferior versions of the 'real' business of relating to males. This downgrading thus makes it very difficult to read continuities in girls' lives for what they are - tenacious celebrations of female rights and delights in intimacy which are female generated.

Obviously there are other accounts to consider here as useful resources to push this hypothesis further. I draw upon both the work of Valerie Walkerdine and Janet Sayers reclamation of aspects of Melanie Klein's analysis to show points of connection between their concerns. I think that useful insights would follow from a more sustained engagement with both sources.

In many respects I went to the more allusive suggestions contained within their material rather than the more instantly compatible conceptual frame offered by the work of Nancy Chodorow. Her work, especially with regard to the symbiotic nature of mother/daughter identifications exactly replicates in the psychological domain my findings about the social. Thus I would suggest future work could begin by a return to her as a useful point of departure.

Similarly the complex issue of how girls police their love of each other, out of fear that this love is impermissibly sexual - could be reconsidered in the context of the important remark about 'Carol's practice - ie. her 'need' to experience love as legitimating her sexual desires. Is she conning ?. Is the taboo on active female sexuality working to launder desire through its hygienic association with the more acceptable notion of female devotion (with its connotations of 'being out of control', irrational, not responsible for one's actions and so on) a coding so identifiable with the stereotype of femininity as to arouse suspicions that these are the only terms under which girls/women can be sexual!

If love is so loaded in female subjectivity as sex by another mystified name then homosocial love presents girls with a real challenge. Couldn't we see female heterosexuality in this context as a defence against homosexual desire between females ? This may not be so bizarre a thought, certainly we need some new seriousness in trying to understand the puzzling fact of girls' continual attraction to the unremitting awfulness of young males. Why do we keep taking up the heterosexual position at all.?

I now turn to reconsider the significance of Carol to the research, underlining how her distinctness actually confirms the thrust of my argument with respect to the value of female/female affiliation.

4. THE PARADOXICAL IMPORTANCE OF 'CAROL' TO THE RESEARCH.

In so many ways Carol stands in total contradiction to my whole thesis about homosocial identity- she is a heterosexual loner standing apart from the world of girls. She is as likely to 'use' girls in much the same way that she 'uses' boys. The important difference is of course her sexual activity - unplanned pregnancies and state or male dependency are likely (and evidenced) results.

It is precisely her singularity as disconnected from the world of successful female relationships - her mother, her female teachers and friends which gives her heterosexual 'choice' such a negative dimension. She appears to have given up on this other homosocial relational root - (or it has given up on her) producing a condition of even more dependency on what the world of men can offer. And when she enters this territory as a sexual entrepreneur (without sufficient protection literally and metaphorically) she does so without the benefit of other disinterested counsel. The fact that she has to invent a good 'fairy' in the form of her idealised aunt speaks volumes to her experience of loss of that gender bonding.

It is in her uniqueness (not in absolute but relative terms) that Carol's story illuminates the strengths of girls' location in homosocial dyadic solidarity. Carol has no access to consistent female support and she is thus denied the benefits of how these work as mediating and managing the difficulties and attractions of the heterosexual world.

Carol's deprivation of a female network leaves her as I claim, to invest all of her needs for self-esteem in male relations - and if I have concentrated upon these aspects of her life it does reflect the truth of her positioning as a 'hard' heterosexual girl. Indeed although I don't mention it in the main body of the text, the word hard is perhaps speaking to that necessity which girls have to embrace who have actually gone the whole heterosexual hog. If they are compelled into heterosexuality as the **only** route to relational connections their 'hardness' might be the protective means which allows them to defend themselves from accusations of 'slag'. These tough cookies then, of course, are seen to 'earn' the attribution by virtue of the style designed as a defence. Certainly as I hinted in Chapter 5 we need to know much more about the brutalising of young working class girls. My views about the origins of Carol's manners are beginnings in that direction.

In the way in which she seems to occupy the centre of the argument I think this owes a great deal to my perplexity in the face of her 'big' unfeminine/femininity. A style so characteristic of the girls who haunted me at my school, whose antagonism to my 'swottish goodness' provoked in me a determination never to offend them.

Carol, apart from being in the here and now, was also like a ghost from my pubescence - a reminder of all those girls who terrified me into quiet subservience and against whom I measured myself (literally - they all seemed to have ample busts) and found myself wanting in femininity.

It is as if I was trying to understand what it was like to live cleverness/conformity in opposition to sexuality/truancy because it was these oppositions which mapped out my schooling too.

Carol's persona as independent and intimidating whilst also fully locked into the dependency/passivity demanded by her boyfriends reactivated memories of my own contradictory experiences too. A double - edged recognition that whilst envying the powerful heterosexual popularity of such girls I also knew at some level about its conditional and oppressive circumstances. An awareness which then fed into my attraction to the asexual realm of academic achievement.

In drawing these conclusions about Carol together I think it is important to repeat that we need far more evidence of how class and gender destinies are taken forward by working class girls in their search for self worth and social power. And it is through these routes that new meanings about class and gender can be generated.

5. JUST GOOD FRIENDS ?

In Chapters 6 and 7 I showed that the social and personal benefits of investing in other girls, particularly one's best friend functions as a social mini-institution which mediates a host of other social relations - boys' homophobia, girls' and boys' class, sex and race antagonisms. And I also argued that it is naive to understand female friendship as a 'good thing' as if it somehow represented a transcendent social form free from these divisions because my work shows in explicit form the existence of girls' deep implication in the elaboration of oppressive practices.

This is an unpalatable truth to accept when heterosexual culture is evidencing severe and continuing dissatisfaction with the state of men, and marriage. Nevertheless there is still some grounds for optimism, for despite the existence of inter-girl competitiveness important and surviving qualities are being expressed between best friends which offer a glimpse of what equal relationships could look like. It is in these that we see the possibility of reciprocity with a pertinent message for how relations between the genders could be.

However the salient thing to recollect is the need to read the particular dynamics of friendship as an embattled and marginalised social form, whose essential conditions of existence of subordination constructs its nature as privatised, defensive and fractured - the one solidity being the connectedness to another girl. And even this core has to struggle against the controlling imperative of heterosexual prescriptiveness.

Boys' insistent fear of the institution of female friendship is partly produced out of an envy about their exile from such warmth whilst being confined to the ranks of the 'strong'. It is this experience of being marooned spectators of girls intimacies which gives adolescent male cultures their endemic phallogentric homophobia. It is girls' homosociality which in part contributes to boys' alienation from them and from each other.

Much more needs to be said about about how boys are each others' friends. I know of no work which specifically focuses on boyhood as it is lived in the company of other boys. It really is time to begin to unpack the nature of male personal relationships to see if my claim of it as fundamentally individualistic (cf. to girls as dualistic) in nature are confirmed.

Equally the implications of my reading of girls friendships groups as rich in class, gender and race meanings carries a great deal of scope for future development. I am particularly aware that Chapter 7 just glimpses some of the more obvious elements of middle class gender consciousness. We need to know a great deal more about this matter and conversely how working class girls understand their differentiation from these girls. I think that it is this level of the personal and inter personal which can give us access to how different groups of girls live the realities of power and powerlessness by providing concepts which meet their criteria of meaningfulness. I think both Chapter 6 and 7 act as pointers in this direction, enabling other work to build upon this preliminary base.

6. SCHOOLING FRIENDSHIP.

I have argued that female friendship has to be understood as produced out of a psychological and a social compulsion for same sex sharing whilst also expressing a set of social antagonisms which ensure that the desired intimacy is delimited to this exclusive best friend bond.

Reading off policy implications directly from these findings is bound to produce a rather clumsy argument, which I think is the case with my attempt to do so in Chapter 8. However I want to persist in making the attempt because I do think there are policy implications to my conclusions.

I think that the difficulty of matching the nuances of the personal with the bigger concerns of the institutional mainly responsible for the top heavy nature of the case put in Chapter 8. I will try in this section to restate my concerns in a more digestible form.

The prime issue as far as the following case goes is the necessity of raising the status of the personal in the school curriculum. Indeed I see it as one of the only ways to insert Equal Opportunities concerns into a school ethos.

EO has to engage with the direct realities of student lives and that means locating the debate so as to open up their subjective understandings of their experience.

Imposing pre-determined teacher made and hence authoritarian models of EO upon the complex and volatile terrain of students' social relations simply mindedly reduces the chance of affecting anything at all except in a negative and harmful way. The timely reminder of this fact is one of the main findings of the leaked details from the McDonald Report into Racism in Manchester Schools which comprehensively denounced as an unmitigated disaster the race -awareness model of tackling racism. ie. it is a model which assumes all white people as equally racist and upon this confrontational assertion posits a form of moral tutelege to expunge this. Its importance to my argument is in demonstrating the excesses which the ideological can produce when it is not underpinned by an investigation of the personal. Thus the white boys at Burnage who had previously made friendships with Asian boys felt themselves as equally vilified for their racism as those boys who held National Front like views, leading to an increase in racial antagonism out of which the murder of Abdul Ullah arose.

My claim is to reverse this process and rather than compel students to fit the external constraints of an ideology of equality, we should fit the ideology of equality to mesh with how they experience inequalities in their lives. And we have to begin by asking them rather than assuming we know the answers.

For example we can begin with all girl groups to investigate with them their reasons for the choice of a particular friend and the reason for the loss of friendship.

Out of this sort of enquiry flows all sorts of possibilities for political narrative to be constructed in such a way that it makes sense to its subjects.

Obviously this investigation of the personal needs sensitive handling and a firm focus that does not confuse educational purposes with prurience nor student-centredness with voyeurism. The point is not to know more about the students' personal lives per se but to enable students to know more about their own, as they are encouraged to reflect upon how their own friendships exist in relation to other antagonisms.

This line of enquiry is not meant as a comprehensive account of an EO initiative but it should form an essential first basis for opening out and recognising the political nature of female friendship. All girl discussions which bring female friendship out of the closet would, I believe, constitute a revolutionary commitment on the part of educators to helping girls work through their taken for granted valuation of these relations. The main point of it being to extend support to girls whilst also enabling them to more effectively support rather than compete against each other.

This thesis whilst it isn't specifically addressed to teachers, nor policy makers does nevertheless question the nature of school cultures - primarily recommending that staff think again about the management of female friendship. Rather than seeking to characterise it as deviant on the basis of their having to pick up the pieces when it breaks down, they could begin to conceive of it in more valuing and positive ways.

I have sought to convince the reader that it is indeed possible to read it as a highly cherished relation testifying to girls demands for same sex understanding despite the unsympathetic surveillance of males, and the world of authority.

Their continuing struggle to make these connections ought to merit some recognition that they reveal an important set of social needs unmet elsewhere. Credit should be given to the positive values shown, rather than these bonds being discredited.

The major rationale for this whole research initiative has been to attribute some of this credit without idealizing this cultural expression of femininity. It is up to other researchers to develop new themes to take our understanding further, through contesting or extending the arguments outlined in this work.

APPENDIX A

Contents.

- a. 'Wally Watching ?' Trying to Participantly Observe
at Eastfax's Comprehensive School.

- b. Welcome to Crossfil's B School.

- a. 'Wally Watching ?' Trying to Participantly Observe
at Eastfax's Comprehensive School.

March 1985

In C school, mixed comprehensive with ambitions to track through :
1. a 4th year non-academic class and 2. A fifth year group of
academically oriented girls. Severe difficulties in finding such
a consistent set of groups ie. these groups fragment and each girl
pursues an individual timetable according to options and ability
ie. setting and streaming both occur within the post 1st year
environment.

But fixed up to 'shadow' the fifth form 'trio' for the time being.
Met the infamous Sandra J who was supposed to be both an absolute
contrast to Suzy et al. and my entree into the non-academic groups.
Got on well I thought, though I should have realised that the signs
were not propitious when, in response to my question as to how she
and her friends spent their leisure, she told me of their favourite
past-time of 'wally watching' at the local art's centre. Anyone who
has this view about the voyeuristic pleasures of sociological
observation is going to be no pushover when she is targetted as its'
subject. No wonder I was given the 'big E'.

Meantime continued 'watching' the fifth form trio and their cohorts in class and began interviewing them at breaks and chatting to them generally in games lessons.

Back to the drawing board about the working class girls.

May 1985

Decided to try a third year class . Made contact with Mrs M who was sympathetic and helpful in giving me access to her tutor group, comprising about 10 boys and 6 girls. Of below average ability as assessed at primary school and also containing a couple of demotees from the higher streams who'd been placed there on the basis of 'attitude'. Tremendous level of absenteeism here and a range of social deprivation and difficulty associated with children in remedial groups. I was made fairly welcome by the girls who took some time to make contact. Their low self esteem echoed in the assumptions of the robust physics master who, on hearing that I was engaged in monitoring 3G, merely said :
'You'd get more response from a brick wall. The best of luck !'
A sarcasm which was augmented by the sardonic tones revealed in the deputy head's equally sceptical treatment of my request in the school bulletin :

Item 411 : I HAVE NOT FOUND SO GREAT FAITH, NO, NOT IN
ISRAEL.

In pursuit of her research into Further Aspects of
Femininity, VH will be observing 3G.....etc.

Despite this I persevered and managed to get to know these third years who also introduced me to their friends in games lessons or at break. I followed their full timetable as far as practicalities permitted for approximately two months, and I still maintained contact and conversations with them after I moved on to do some PO work with IM.

In this month I also made a good ally in the school nurse whose information network about the girls was so strong and whose own style was so sympathetic. Just as some of the depressed and unhappy girls could use her room as a 'safe haven' so could I 'borrow it' to do my tapings. She seemed to understand, like few teachers did, the need for girls only territory in school. Her kindness was a godsend to them and to me.

It was with the girls of 3G that the importance of 'fantasy' was demonstrated in their tremendous resourcefulness in livening up a dull day. These low achieving girls managed to conduct the most amazingly complex social interactions in which they switched language use with gay abandon ; moving into the requirement of the task in hand, then slipping off into a public account of their viewing habits, their plans for the weekend, their favourite songs all woven into 'lessons'. I think Joyce's 'stream of

consciousness' technique was honed on listening to such girls.

Made another 'friend' too, a newly appointed deputy head, she and I were both 'strangers across (several) crowded rooms'

In this month there had been a 'serious' incident reported in the park adjacent to the school. A man had exposed himself to several groups of girls and some boys.

Some ructions within the girls' network of 3G, involving Doreen who was punched up by a fourth year for spreading sexual gossip. Doreen has to have some time off. Amy is called a 'splitter' by Maureen. I never did discover the cause of this, nor the reason why Dottie spent the whole of one lesson in tears. (except that it was an issue of friendship) Dot and Maureen tell me they have heard that there are pictures of themselves around the school. One break they set off to try to erase them. Maureen's high 'popularity' makes her very confident with boys. She has a 'steady' who she visits out of London, this boy forms the content of a lot of their 'unofficial' classroom chatter.

My first encounter with Carol who is feigning injury with a heavily bandaged leg. So I am the one doing rounders with 3G and she is watching me. Also met Amelia and her best friend Gabbie and Candy from the 3H group.

Heard the story of S from 3G who was alleged by all the girls to have a very bad 'reputation'. She has now left the school.

I begin to think that the high absenteeism of this group militates against my project. Their ingenuity knows no bounds, Dottie took time off in the past to nurse her sick grandmother, and decides unilaterally to apply this same principle to Amy, another classmate, who is 'sick', so she leaves school to attend to her.

Maureen has opted out of school at times with the full permission of her parents to get 'the really useful knowledge' in her case, obtained from helping out at a car hire firm.

Made moves to build on my increasing interest in finding out how the young girls operated in school situation. From conversations with KS. 1M's tutor, I arranged to commit some of my time to seeing if these girls were more 'available' to me ie. being less likely to truant. Also as a first year mixed ability form they had nearly all their classes together so I could get into their relational worlds and have more time with a fairly consistent set of pupils. As a true mixed class they offered a lively and interesting bunch of children.

June 1985

Began my detailed PO study of 1M, saw the 'passion for friendship' at close quarters. Began to plot out the structures of friendship which are so germinal in girls' school existences. Thought again about the seeming universality of it as a phenomenal form. Looked

at the 'notes' which told its' story and tried hard not to be seen fishing them out of the litter bins. Began to track the shifts within their friendships and the ethics which governed its' domain.

Became aware of how soon into a secondary school career, girls become subjected to 'heterosexualisation' through their subordination to their male peers judgements. Saw how this subordination was realised and expressed in girls' poor opinion of the value of their own bodies, simultaneously noted that the girls who had high self esteem in this regard did so because of the general perception of their 'popularity' and that this was taken by them in some measure as 'compensation' for their low academic status. This is one way class values articulate with patriarchal powers. (cf. Jean Anyon in 'Intersections of Gender and Class : Accomodation and Resistance by Working Class and Affluent Females to Contradictory Sex-Role Ideologies' in Gender, Class and Education Walker, S. and Barton, L. Falmer Press (1983)

Made notes on the 'absolutism' of pre-pubescent male cultures.
Began taping the girls in IM in respect of their interests.

Saw the increasing marginalisation of Saskia despite her strenuous efforts to 'belong'.

July 1985

Saw more of Carol whose family politics and the management thereof

would have necessitated full concentration. No wonder school was a 'luxury'.

Took time to tape another trio in the school grounds, several consolidating observations made by the 3C girls on the value of their bonding and on their views about female 'jealousy'. Also noted their rather unusual relationship to the 6th form boys with whom they had a semi-flirtacious friendship.

Impact of exam results upon those girls in IM who were known to be academically weak and vice versa. To Irene and Sonia, Tamara and Olga were 'snobs' and 'swots'. Other divisions within girls created by the imperatives of being thought by boys as 'acceptable' hence Natalie and Laura's disavowal of Michelle expressed principally in terms of her bodily immaturity.

The 'battle for Erin' in Samantha's absence. Saskia making a bid and failing. The intersection of Anna's and Saskia's relationship with their shared investments in being Laurence's 'girl-friend'

Discussed Laura's boyfriends with her.

Discovered Carol's penchant for older boys and saw the way she dealt with the younger ones ie. her peers.

Several conversations with female staff including a senior female deputy and other female subject teachers.

Conversations with Head about the school ethos and the staff scenario. Alluded to the historical origins of the institution as still having a discernible impact upon the ambience.

Girls' wilful ignoring of the most sexist discourse of one of the newcomers to the class.

The new boy's rivalry for class top dog.

The IM network of girl alliances as both inflexible and flexible.

YEAR TWO Academic year 1985-86.

September 1985

The movements within 2M in terms of additions and deletions to personnel. The chief shift from my point of view was the removal and demotion of Laura to another form.

Several rendezvous with the sixth form trio and Carol and her friends which in the latter case seemed to consist principally of fall outs and melodramatic showdowns.

Became involved in PD aspect of the curriculum courtesy of KS who allowed me in to participate and to observe in a series of fourth form 'Moral Education' classes.

Some 2M girls 'fancying' Dominic as a collective activity. His 'shyness' being recognised.

Taping with Amelia, Gabbie, Aileen and Pamela fourth years.

Getting to know Maria and Amy and Melly, the latter two from 3G now in 4G.

Invited to Samantha's flat along w^yth most of the girls from 2M.

Involved in games lessons with all the second year girls.

October 1985

Reconnection to the sixth form again, continuing some PO and some taping work.

The big 'showdown' between Anna and Natalie versus Saskia.

Fourth yer^a girls 'attacking' Ronnie 'the blob'.

Carol's 'hardness' of the lone status of girls in Mandy Llewellyn's work. (Note 6) * See Chpt 1.

Michaela and Lulu (fourth years) and their management of heterosexual relations and identity.

Saskia's 'illness' as psychosomatic ?

A teacher has asked that I no longer continue to come into the class as he prefers to work without an adult present. The Head has asked to see me. I've been advised to end my PO work. I remind him of our 'contract' and he says he can not give permission for me to take girls out of the class to interview. There are so many occasions when they have been sent home as part of the teachers' action that he says the parents will not want their daughters to

miss any more schooling. He has no objection to my talking to them in their own time and we leave the arrangement very ambiguous - I do this to safeguard the access I've got and the rapport which has been accomplished between me and the girls so far. I thought I'd risk jeopardising all that if I pushed the matter further. So I think that what we have cobbled together as a compromise is my continuing presence within school but only in those lessons where I have proof positive that I am accepted by the staff. Thus I have been seen to publically disappear if privately I can carry on in the previous manner. This makes for my continuing anxiety that the fieldwork rug (if that's at all possible) is about to be pulled from under my sociological feet! I have decided to make the best of a bad job and to exploit those areas within the school that have welcomed me so far.

Like the girls I have developed a reliance upon 'friends' who are in basic sympathy to me and my work from these sources I persist in PO work on a slightly reduced scale and make the most of the girls being evacuated at lunch times to off school premises, I make it my duty to be with them and to ask questions about their changing lives. By this time into my work I am welcomed into a whole range of mixed groupings. It was here that the Pond Cafe venue came into it's own. Here I rendezvoused with : Carol, Liz, Michaela, Melly, Candy, Gabbie and Amelia, Dottie and a whole host of other 3, 4 and 5th year girls.

The head has 'arranged' for me to go to another school since he is very friendly with the acting deputy head of a sister school. I

have no objection to this. Spent some time recomposing research access proposal to avoid the misunderstandings of the first one.

November 1985

Back into C school after a couple of weeks off for tape transcribing. Felt just like a 'naughty girl' on the periphery and truanting. KS from 2M had phoned me up on behalf of her class to ask where I was. I explained about the temporary withdrawal. She said I was more than welcome in her classes. Ditto for KR, and the other PE staff and some other teachers. At this point Carol was my great 'sponsor'. I could always arrange to see her and her friends in unoffical and official time.

Tape 8 with Suzy and Barbara.

Several tapes with 2M.

December 1985

Still tracking 2M in several environments, picking up on Saskia's increasing alienation from the class and the impact of several newcomers within the girls - ie. Clara and Kay.

I decide to ask for a week's diary from all the girls I've got to know really well. I also devised four type of questionnaires to

elicit information from the fourth year in C school and the 2M
tutor group.

b. Welcome to Crossfil's B School

January 1986

Began my field work at Crossfil's B school. Met the senior female staff who were to be my contacts and the other members of staff.

Was also tactfully introduced to the girls in an assembly.

Met Judith and her friends and her teachers. Was her shadow for a whole week : going with her to her friend's house in lunch time and out of school at breaks. Even into the hallowed sanctuary of the girls' toilets for the proverbial 'quick fag'. Throughout the week I was made very welcome and they were very easy to talk to, being so secure amongst themselves, about their own values and friendship. Began to see that a lot of this constructed from the solidarity with each other over 'common sense' notions of boys' unreliability and less attractively from their 'whiteness' which was one of their principal points of identification against which the Asian girls were said to be 'boffins' and conformist and the West Indian girls were cited as 'sexually loose'. This racist position was undercut both by their own past friendship with

several black girls and their recent enjoyment of the company of many back boys from the nearby all boys school who they used to meet in summer at the local park.

In terms of negotiating a front - altogether a less defensive situation for me to manage. The topic ie. femininity and girls their stock in trade. I make explicit the contract as having no 'payoff' to school and they seem to accept that. A firmer awareness that girls' informal concerns are very important. The school and I seemed to share more of a common language. Extremely helpful to me in arranging for girls' availability and anxious to ask the girls' permissions too.

Altogether I have learned a lot from the first 'contract' negotiation at the tactical level and tried to prevent the inevitable ambiguities from damaging the relationship between me and the institution.

Just like Carol, the girls seem to generally and actively like school - it's just that they liked their own time better! They seemed to have a basically non-antagonistic attitude to school and the senior staff were personally non-antagonistic to them, even if they went through the form of sending out absentee reports etc. The issue of 'boredom' was the biggest deterrent to their full time attendance at school.

Continued taping sixth form trio at C school and collecting the diaries.

February 1986

Involved in the major task of transcription of taped material so far.

Continued my presence at Crossfil's school : taping and meeting up with Judith's friends at breaks and lunch times. Also on their unofficial off school site rendezvous at the local cafe or in each other's nearby houses.

March 1986

Continued at Crossfil, distributed questionnaires and progressing with my taping sessions with combinations of Judith and her friends. The teachers' dispute had an impact here too, with the staff very committed to the local action.

At Eastfax's C school learnt from KS of the shifts and changes within 2M. A new mood of the girls getting older. Olga to move to another school and Saskia contemplating a transfer to a private boarding school.

Carol cornered me and offloaded all her 'dramas' : she's taking more and more time out of school. I learnt later that Carol was suspended for truancy!

Signed off from B school, collected questionnaires and other material.

Signed off from C school ditto.

Appendix B

The 'Two Katy's Note'

Introduction.

The text is copied below, it is impossible to render it all as it was originally done as with all the notes, and spelling and aspects of punctuation have been standardised to aid understanding. The commentary follows.

I received it from a teacher, who was both sympathetic to the girls and to the nature of my work. She found it on the floor after one of her lessons and she was able to identify the girls concerned as two fourth year best friends.

Here in the letter are the voices of frightened and dependent, not to say manipulative 'child' and consoling 'mother', anxious to assert herself in opposition to the insistent demands of the clinging child. (Note 1) And as I have argued before it is these voices which do the work of carrying the same more problematic emotions which exist between female best friends too.

Voice 1

Item 1. Hello Katy. How are you ?

Voice 2

Item 2. I'm Ok. Don't you just reckon he would be
so sexy in an annoyed mood.?

Voice 1

Item 3. Please Please Please Please with cherries and
ice cream on top will you stay at Emma's tonight.

Voice 2

Item 4. No No No No with a great big fat flying terd on
top

Voice 1

Item 5. Well bye because I am going to Rye tonight see
you on Monday.

Voice 2

Item 6. Ok, Katy. Bye
Why must I ?

Voice 1

Item 7. Because I don't want to stay wthout you because
I get home sick and I always wet the bed.

Voice 2

Item 8. Not to worry. I'll phone you up and sing you lullabies 'til you fall asleep and I'll buy you a portable potty with your favourite Donald Duck on the front.

Voice 1

Item 9 Katy please I can't live without you. I might have nasty nightmares if you're not there to hold my hand.

Voice 2

Item 10 You'll survive without me just for one littley bittley nightie wightie.

Voice 1

Item 11. I am staying at your house on Saturday because if I don't you will be a gooseberry.....

The 'text' disintegrates at this point into a series of doodles, in which the words dad, Katy and Katie woz 'ere, staying, staying, Katy oh, oh, yes are plastered all over the end of the sheet of paper. In terms of 'content analysis' I've no means of knowing who the male is in item 2, or indeed what particular situation item 11 refers to. It seems to allude to a three girl stop over, since it is very hard to imagine a heterosocial invite to stay

the night. The use of the word 'gooseberry' with its' meaning of the heterosexual surplus to requirement, is interestingly re-applied to girls' networks. (You may recollect its' usage by Erin's, mentioned in Chapter 3)

What concerns me in looking at this sequence is not so much the actual empirical realities to which these coded jottings refer but the form in which these girls choose to express their dependency needs to each other.

The discourse of a dependent 'child' is the elected and regressive mode which sanctions their claims on each other - though because these claims are ^{at this stage experien} _{as} inevitably unequal they are also conducted through the other element in this narrative, namely that of the all powerful 'mother', whose resistance to the persistent demands of her 'child' is expressed in her determination to struggle for, and insist upon, some sort of separate space whilst still accepting the responsibility for the naughty 'daughter' (item 8). The manipulative 'child' uses the whole range of devices to hold her errant 'mother' : including the following :

item 5 - a statement of her own 'autonomy'.

item 7 - induced sickness - loss of control which induces her fear, requiring maternal consolation.

item 9 - nightmares.

item 11 - insistence upon her own rights.

A range of emotional/physical responses which in their combination of voluntary/involuntary constituents will be extremely familiar to most mothers (and daughters too!).

According to their teacher, both girls are inseparable and yet no doubt this dependency whilst obviously pleasurable (cf. Amelia's comments which opened ~~this~~⁴ chapter), also has its' irksome side.

As Suzy noted, the price of commitment is dependency and when that commitment is strained by the pressures of heterosexual involvement (in the case of Barbara and David) or other needs for more girl friends (as in Saskia's case) or by virtue of the fact that the material world impinges to curtail friendship - in the form of the need to earn money, do homework, or take notice of the seasonal regulations of hours of daylight (Note 2), then a struggle ensues.

Suzy's reaction, to the pain of jealousy, was to tutor herself in the need for less dependency - just as the struggle 'revealed'/(concealed) within the 'Two Katy's' material is for some autonomy as well as wishing to hold onto the fun/power which having someone depend on you can bring.

To summarise, my argument is, that because the prohibition upon homosexuality for both genders is so comprehensive - not withstanding the fact that it is even more stringently applied in male adolescent cultures, this taboo polices (in gender-differentiated forms), homosocial passionate dependencies within girls' cultures so that the relationship is frequently

'pathologized' as 'lesbian'; leading to girls' complex difficulties in expressing all of the experiences which flow from close bonds, viz. pleasures and irritations but that these 'unspeakable' indications find an outlet within the displaced discourses of displaced discourses ie. within their private correspondences in which they write of bad/good mothering (or in the spoken language of the same) or as sections^{a/ Chapter 4} b_λ showed within the even more stigmatised language of pornography.

At least the good mothering persona allows the girls to accept the caring aspects of this role in terms of the language of affectionate warmth/nurturance etc and in so doing celebrate its' continuance between females. Because, if you note, the only time that best friends addressed the issue of 'desire' between them without the safety of maternalising it, the taboo on women's bodies aligned with the equally effective taboo on female homosexuality combined to construct an act of female sexual intimacy as so (irrevocably) dirty that its threat has to be hurriedly dumped onto the convenient proximity of one's enemies.

Notes.

1. Cf. The arguments in Carolyn Steedman's commentary upon the identical preoccupations of young junior school girls - what she terms in her interpretation of the narrative of young working class girls' stories as 'the getting and regretting of children'. 'The Tidy House' Feminist Review 6 1981 (Virago)

2. Viv. Griffiths has a similar observation about girls' social availability in her paper 'Adolescent Girls : Transition from Girlfriends to Boyfriends' BSA 1986 p9.

Eloise and many other girls confirmed this for me.

APPENDIX C

'DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS : GIRLS, BOYS, SEX EDUCATION AND THE SEXUAL STATUS QUO'

Girls have much less access to a public culture in which it is permissible to acknowledge in a positive way their bodies, to learn about its' functions and to accept its' particularities.

One girl at C school, as recorded to me by the school nurse, thought that she was developing breast cancer, when she was actually developing breasts! The lack of a language in which to speak about female genitalia, which has not already been hi-jacked by patriarchal definitions is powerfully implicated in the production of fear, guilt and self-hatred on girls' part. Girls' characterisation of their bodies is steeped in an imprecision and a distaste borne out of this ignorance and fear : so much so that 'down below' is invariably linked in their imaginations and subjectivities with 'dirtiness'.

Boys' active surveillance of girls' bodies also works to reproduce female subordination and male dominance. Considerations of time and space and narrative focus have precluded my developing a more substantial engagement with the many aspects of this masculinity in action, of particular significance to the arguments contained in this appendix is the extensive existence of a taken for granted culture of sexual harassment, of which sexist abuse as well as sexual interference plays a material part. The evidence of this is too vast to detail, I want instead to substantiate the case about the mysogyny of schools by the citation of one document which although not produced in response to a scenario at any of the schools I've studied, could nevertheless stand as an apt encapsulation of school pupils' sexual politics. It is printed below as a contribution to the case I am making for the opening out of the gender curriculum and to show just what level of intervention, (focussed on the nature of masculine identity and feminine sexuality no less!), which has to be addressed if there is to be a successful challenge to the nature of the oppressive behaviour which is inscribed in the space between the two.

This was given to me by a friend working in another London mixed comprehensive when she learnt about the sort of things that my own reseaches were uncovering :

It is a memo distributed to all the school staff by the female head of the second year. It is I believe self-explanatory :

Sexual Harassment in 2 X.

TO ALL MEMBERS OF STAFF FOR INFORMATION AND
CONSIDERATION.

TO ALL TEACHERS OF 2X FOR ACTION

Background Information

The week before half term a deputation of four girls of 2X came to the staff room to see me. They had been sent on behalf of all the girls in the class to complain about the constant harassment that they have received from a group of five boys in their class for the past 1 and a half years. Practically every girl in the class was hit every day, such that they would club together to run between lessons to reach the relative safety of the next lesson. Under the guise of 'borrowing' they have had their pens, rulers etc taken on a regular basis often to be broken. Many of the girls facing this level of harassment spoke of not wishing to come to school in the mornings. The next level of harassment has been the 'touching up' of a number of girls in the class on a regular basis by all five boys. When the girls tried to prevent it they got hit and threatened. There has also been regular humiliation of the girls such that none of them want to swim

because of the comments about their bodies. The boys have gone out of their way to discover when they had periods in order to taunt them even to the extent of searching through a girl's bag until they found her spare knickers. The girls took 1 and a half years to come forward on this issue because of fear of reprisals from the boys concerned - despite the fact that Richard Innis (their form teacher) frequently mentioned to me that he suspected something was going on (as did a few of the class's teachers) and I on several occasions asked different girls in private if such things were happening to them. They all denied it out of fear. IS 2X THE ONLY CLASS IN WHICH GIRLS ARE SUFFERING IN THIS WAY ?

The memo then goes on to document the action plan to counter these practices, involving all the boys in suspension, having to sign on re-admission an agreement in which they are asked to take responsibility for their harassment and its discontinuance.

If, and I am asserting that it is the case, that such sexism inheres in institutional life as a matter of course, then it beomes even more essential to scrutinise the way that girls' are actively inserted into sexual definitions. And a casual look at the regime offered, reveals their singular sexual destiny as the bearers of their husbands' children. A foreclosing of sexual meanings and pluralities which is complicit with, rather than attacking of, their vulnerability in the face of patriarchal

forms of heterosexuality. I am arguing that the way girls are 'permitted' to have a sexuality makes a determining impact upon the ways they position themselves homosocially, heterosocially and heterosexually.

The singular force of the message to inscribe female passivity even deeper into female subjectivity is predicated upon it being institutionalised literally and metaphorically in the obsessive privileging of marriage as the only legitimate mode for feminine sexual activity! Thus we find that the main text book in use for General Science classes for 1st and 2nd year pupils at C school contains the following account :

'Parental Care in Humans'

'In a healthy human society much parental care is exercised. Marriage helps to ensure that children have a home and 2 parents to care for them. Also marriage reduces the possibility of unhealthy children being carried by venereal diseases. Venereal diseases (VD) can be passed from one person to another during coitus. There is much VD in promiscuous societies where coitus occurs freely.'

Windridge and Kenway, Scofield and Sims.

The image used to exemplify these politics of 'reproduction' is that of a white couple in wedding attire, followed by an image

of a pram!

The teacher who was responsible for the General Science class was in many respects a fine and committed teacher, who was very concerned to encourage and extend her charges.

Yet the way she structured her content exactly replicates the dynamics which produced the girls' 'embarrassment' about their own bodies, a situation of which she was sensitively aware.

Thus when she spoke of puberty to them (1M) she spoke of it as a time for bodily changes explicitly equating in the process, male wet dreams with female menstruation and characterising both as 'something both of you have to put up with.' I do not have space to complete the deconstructions needed to get to the meaning of this comparison, let alone to unpack all the prescriptive forms in which sex is linked to disease and to the breakdown of western civilisation as we know it (according to Windridge et al.), I simply want to look at her own account of why she puts the two 'emissions' together, since it illuminates the point of gender differentiation beautifully.

Her frame of reference as expressed to me is that of 'balance'.

And I want to suggest that the illusory pursuit of balance compels her to go to the only material fact which is similar in these two experiences ie. that of involuntary secretions.

In going to this 'similarity', the differences of bodies, meaning and cultural content is elided. (See my quote from Walkerdine in

Chapter 8 Note 16). In this 'lesson' therefore, what is suppressed is as important as what is 'taught' :

1. male masturbatory practices endorsed.
2. male 'embarrassment' at this acknowledged.
3. menstruation is negatively constructed.
4. menstruation seen as precursor to the 'real' job of having babies. ie 'something you'll just have to put up with'

By interpellating her students into this frame, the girls are given no opportunity to break from all the negative cultural baggage about their periods, except through understanding it as the endorsement of their physical capacity as potential mothers, whilst boys are explicitly acknowledged in a completely different context as the possessors of an autonomous, not to say involuntary type of sexuality, (only rendered slightly ridiculous by virtue of its onanistic expression and unpredictability).

Appendix D : 'Fragmenting Friendship'

Parts of a chain correspondence between girls in 2M in which the tensions within the 'elite' group show a constant struggle between three of the main protagonists : Saskia, Erin and Anna. One of whom is exposed as harbouring an ambitious attempt to ; 'take over' Erin, the clan, ditch Anna in the process and become 'the most popular' central focus of the caucus.

The 'notes' are embedded in a commentary which will instantiate the meanings of each communication, if they are not already self-evident.

Introduction.

The original source of the conflict in this sequence were the plans afoot for friendship partnering. A set of swops seemed to have meant a realignment in the clan which revealed an instability around the usually rock-steady alliance of Samantha and Erin as well as involving the contested relationship between Saskia and her supposed best-friend Anna.

As I've already mentioned, one of the details shows Saskia's manoeuvres to claim Erin in a lunch time arrangement which specifically excludes anyone else. And the other major detail lies in Erin's offering Saskia, the reciprocal chance to partner her on a weekend trip.

The first offer is predicated on Saskia's desire to be more involved with Erin in preference to Anna, whilst the second plan is based on Erin's contingent need to 'have someone to go with' since she had fallen out (temporarily) with Samantha. Both girls therefore had differential investments in these negotiations.

Saskia is going for broke in her explicit request :

'But Sam, Olga or Anna can't come. Do you mind ?'

Item 9.

Communication 2

Erin is equivocal in her reply to this insistence :

'Yes but I want to come.

Why couldn't Sam eat with us at your house ?'

Item 10

Communication 2

Here Erin, is caught on the horns of the monogamous dilemma. Yes, she wants to be patronised by Saskia, but can't risk alienating her 'best' Samantha. Nevertheless she is into a pleasure of provoking Samantha's jealousy by allowing herself to be invited.

However Saskia's position is to take Samantha's resentment at being excluded, as the source of her withdrawing the invitation. A position which allows her to 'save face' given Erin's lack of compliance with the choice Saskia confronted her with.

This is how Saskia sees it :

'Erin, I am sorry but I can't invite you to my house whilst I feel guilty I'd like to talk it over with

you but thanks to Sam I can't. If Sam decides that I am not making anything anything up (ie. about numbers) then maybe I won't feel so bad. But she has said things that have made me feel bad.'

Item 12

Communication 2.

Saskia, was past master of the projection of unacceptable feelings onto others. In an attempt to retain her own dignity/self esteem she constructs the failure of the plan as solely reducible to the impact of Samantha's jealousy, and thus avoids acknowledging the responsibility for provoking it.

Saskia continues to play this 'offended' card and to insist on her being victimised by it.

'If Sam is so jealous then she must not like me at all. Has Sam changed her mind about me making things up. Because it seems she is making things up not me.'

Item 1

Communication 3.

The reference to 'making things up' is about the house rules.

Saskia re-enters the scenario to test out if she is still on

Erin's invitation list for the Barmouth trip. You recall the reason for her being invited was because of Samantha's exclusion after a row with Erin.

'Am I still going with your dad because I am excited about going ?'

Item 5

Communication 3

This was confirmed, and Saskia, couldn't resist rubbing the salt into Sam's wounds :

'Thankyou, we can see the note when you come to my house for luncheon. Sorry Sam.'

Item 7

Communication 3

To which now Sam retaliated, having seen the negotiations in force again :

'Well I'm not!'

Item 8

Communication 3

Leaving Saskia the macho reaction :

'You'd better be'

A full stop to that particular communication.

However, the next day the saga continued, with the impact of these new, challenging dealings being registered upon Anna.

She actually sat apart from all of them during the afternoon.

Next day saw another chain which suggested that the truce ^{which had} managed to get them all as friends by the end of the day had already broken apart in registration. Other decisions had compounded the original problem and the cat was really out of the bag as far as the network were concerned. For what ever reason, I was not able to ascertain, Erin had withdrawn her invitation to Saskia and re-issued it to Anna. Unsurprisingly, Saskia's 'best-laid plans of mice and men' looked in ruins. Now Saskia was well and truly on the receiving end of her own medicine.

Here is her expression of anger at this 'injustice' - it needs to be borne in mind that invitations/disinvitations are power. In this sense I am reminded of the character of Gilbert Osmond in 'Portrait of a Lady', who held parties more for the pleasure of not inviting certain people.

'That's right blame it all on me ~~why~~ don't you.'

And Erin just because I took the note away doesn't mean to say that you shouldn't (be) my friend. But I don't care you take Anna on holiday with you and forget about me that's the best thing to do.

Item 1

Communication 4

A situation which Erin denies, insisting on her preference to take Saskia.

Now Saskia really takes umbrage :

'Well I don't want to go with someone who doesn't look like they like me. You just go off with Anna and have a nice two days away.

Item 3

Communication 4.

Which sounds about as sincere as Lucretia Borgia wishing one 'bon appetit'.

All these micro-exchanges show a shared elasticity about the obligations of girls to their attributed best-friends which provokes resentment and counter-resistance in the (temporarily) displaced girls, Anna and Samantha. All the girls are struggling about their importance for each other, though it is the twin (if not the identical) strategies and investments, of Sakia and Erin in making overtures to each other which sets up the scenario

in which Sam and Anna feel their marginalisation. If the girls are differentially involved in struggle, we should note that they are all locked into a recognition of the constraining parameters of monogamous best-friendship.

However as I have tried to indicate these constraints were differentially managed and experienced. For Saskia, this narrative carries the main burden of her permanent dis-satisfaction with her 'best' Anna, whilst Erin's 'flirting' with her own power was premised on the mere temporary fall out with Sam. Thus both girls at the centre of the battle had distinctly different investments - Saskia's quest for popularity which she saw as centred upon becoming Erin's best friend rendered her eventually much more open to manipulation. A double irony given her own motivations.

Thus, we note, one direct result of these infinitesimal toings and froings, was the increased sense of anger Anna felt about her treatment in the game plan. It actually forced her to put an ultimatum before Saskia :

'If you don't want to be my best friend anymore just say yes or no and get it over and done with because I'm not going to wait anymore and don't think I'm going to come crawling back because I wont.

From Anna.'



Item 4
Communication 4

My emphasis.

Saskia's reply to this demand couldn't have been more clear, despite its' prevarication. When she replies 'I don't know' you can bet the writing is on the wall.

The last remark on the note sequence cryptically puts what is at stake for Anna on the table , the comment ' THATS FIN(AL)' : sums up the next stage in their deteriorating relationship in which these 'alarums and excursions' become the precursors to the severance.

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