

WHY STOP HAVING FUN?

DRINKING AND SMOKING AS WAYS OF 'DOING' GIRL

by

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**FOR  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **WHY STOP HAVING FUN? DRINKING AND SMOKING AS WAYS OF 'DOING' GIRL**

In recent years a great deal has been written by journalists, policy makers and academics, about young women's leisure time pursuits. Much of this interest has focused around a concern that young women in the UK are smoking more regularly and in greater quantities than ever before. This thesis responds to these concerns. My key argument is that the young women in the field settings used alcohol and tobacco to partly negotiate entry into imagined 'adult' drinking and smoking femininities, and by doing so, girls also explored and practiced ideas of bodily control and social conformity. The theoretical framework for this thesis is influenced by recent feminist poststructuralist work exploring multiple femininities. My aim is to contribute to the theoretical debates around the nature and purpose of drugs education within schools and other youth settings. The research asks: *in what ways is young women's tobacco and alcohol use gendered?*

This small scale, multi method, qualitative research with 13 – 19 year old young women examines a range of aspects of girls drinking and smoking experiences. These include: young women's social geographies, the use of party photography, teenage drinking stories and the young women's use of cigarettes as an informal social currency. My argument is that understanding a whole range of young women's social experiences within friendship groups, provides valuable insights into the complexities of the young women's social worlds. The main findings suggest cigarettes and alcohol use by the girls in the field settings was part of a complex performance and production of contextual age-specific femininities, and the negotiation of gendered and friendship hierarchies. I argue that such an analysis is an important element of theorising and creating more meaningful drugs education for young women.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### ***Girls Behaving Badly: Drinking and smoking girlhoods.***



Fig i. William Hogarth( 1751) Gin Lane



fig ii. Martin Rowson 2006 After Hogarth (Guardian, 15/2/07)

This thesis is about teenage girls who drink and smoke. It emerges firstly, as a response to the rise in attention within the media, policy and academic work on young women's leisure time pursuits, and secondly, from my own practice as a drugs educator and youth worker. In the past decade or so, a host of new labels have

appeared to describe these new types of 'girl' in late modernity, from the 'girl power' of the mid nineties 'Spice Girl', to the binge-drinking 'ladette', to the 'mean girl', and girl-gang bullies of popular press coverage (Harris, 2004; Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Jackson, 2006). I am interested in teenage girls' social and leisure activities, and this thesis focuses on young female drinkers and smokers, to examine some of the different ways that young women may perform and produce gendered drinking and smoking identities.

I examine in this thesis some of the ways teenage girls use alcohol and tobacco as a way of negotiating their entry into adult femininities, and through such acts, explore and practice ideas of bodily control and social conformity. I argue that such an analysis is an important element of theorising young women's substance use, and can help create more meaningful drugs education for young women. This chapter will provide an overview of the thesis. I will describe the research context, my interest in the research subject, the research questions, the aims of the study and the overarching themes of 'belonging', and bodily practices used to perform aspirational gendered and age-specific identities. In the first part of this chapter, I will outline the rationale and research questions, before going on to describe the research context, and finally I provide an overview of the organisation of this thesis.

### New 'formations' of girlhood

I have chosen to examine teenage girls' experiences, rather than, for instance, boys or older women, for a number of reasons. These were about the continuing anxiety within public discourse about young women's drug and alcohol use, and what I perceived to be gender differentiated interventions within the classroom and other



drug education settings. I look at tobacco and alcohol because these are legal, and to some extents, culturally acceptable and normalised parts of mainstream UK culture. Tobacco and alcohol are often used in combination, and both are reportedly used by higher numbers of teen girls than boys (Department of Health, 2005; Department of Health, 2006). I felt that the growing body of work on girlhood using poststructuralist tools provides fruitful insights into teenage girls' tobacco and alcohol use and ways of 'doing' girl. A similar approach has been used in recent Australian work by Martino & Pallota- Chiarolli (2003) to explore the range of masculinities that may be taken up and enacted by boys in a health education classroom.

The focus of this study is on generation and gender. Although issues of social class, sexual orientation and 'race' are deeply important in this work, this study because of issues of space and focus concentrates primarily on issues of girls' gendered identity and femininities. As I recognize, as highlighted later in the final concluding chapter, there remains a need to explore and unpick the complexities and intersection of 'race', gender, class, sexual orientation and young people's legal drug use in further future research. This study is an exploration of a number of aspects of how particular girls' social networks operate to generate meaning, and create learning spaces for producing and negotiating differing types of teenage femininities.

Much of this attention about young women's leisure activities within UK government policy has focused around a concern that young women in the UK are smoking and drinking more regularly, and in greater quantities, than ever before (Higgins, 2000; Department of Health, 2005; Department of Health, 2006; ASH, 2006, Advisory Council on Misuse of Drugs, 2006). Research within

England and Wales has noted that some 26% of 15-year-old young women smoke cigarettes, in comparison to only 16% of their male peers (Department of Health, 2005). The same study found an equal number (23%) of 15-year-old boys and girls reported drinking alcohol in the previous week. In a European wide study, (European School Survey project on alcohol and other drugs, 2003) women in Britain and Ireland were reported as having the highest percentage of female smokers in the 35 countries surveyed, and Britain and Ireland rank, alongside Denmark, as having the highest proportion of 16 year old regular weekly drinkers. The statistics report a high level of alcohol and tobacco use amongst teenagers within the UK, with young women drinking with increased regularity and smoking more than their brothers. Such statistics have also reflected in much recent academic work examining young people's risk-taking behaviours from early sexual activity, smoking, drinking and other substance use.

British newspapers regularly report on an escalation of young women 'binge drinking', complete with array of pictures of mini skirted girls drunk and sprawled on city centre pavements. Such images mirror Hogarth's famous etching of drunken debauchery, Gin Lane (see fig i), produced in 1751 in response to contemporary concerns regarding the consumption of cheap gin by women, children and the poor. Over 250 years later, such concerns about the availability of cheap alcohol and some sections of the nation's drinking habits are similarly reflected in today's coverage. For example, the political cartoonist, Martin Rowson (2007) deliberately draws direct parallels in his depiction of a latter day, 21<sup>st</sup> century Gin Lane (see fig ii). Newspaper headlines such as "*We take drugs, we drink, we fight. What else is there to do?*" (The Times, 26/11/03); "*Binge Girls outdrink the Boys*" (The Times, 15/12/04) and "*A glass of their own.*" (Daily Mail, 17/10/03) depict a

hedonistic, violent, binge drinking and drug taking culture amongst young women. Such highly gendered depictions paint a stark warning about the perils of too much *girl power*. Despite this coverage, young women are not the only section in society who smoke or drink to excess, and issues of substance use affects all age groups. Lloyd & Lucas (1998) argue that this adult examination of young people's recreational activities is heavily laden with value judgments. They state:

*"The lack of successful interventions may lie in the very different views of the world held by medically orientated academics and by teenagers themselves."*  
(Lloyd & Lucas, 1998: xii)

This study concurs with Lloyds and Lucas' observation that work exploring young people's so-called 'risk-taking' must be grounded in the young people's own perspectives, to "*compensate for the judgement-laden approach of middle-aged investigators...*" (Lloyd & Lucas, 1998: xiii). I believe that understanding a whole range of young women's social experiences within friendship groups, allows a partial insight into the girls' social worlds. Moreover, such an approach focuses on young women's constructions of gender, which I would argue is relevant to the role tobacco and alcohol has in these girls' lives. My aim within this work is therefore to add to contemporary debates on 'girlhood' and the performance of gender, and for my findings to be relevant to practitioners within the field of drugs education, Personal Social Health Education (PSHE) teaching and youth work.

### Research Questions

The research questions focus around young women's own gendered understandings of cigarette and alcohol use, and how gender is

'learnt' through such social practices and interaction. The research questions are as follows:

- *In what ways are young women's tobacco and alcohol use gendered?*
- *How are these genders culturally enacted and reproduced through young women's use of tobacco and alcohol?*

The subquestions that arise from these main research questions are:

- *In what ways do young women's social networks influence tobacco and alcohol use?*
- *What localised cultural and material practices are linked to young women's use of tobacco and alcohol?*

These questions structure the following examination of issues such as substance use within social networks and their place in girls' cultural and material practices. My argument is that young women attempt to enact and embody a range of personas, through and by smoking and drinking. Such personas are temporally and contextually situated, and various ways of 'doing' girl might be mobilised at differing times. I believe such an analysis is an important element of theorising and creating more meaningful drugs education for young women. In order to pursue this argument further, I examine a range of aspects of young women's drinking and smoking experiences, including young women's use of space, social photography, leisure time, and exchange networks for cigarettes as an informal social currency. Whilst at first glance many of these issues may seem to be of little relevance to young women's drug use, I argue that understanding a whole range of young women's social experiences can provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways they negotiate and resist various ways of 'doing' girl. Moreover, such an approach focuses on young

women's constructions of gender which I would argue is relevant to the role tobacco and alcohol has in these young women's lives.

*The Feminisation of tobacco and alcohol use.*

I focus on young women's use of tobacco and alcohol because these substances are legally regularly used in the UK by a large proportion of the population, despite the associated potential risks to health. This is in contrast to other substances such as ecstasy and cannabis which whilst used by large numbers of sections of the populace<sup>1</sup> remain illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971. Within the UK, the current legislation relating to the sales and consumption of tobacco and alcohol is highly complex and contradictory. Under the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991, it remains illegal to sell tobacco products to under 16s in the UK, but it is not unlawful for minors to buy, possess or use tobacco products. The present alcohol laws are more complicated. For example, in England & Wales it remains illegal for a licensed vendor to serve alcohol to young people under the age of 18, but children from the age of 5 years and upwards can legally drink with parental permission within the family home. Whilst many of the drugs education interventions within schools and other educational settings focus on the risky aspects of smoking and drinking, I do not want to deny the pleasures alcohol and tobacco bring to many women. The continued centrality of drinking and smoking within contemporary British culture means that the 'moral panics' and pathologisation of teenage girls' tobacco and alcohol use is remarkable, particularly when considering that men's substance use passes with considerably less comment (Waterson, 2000). Although historically much illicit drug use has often been perceived as a 'masculine' practice, various scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Figures from the 2004/05 British Crime Survey <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hosb1605.pdf> (PDF) indicate that 9.7% of 16-59 year olds reported having used cannabis in the last year and 5.3% of 16-24 year olds have used Ecstasy.

have noted an increase in substance use by women in recent decades (Ettore, 1992; Wearing & Kelly, 1994; Michell & Amos, 1997; Waterson, 2000; Pini, 2001; Measham, 2002). Whilst the feminisation of smoking as a practice has been in place since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hilton, 2000; Tinkler, 2006), the feminisation of drinking cultures is a relatively new phenomenon (Waterson, 2000). Cigarette use, has long been marketed specifically towards women, as a way of managing weight, enhancing sexual attractiveness and coping with unwanted emotions (Jacobson, 1988; Ettore, 1992; Bordo, 1993; Hilton, 2000; Tinkler, 2001; Tinkler, 2006). As Tinkler (2001) states:

*“Smoking is now firmly, if contentiously, established as a feminine practice in British society.”* (Tinkler, 2001: 249)

The launch of *Virginia Slims* in 1968 as the first cigarette directly aimed at women has been replicated in recent years with the uptake and marketing of low tar cigarettes as a ‘healthy’ feminine alternative to the full tar versions (Jacobson, 1986; Tinkler, 2001). Despite women’s leading role in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century temperance movements, alcoholic beverages have increasingly been marketed at women. The social world of the pub and the pint as explicitly a predominantly working class and masculine space (Hey, 1986; Brain, 2000) has been superseded with the rise of café-bars, ready-blended cocktails and wine, marking a feminisation of UK drinking culture in the past 30 years (Brain, 2000; Waterson, 2000; Measham, 2004). Similarly, particular alcoholic drinks and tobacco products are often associated as used by certain generations and social classes. For instance, practices such as pipe or cigar smoking, and to a lesser extent, rolling tobacco, continue to be codified as masculine (Hilton, 2000). In this light, there are a range of gendered, age specific and class identities being played with and performed by a young woman who engages in such bodily practice and chooses to drink draught beer, rather than for example, alcopops.

The value judgements implicit in much of the health education literature, also presupposes a generational, normative heterosexual femininity. Such a view positions women as the moral guardians of the nation (Siddell, 1997; Waterson, 2000). This normative gendered code is arguably apparent in the messages and images used within drug education leaflets and in political rhetoric, such as the British former Home Secretary, David Blunkett's reported call in much press coverage in 2004, for women to return to being caretakers of their men folk's alcohol consumption (Lister, 2004; Womack, 2004). Alternatively, this discourse of normative heterosexual femininity arises in the supposition in many of the drug education interventions aimed at young women. Beyond this, drug education materials are often curiously gendered, with young women urged to think about their sexual vulnerability (see fig iii), the potential damage to their looks through drug use (see fig iv), their capacity for motherhood, and the dangers to their future unborn children (Waterson, 2000; Lister, 2004; Tinkler, 2006) .

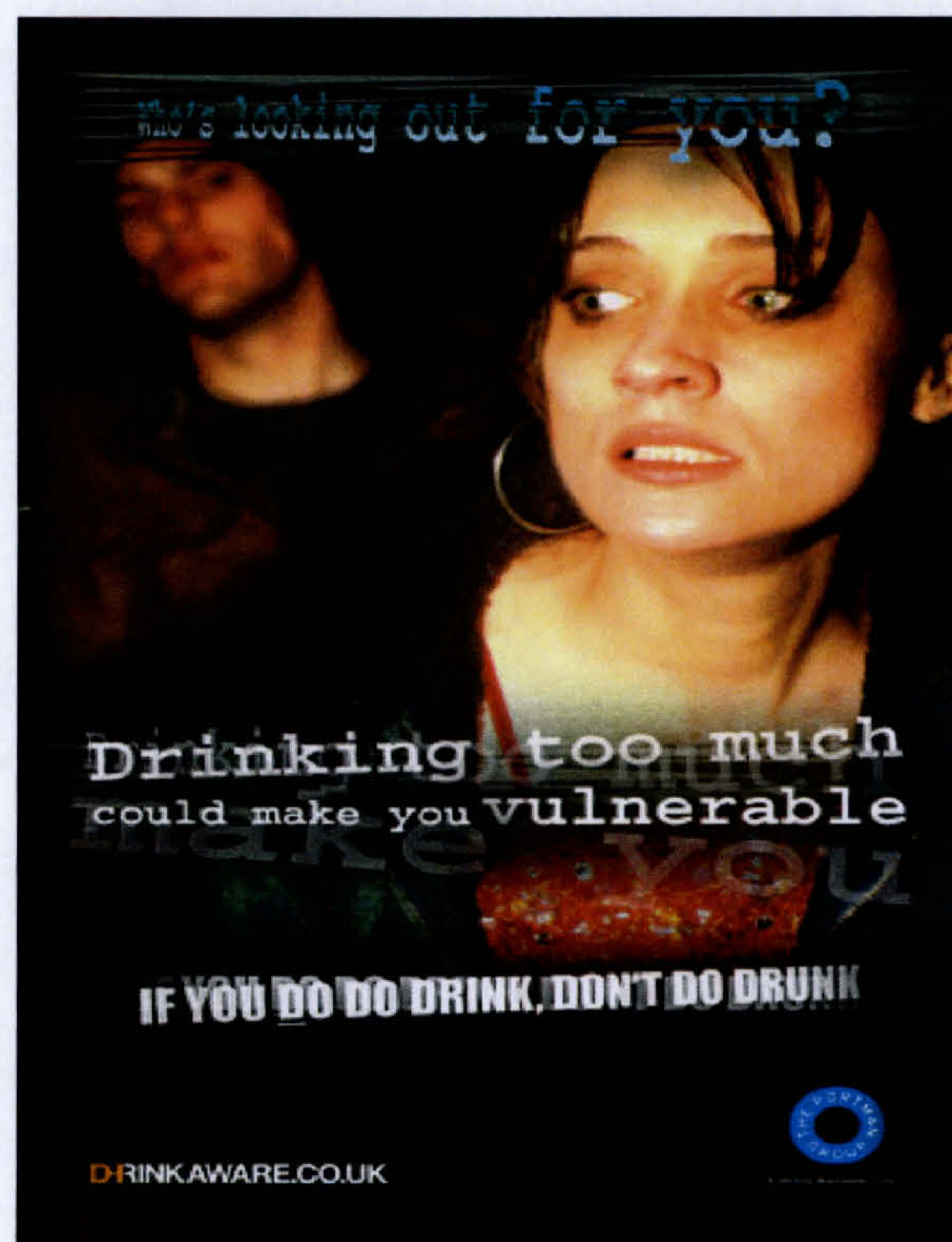


Fig iii Drinking too much could make you vulnerable.(Portman Group, 2005)



Fig iv, Image from smoking cessation campaign: *Fags make girls ugly* (2005)

<http://www.uglysmoking.info/>

For example, Waterson (2000) notes that since 1970, there has been in excess of 3000 medical papers focusing on the effects of alcohol and pregnancy, with little comparable interest in the effects of drinking on men's reproductive capacity. As Waterson states:

*"Ideological portrayals of pregnancy and motherhood as self-denying, nurturing of men and offspring alike... inevitably conflict with notions of independent and stigmatises female drinking."* (Waterson, 2000: 7)

Within the UK, the British popular press has reported widely on the rise in young women's alcohol use. *"The ladette takeover"* (The Mail on Sunday, 19/1/04); *'Ladette' Culture puts Britain top of the alcopops*, (The Telegraph, 2/4/03), *"Ladette culture leads to rise in binge drinking"*, (Guardian, 17/10/03). The assumptions underpinning the so-called rise of a binge drinking culture amongst young women, has drawn on the image of the 'ladette' binge drinker, who is seen as aping male drinking behaviour. Recent writings on 'ladettes' have noted the centrality of alcohol



and tobacco to the construction of a 'ladette' identity (Jackson, 2006). Whilst smoking, drinking and drug taking could be seen as 'laddish' behaviour, girls may perceive the practices as being part of a wider performance of an in-control 'cool' young femininity, rather than copying their male peers 'laddishness'. Similarly, following Jackson's (2006) observations on pupil's 'laddish' behaviours, drinking and smoking are not necessarily connected with a 'bad girl' ethic, but could be seen to be part of a wider social strategy of friendship and personal stress management and the need to succeed.

I want to problematise this easy linking of drug use and masculinity in the contemporary social climate. Instead, I want to suggest that the taking up of tobacco and alcohol use by teen girls is not simply an attempt to replicate 'male' behaviour, but rather is part of a more complex negotiation and production of a range of intersecting, contemporary generational, classed, gendered, 'raced' and subcultural identities. The 'girl power' thesis, Aapola et al (2005) suggest, portrays contemporary girls as rejecting the diligent, sensible 'good girl' femininities of old, for a newer version of *having it all*. In Aapola's depiction, these feisty, sassy, in-control girls produce new sexy, in control ways of 'doing' girl. Indeed, these are some of the dominant discourses mobilised in the later empirical chapters by teenage girls to describe their drinking, drug taking and sexually active personas. However, this does not mean that young women are entirely free to choose which aspects of traditional femininities they take up, reappropriate or reject. Girls' subjectivities continue to be produced via traditional femininities which shape girls' ideas of perceived future adulthood, and their impressions of acceptable gendered behaviour (McRobbie, 2000).

### **Personal intoxicants**

As feminist scholars have previously noted, one's research interests and theoretical choices are shaped and guided by one's life experiences (Stanley, 1990; Skeggs, 1995). This research is very much rooted in my own autobiography. Indeed, it became a running joke, that whenever people asked me what my research was about that I was invariably sitting in the local pub with a cigarette and a pint. I was a teenage drinker and smoker, who grew up to be a drug educator and practicing youth worker. My own pathway to this research was thus littered with half remembered drunken nights out and chain smoked cigarettes. Such experiences shape and guide my interest in the subject.

My interest in smoking and drinking started young. I grew up in a wet culture, and in the Lancashire of my childhood, every event, whether happy or sad, was marked with the raising of a glass and the pouring of large quantities of dark beer down the throat. If in one hand was a pint glass, then in the other was a cigarette. My first cigarette was smoked at the age of ten on the playing fields with my errant school friends. I was not one of the 'nice girls' in my class. I was too rough, too frank, and never knew when to keep my mouth shut. Instead, I decided to be a 'bad girl', and hang out with the tougher girls who smoked and fought and swore.

By the time I was 14 in the late 1980s, my friends and I had concocted non-existent sleep overs, so that we might frequent bars, wearing too much make up, wishing to appear much older, and drink foul cocktails that resembled mouth wash. At friends' houses we would raid cocktail cabinets to mix martini with brandy in pint glasses, then stagger home, head spinning, giggling and sucking mints in a vain attempt to fool our parents. At 17, I drank cider and kept up with the lads sinking pints in the pub. I felt I had tasted 'adulthood'. I smoked throughout my teens and early twenties,

moving from *Marlboro Lights*, menthol tipped *Consulate*, to roll your owns, which I rolled matchstick thin and traded 'twos' with homeless men in the shelter where I worked. It seemed that tobacco brought us together, a common currency and a shared need.

Throughout my life cigarettes have had various meanings at different times. I have smoked because I was upset, or to look 'cool' and tough. Sometimes it was because the person I was with smoked, or because I wished to bond with strangers and I did not want to cause offence by refusing a cigarette. I smoked because it gave me pleasure. I loved the ritual of placing the tobacco in the papers and rolling the perfect cigarette. I relished the sound of the match striking, the light of the cigarette and the first pull and whirl of smoke as I exhaled. In the following chapters in the young women's descriptions of their relationship with tobacco and alcohol I caught glimpses of my own teenage self.

#### *21<sup>st</sup> century Tobacco, Alcohol and drugs education*

In my late twenties I found myself back in the class room. I was involved in designing and delivering drugs education within secondary schools, pupil referral units, and youth centres in an inner London borough. It proved frustrating. I found the drugs education within classrooms patchy and incomplete. Personal Social Health Education, drug, alcohol and tobacco education and Sex & Relationship Education were low status subjects sidelined in short tutor groups or on annual 'Health days' where regular classes would be suspended, and various visitors would do sessions on drugs and sex. The materials and approaches used within schools were often dated and incomplete, and rarely tallied with the young people own experiences as drinkers and drug takers. The prevailing discourse around drugs education, although loosely based on models of harm minimisation, veered towards abstinence based

approaches, with a deficit model of young people who chose to drink, smoke or take drugs. Furthermore, the all pervading drugs education discourses of peer pressure underlined many of the classroom interventions.

The drugs educator, in common with other health educators, has a complex, and sometimes, contradictory role. As commentators have previously noted, it is the socially and economically disadvantaged who remain the focus on the health education agenda. Historically, this has meant health education has largely been aimed at women, those from the lower classes, and the young (Siddell, 1997). Such health initiatives around substance use are largely funded by central government, via health and criminal justice funding streams. In relation to tobacco and alcohol use, the very revenue raised on the large taxes on such legal products finance health promotion and treatment revenue provided by the state. Of course, alcohol and tobacco use have serious long term health implications and can be seen as a large drain on the resources of the state in the treatment of alcohol and tobacco related illnesses. Yet, without the widespread use of such substances, arguably a large proportion of the funding for health promotion and treatment would not exist.

My position is that in order for drugs education initiatives to be more effective for *all* young people there is a need to understand young women's perspectives, and the meanings they make about drugtaking and the production of their own identities and practices. Much of tobacco and alcohol education I witnessed as a drugs educator seemed ineffective to young women's needs, because girls did not identify with the messages given. In such classes, young women were urged to consider their perceived sexual vulnerability, damage to their looks and fertility, if they continued to drink, smoke and take drugs. In contrast, such aesthetic and fertility concerns rarely underpinned messages given to male pupils. I also grew

increasing uneasy with the dominance and overly simplistic use of the concept of 'peer pressure' as a concept within drug education discourses that continued to be used in many of the classroom interventions, an issue I will visit again in Chapter 5. Moreover, much of the drugs education that took place within the classroom was gender differentiated, and based around a normative heterosexual femininity and motherhood.

The argument in this thesis is therefore that young women's own understandings of gender identity are central to my theoretical understandings of girls' bodily practices and social relations. A recent report by the UK based Advisory Council (2006) on the misuse of drugs noted the very limited effectiveness of drugs education in preventing substance use by pupils. At the time of writing, drug, tobacco and alcohol education remain a non statutory part of the curriculum in England and Wales. Despite elements of drugs education being a statutory requirement for state schools in England and Wales, the subject often finds itself neglected, pushed to the margins by the various, competing demands on school timetables. Whilst many formal school-based drug education interventions focus on the physical effect on substance use on the body, and are covered in the Key stage 2 Science curriculum, Citizenship and Personal Social and Health Education, few young people receive the bulk of their drugs education through formal schooling, and instead gain knowledge from other sources including friends, family and the media.

Formal drugs education is informed not only by health guidance, but also by Home Office targets and educational priorities (DfEE, 2004; HM Govt, 2005). The meaning and function of drug education could become horribly confused as a product of punitive/criminal justice/pedagogic and health and welfare interventions. However, as Joyce (2006) states, "*policy makers and*

*educationalists alike continue to echo the 'drug education doesn't work' message.*" (Joyce, 2006:81) In response to such criticism formal drugs education has taken a variety of forms, with arguably often limited success, from shock-horror and abstinence based approaches, to factual information giving, peer education or life skills based approaches.

In prior work, formal drugs education has been described as a kind of social engineering (Evans, 2001) suggesting that the purpose not be about demanding reduction but knowledge about drugs should be "*a right, not an initiative.*" (Evans, 2001:2). As Crossley (2001) notes, in an analysis of responses to safer sex messages, individuals may choose to actively resist government and professionals health messages as notions of 'health' and 'morality' become collapsed into one another. Crossley argues that health promotion initiatives need to acknowledge this resistance as a response to health education agendas. This need to acknowledge and understand young people's resistance to perceived 'adult' health education messages may enable health initiatives to recognise individual agency, and would not view the intended audiences as mere passive recipients, and admit the pleasurable aspects of drug use (Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2003; O'Malley. & Valverde, 2004)

The issue of *what* actually constitutes success within drugs education initiatives, is often is lost in the 'top down' thrust of much policy, which fails to become realised in practical interventions within the classroom. Furthermore, the idea of 'successful' drug education is dependent on whether the ultimate aim is abstinence, delayed onset of first use, or better informed and confident students. Commentators (Evans, 2001, Blackman, 2004) have noted that government pressure limits and moulds the drugs education curriculum, with drugs education and prevention often

collapsed into one another. As a result of such complex, and potentially contrasting requirements, drugs education may have a contradictory purpose. Indeed, much of current 'good practice' in drugs education within the UK, is based around harm minimization models of 'informed choice', but as Blackman (2004) argues, many of these harm minimisation approaches have become collapsed into discourse of abstinence, with young people urged to make the right 'healthy choice' as long as it is *'just say no'*.

I do not want to downplay the damage that both legal and illegal substances can do to the body and wider society as a whole. However, in the move to young people making the 'right' choices in drugs education practice, young women's gendered understandings of such bodily practices have been somewhat sidelined. This is despite work on young women's tobacco use, social identity and young people's social networks (Wearing, Wearing & Kelly, 1994; Mitchell & Amos, 1997; Michell, 1997), which suggests it is often the most popular and successful girls in groups that smoke, in contrast to the dominant depiction in some health discourses, of weak willed girls with low self esteem, submitting to 'peer pressure' and cigarettes. This thesis will not construct "deficit" models of young drinkers and smokers. I am not interested in pathologising or labelling young women's behaviour, nor did I seek to find young people who view themselves as 'problem' drinkers or smokers. As a practicing youth worker my interest remains in informal drugs education, and thus I focus on young women's own views as a way of gaining new insights into girls' smoking and drinking. Drawing on poststructuralist theories, I examine how young women manage multiple femininities within their daily lives mobilised and experienced through smoking, drinking and partying.

### *The Context of the Research*

In order to explore these themes I undertook a small scale, multi method, qualitative study with young women aged 13-19 in two youth work settings in a town in Southern England. Further details about the research context, research design and analysis can be found in Chapter 3. The following empirical study is a snapshot of a particular time and place and set of relations. The fieldwork is based around two youth settings, one a generic youth centre, and another a common room in a local further education college in an affluent town on the edge of a large conurbation. I will outline the research settings in further detail in Chapter 3.

However, I think it is worthwhile to sketch out the research settings here, in order to explain how the choice of setting underpinned the rationale of this research. Unlike in most formal school settings, young people at the college and youth centre were allowed to smoke openly. The young women who appear in this thesis were girls who voluntarily used these settings. Girls' friendship groups were hierarchical and were segregated down loose subcultural lines. Indeed, young people often voiced an ambivalence about their subcultural affiliation, but were clear about their participation in specific friendship groups. This may be as Eckert (1989) describes because adolescent subcultural groups can have porous and permeable boundaries. This is in contrast to friendship group or cliques, which may have stronger and clearer boundaries and membership. In this study, although young women rarely would subscribe a strong allegiance to one group or another, where they 'hung out', the music they listened to, the brands they wore, and what they smoked and drank, gave clues to how they would be positioned by their peers.



In 2003/4, the main groups were *grungers*, a predominantly culturally white middle class group who listened to alternative rock music and wore dark clothes, and *rudies*, a multiracial subculture who listened to urban music and hip-hop and wore casual sportswear from brands such as *Nike*, *FUBU* and *Avirex*. Although *rudies* were apparently multiracial, within the college setting the groups were further splintered down ethnic and cultural lines, with Arabic, Black British, Asian and White *rudies* inhabiting different social space. The *grungers* were ethnically mixed, with many of the young people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds including: Lebanese, Iranian, Irish, Nigerian and Caribbean. Although some friendship groups spanned these divides, and some individuals crossed territories, friendship groups were exclusive spaces and regulated by a range of exclusionary practices.

The subcultural landscape of the borough was complex and ever shifting. The following comes from an internet board at the youth centre:

*“It’s like*

*grungers- baggy clothes usually listen to a variety of heavy metal music.*

*Skaters- a majority of skates listen to hip hop r ‘n’b wear relatvly baggy trousers, skate shoes...*

*Rudes (no racism) but these guys are normally black people who are hard and u don’t want to mess with them*

*Pikeys aka townies-little white girls/boys who think they are hard but really arnt lol*

*Punks – u don’t find many proper punks round this area*

*Goths – I don’t think I need to explain*

*Cleanys like jeans and zip ups . what some may call normal.”*

(Youth Centre bulletin board posting by Open Mind, 26 June 2003)

Open Mind’s choice of screen name alerts us to his/her wish to position him/her self as a detached observer, somehow free of the youth subcultural group s/he describes, however, Open Mind’s

explanation was further critiqued by other site users' as overly reductive and stereotypical. In my various discussion with young people on this topic, certain groups were interchangeable with various names, for instance, groups such as: *pikeys*, *townies* and *rudies* were often collapsed into one another, as all predominantly working class youth cultural groups with reputations for aggression. The lowest position of the local subcultural hierarchy were the *pikeys*. Although the term *pikey* had been used originally as a derogatory term for an Irish traveller, it had come to be used as pejorative expression to describe 'othered' economically disadvantaged white working class young people.

### *The Structure of this thesis*

In the following chapters I discuss how young women describe their own and other's smoking and drinking habits, the informal trade networks to exchange cigarettes, and the places they socialised. I was struck during my fieldwork about how I could not divorce young women's smoking and drinking practices from other bodily and social practices involved with their friendship groups. As a result, the end product has explored a range of practices allied with girls' alcohol and tobacco use. These practices which are used as sites and vehicles to negotiate girls' friendships and various ways of 'doing' girl, included the exchange of cigarettes, the sharing of drinking stories, and the use of outdoor drinking locations, came to inform my understandings of young women's smoking and drinking practices. To divorce such acts from their context would thus be to collapse and negate the young women's narrated social world that they recreated within the interviews.

The thesis is structured as follows. The initial three chapters map out the rationale, theoretical framework and key themes in this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for the thesis and draws upon poststructuralist feminist writings on femininities,

as well as Lave & Wengers' (1991) conceptualisation of communities of practice, and Foucaultian models of power/knowledge. I wish to frame this study within a growing canon of work by feminist commentators into female subjectivity and the many ways in which young women may 'do girl' (Hey, 1997; McRobbie, 2000; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Reay, 2001; Driscoll, 2004; Harris, 2004). By blending theoretical models I hope to bring a fresh look at the gendering of teenage girls' cigarette and alcohol use. In the following empirical chapter I also draw on writings from social geography and anthropology in order to explore the smoking, drinking and spatial practices of the young women.

Chapter 3 deals with issues of methodology of the study and the myriad of ethical issues in using ethnographic methods in a study of sensitive issues with young people under the age of 18. I explore the tensions that emerged from my status as a researcher and a youth practitioner, and the negotiations needed in attempting an ethically congruent study, when researching sensitive issues with minors.

The empirical Chapters 4-7, explore some of the spatial, cultural and material practices featuring smoking and drinking which were mobilised by the girls to produce gendered selves. In these chapters I am particularly interested in the overarching theme of trade, belonging and the access and control of symbolic group resources, as important processes in the negotiation of teenage social hierarchies, and the reproduction of particular femininities. The access to and control of various resources, whether spatial, material or cultural, were utilised to highlight social allegiances, produce and configure aspirational identities and to establish group social codes and influence social hierarchies. In these chapters I unpick the various exchange practices around social

space, cigarettes, alcohol, stories and images. Chapter 4, “*Cotching in the catch*’ *Young women, embodied geographies and transitions*”, explores the trading of social space and youth geographies. This chapter is a data led analysis of the young people’s use of social space and looks at where young women drink and smoke in autonomous outdoor spaces referred to as ‘catches’. I explore how young people use of social spaces changes with their generational and gendered bodies by drawing on a range of theories from anthropology, that of life transition (Van Gennep, 1909) and Lave & Wenger’s (1991) work on ‘communities of practice’. The young people’s use of public space such as parkland and riverside locations, often situated on the margins of society, in part, reflects their own marginal social status on the cusp of adulthood.

Further empirical chapters 5, 6 and 7 explore how young women trade cigarettes, drinking stories and party photographs respectively, as part of the social power play in order to create allegiances, create group artifacts and produce individual and group identities. Chapter 5 explores girls’ networks of gift exchange using cigarettes as an informal social currency. In this chapter I critique the continued dominance of the concept of ‘peer pressure’ within classroom based drugs education discourse. I argue that it is in this sharing of cigarettes that young women create and sustain bonds of friendship, which underpin their social networks. Moreover, I argue that through such reciprocity, young women gain status and learn the gendered rules of the group.

I return to this theme in Chapter 6, which explores girl’s production of gendered identities through drinking and collective storytelling practices. I argue that stories and storytelling are exchanged and used as a way of regulating and upholding gender-sex hierarchies. Exploring how girls talk about their own and others drinking provides an insight into the normative gendered

framework of the participation in young people's drinking cultures, and how girls learn the social codes of group membership. I return once more to these themes in the Chapter 7 on party photography and visual narratives and the construction of young women's identities. Tinkler (2006) notes that smoking as visual spectacle has been the heart of the feminisation of cigarette use over the past century. I would also argue that this aesthetic appeal is also part of young women's drinking identities. This final empirical chapter explores girls' use of party photographs and new visual technologies as a way to feel popular and portray a 'wild' and rebellious self, and the trade of such snaps provide an insight into the gendered power play within girls' friendship circles.

Chapter 8 summarises the main findings and identifies future areas for future research and strategies for dissemination before moving on to consider some implications for youth practitioners including, teachers, youth workers, and health education workers and drugs educationalists. In several places during the course of this work, I return to the notion of *praxis*. By this I mean, that I wish to link the academy to potential implications of this work in terms of front line practice and policy within formal and informal educational settings. Throughout the research and writing up on this fieldwork I remained a practicing youth worker and a PhD student. I cannot divorce these identities. My research informs my youth work practice, as much as my youth work practice continues to influence and inform my research interests. Often, combining these two occasionally very different roles was immensely challenging, and this is an issue I reflect on at length in Chapter 3. This study aims to contribute to explorations of how young women 'do girl', and produce their diverse gendered identities, and I will endeavour to find new ways to feedback my findings to practitioners and young women alike.

## Chapter 2

### ***Many different ways of 'doing' girl –Exploring multiple femininities within communities of teenage practice***

#### **Introduction**

Within this chapter I outline the theoretical framework of the thesis, and provide an overview of some of the main arising issues. I will locate this study within wider theoretical debates around the creation and performance of teenage femininities, in order to provide a coherent analytical framework to make sense of the findings later presented. Further theoretical concerns relevant to the research findings are outlined later in Chapters 4-8.

My main argument throughout this thesis is that girls drink and smoke as a way of negotiating their entry into adult femininities, and by doing so they can explore and practice ideas of bodily control and social conformity. One of the tricky areas I have tried to navigate when writing about young women's identities and substance use is the fixity and specificity of language (Davies, 1989). There is a lack of flexibility within current language to communicate the subtleties of contextual gendered practices. I wish to write in a coherent and accurate way about how young women view and position themselves in relation to dominant discourses of femininity. The issue of whether teenage girls who drink and smoke are doing 'masculinity', or an alternate or resistant 'femininity', frames young women's behaviours and identities within a binary fixed framework. This is not merely a semantic quandary, but it cuts to the heart of the difficulties of exploring gender identities with the loss of essentialised categories in the wake of poststructuralist criticism. As Butler (1990; 1993) highlights, the materiality of language reproduces gender and sexed bodies in particular ways, and cannot fully explain the immateriality and complexity of what sex and gender are, and how they may be enacted.

The lack of suitable language to fully express the lived configurations of gender, is an enduring one, and I cannot overcome these difficulties in the space of this thesis. Although I am to an extent hampered by the existing language, the theoretical work that underpins and influenced this study enables challenges to dominant gendered discourses within drugs education. This said I also wish to be clear in how I use specific terms within this thesis. When I use the term sex, I mean biological sexed body. However, I recognise that the way biology is understood is a product of culture (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Paechter, 1998). Gender, here refers to social and cultural formation of particular behaviour, practices and identities. Although I use the terms sex and gender in this thesis I do not want to take a dimorphic view of these categories. I concur with Kessler & McKenna (1978) that the biological 'facts' of the sexed body, are as much a product of culture as of physiology, and that notions of biological sex are historically and culturally variable. This thesis, draws on the Foucaultian notion of discourse (Foucault, 1980; 1982), and by this I mean, the various structuring principles including ways of thinking, and structures of language that are formalised within social institutions, and are used to make sense of the world, and in turn, position and produce individual subjectivities.

Within this thesis I use poststructuralist feminist work as an overriding theoretical framework, but I will interweave supplementary approaches from work on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger; 1998; Paechter, 2003 a; 2003b; 2006a) and Foucaultian analyses of power (Foucault, 1980, 1982). In addition, I draw on anthropological concepts of transition and gift giving in later chapters. I am aware that by blending a range of conceptual tools I may be faced with contradictions and tensions in my theoretical framework. I could have used a range of other

theoretical frameworks in order to interrogate the data, many of which would have given fruitful insights into the material. However, my theoretical choices were influenced by the data itself, in addition to my own autobiography. I did not want to impose a theoretical framework with particular assumptions on the data, and I have some sympathy with Glaser & Strauss' (1967) 'grounded theory' approach, where theories arise from my empirical work. However, I did not enter the field without any acquaintance of the area in relation to my prior knowledge of the youth work settings and experience as a former drugs educator, and this prior knowledge did shape my choices. The findings could be understood by using a variety of tools. By being overly exclusive in my conceptual choices I would have closed down many potential interpretations that provide new ways to explore young women's substance use.

This framework has been influenced by three main factors. These were my personal experience as a drugs educator, my wish to use a non-deficit framework of young female smokers and drinkers, and my position as a feminist researcher and youth worker. Firstly, as stated at length in the previous chapter, I believe that there is a need to understand young people's own perspectives and the meanings they make about drugs, and their own identities and practices in order for drugs education to be more meaningful. My experience as a drugs educator left me critical of the normative gendered concepts and practices drawn upon unproblematically in such drugs education discourses. The argument in this chapter is therefore that young women's own understandings of gender identity are central to my theoretical understandings of girls' bodily practices and social relations.

Secondly, in this thesis I want to use a theoretical framework that is not modelled on a deficit model of young smokers and drinkers. Drugs education as a practice within schools and youth centres



remains a relatively under theorised area, and one in which deficit models of drug users and young women continue to underpin drug education policy and practice interventions. I want to argue that the use of poststructuralist work on multiple femininities and the body can aid drugs education interventions, and create meaningful and insightful work on understanding how and why girls through smoking and drinking perform individual and group gendered identities.

The third reason for my theoretical choice was my position as a feminist researcher. I wish to frame this study within a growing canon of feminist work into female subjectivity, and the many ways in which young women may 'do girl' (Hey, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Reay, 2001a; Ali, 2003; Bloustien, 2003; George, 2004; Driscoll, 2004; Renold, 2005a, Renold, 2005b; Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). Such work is influenced by poststructuralist writings on the mutability of sex and gender, and how girls may produce subjectivities through material cultures.

I use feminist poststructuralist conceptual tools to analyse and explore young women's world views and gender identity, in order to explore young women's production of gender identities. Poststructuralist writings examine individual women subjectivities by focusing on the local and unique, and the possibility of a range of multiple femininities intersected by factors such as class, race, sexual orientation and age. Moreover, by examining the ways that young women on a micro level may 'do girl', they open up a variety of possible interpretations where young women may claim space to subvert and resist dominant forms of hegemonic gender. I want to place girls drug taking practices within such a framework, as a way of exploring the multiple and alternative femininities that girls may enact for themselves and one another when they light up a cigarette or crack open a beer.

As I will argue later in this chapter, and illustrate in data chapters later in this thesis, a range of power relations are being engaged with in the social complexities of young people's peer groups. I want to move beyond imagining young women as simply conforming to or resisting individual or group norms, by examining femininities as discursive constructs. These enacted gendered personas are not static entities, but rather part of a wider process of identity formation. Identity is negotiated through a combination of individual agency and group membership in the wider nexus of social networks in which a young woman participates. I am keen to argue throughout this thesis that many of the so-called 'new femininities' of late modernity are the repackaging of traditional forms of heterosexual normative femininities, and as such, remain underpinned by structural forms such as 'race' and social class. I want to examine some of the processes that mould the ways young women in this study articulate and reproduce particular kinds of femininities in specific ways.

One of the main theoretical concepts that I draw upon throughout this thesis is the notion of gendering as a process, and that identities are shaped by discursive practices. It is important to note whilst there may be multiple masculinities and femininities, not all are seen to be of equal value, and issues of dominant and subordinated gendered discourses are integral to an understanding of how inequalities are sustained and reproduced intergenerationally. The concepts of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity', have been highly influential in gender studies in the past twenty years. Connell (1987) uses these concepts to explore gender inequalities in society. These dominant gendered forms are clearly structured around normative heterosexuality, and are closely connected with gender and sexuality. For Connell (1987), 'hegemonic masculinity' is "*always constructed in relation to various*

*subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women.*” (Connell, 1987: 183)

Hegemonic masculinities’ toughness features the subordination of femininity, and the marginalisation of gay identities. ‘Emphasised femininity’ is seen to accommodate and comply with this valorised version of hegemonic masculinity, by sustaining male desires, and the adoption of heterosexual marriage and childbearing. Whilst Connell argues that there are many other forms of masculinity and femininity, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘emphasised femininity’, remain the most dominant in the contemporary industrialised West, and the version by which others are measured. This notion of hierarchical and multiple gendered identities and practices, will be a key theoretical tool in understanding young women’s identity formation within this thesis.

I will now explore past and current debates about gender and young people’s identities. In the following sections I outline some of the historical and contemporary debates within feminist theory that underpin the theoretical framework of this thesis. In later sections I explore Lave & Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (1998) work on communities of practice, and Paechter’s (2003 a, b, 2006a) use of communities of practice to explore gender acquisition. Finally, I examine issues of power within young women’s friendship groups, and how through a variety of mechanisms of control and resistance, young women may negotiate their individual and group identities (George, 2001; George, 2003). I turn to Foucault’s writing on surveillance and pastoral power to illustrate how mechanisms of control may operate within teenage communities, to shape and uphold dominant femininities within the wider social group. I argue that poststructuralist writings on gender mutability are immensely helpful in examining the range of factors that may influence the enactment and interpretation of particular actions by young women.

Furthermore, that such work care provides new analytical tools for exploring young women's drug use and produce new ways of thinking about the ways that young women may negotiate and perform femininities by smoking and drinking.

*What is gender?- Structuralist and post structuralist accounts*

In the past thirty years much has been written about gender role and identity within a range of disciplines. In structuralist work on gender theory in the sixties and seventies, there was a clear distinction between sex and gender, into the physical and social components of male and femaleness respectively. In more recent work, poststructuralists have questioned the sex-gender distinction and the unproblematic supposition of biological sex (Stanley; 1984, West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler; 1990; Davies, 1989; Harraway, 1991; Butler, 1993; Davies, 1997; Francis, 1998; Connell, 2002). In the place of the grand narratives and theories of structuralism, poststructuralist work emphasises the small, local and unique. As Paechter (2001) describes:

*“Poststructuralist work, by contrast, is focused on small, local stories about specific discourses and power relations. “ (Paechter, 2001, 44)*

Within gender studies, this move from the certainties of structuralism, meant the loss of patriarchy as a monolithic all-encompassing explanation, and a troubling of the essential binaries of sex and gender. The focus on the local and specific allows the body and embodiment to become emphasised in poststructuralist writings. Previous structuralist sex role theories perceived gender acquisition as a process of socialisation by various agencies including the family, the peer group and schooling (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 2002). Within sex role theory, children learn and internalise gendered norms before reproducing and socialising the next generation. However, as Connell (2002) argues

there are problems with the use of sex role theory in exploring how children learn gender. Firstly, Connell states that socialisation theories fail to recognise that there is not one unified gender role for males or females, but rather a range of roles for boys and girls intersected by factors such as class and ethnicity. Secondly, such models negate the pleasure that young people may have invested within normative gender symbolism, in addition to ignoring the ability that children and young people may have to enact resistant and alternate forms of gendered practice. Within socialisation theories there is an assumption that children and young people passively acquire types of gendered behaviours and bodily practices. Recent work within the growing field of childhood studies contests this assumed passivity, arguing that children are active agents with rich social cultures (Davies, 1989; Thorne, 1993; Jenks, 1996; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).

In the late eighties, West & Zimmerman (1987) argued that 'gender' might be seen as a performance through which normative conceptions were attributed to being male or female, and through which, one could become a competent and accepted member of society. In the early nineties, post structuralist work on gender, most notably, highly influential work by Butler (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1993), argued that both sex and gender were not fixed, but rather were mutable entities. In poststructuralist writing, subjects become constituted through discourse, and girls are made, rather than born. Butler (1993) questions the very category 'woman', and argues that there are multiple ways to perform one's identity, and thus that the category is always in process. Butler's argument raises a range of interesting issues, and opens up new channels for empirical research on factors that influence gender performance, and how much capacity one has to choose one's gender. In her later work, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) develops this argument further, to question the very materiality of the body. The body in Butler's work

is both constitutive and performative, as not merely a site of cultural construction, but one that is constructed itself through discourse. In questioning the materiality of the body, Butler troubles the essentialised fixity of biological sex, and highlights the performative aspect of gender. If, as Butler argues, there is no pre-social body, gender comes into existence through actions. Butler, in unfixing sex and gender, thus creates a much wider range of possibilities of how one might 'do' boy or girl.

Sex and gender, could be thus be understood as a complex of intersubjective discursive practices, which allows individual's agency in the production of a range of masculinities and femininities. Poststructuralist work opens up new ways of exploring girls' everyday experiences, by focusing on individuals' ability to resist and subvert dominant discursive practices. This work also provides theoretical tools that go beyond the 'agency/structural dualism' of earlier writings (Jones, 1993). Whilst young women may perform particular genders through for example, their drug use, these actions are mediated by the interpretations by other actors. In such a context, gender identity becomes mutable, and some individuals have may have more choice about the identities they construct and perform than others (Head, 1997).

The troubling of 'essentialised' categories has a range of consequences for feminist work. Contemporary work on young women has moved from recording girls experiences, to question the very categories 'girl' or 'woman', has potential serious implications for feminist theoretical endeavours. I do not have the space here to fully rehearse the various debates instigated by feminist poststructuralist work, but the notion of sex and gender remain contentious. Moi (1999) suggests that in the rush to move beyond essentialised 'natural' categories, some aspects of poststructuralist

theorisations merely reproduced the sex/gender binary of earlier work.

Earlier feminist writings have been criticised for ignoring differences between women, and highlighting the concerns of privileged, white, middle class Western women to the detriment of others (hooks, 1982; hooks, 1984; Freeman, 2001; George, 2003). However, the problem of the silencing and othering of experience of working class, black and non- Western women is not necessarily overcome by abandoning the category 'woman'. Whilst poststructuralist feminist work has called for a deconstruction of fixed gender categories, other commentators have argued that there is a continued need to hold on to the commonality of girls and women's experience, if the political ideas of feminism are not to be lost (Francis, 1998; George, 2003; Freedman, 2001). As George (2003) states:

*" Just because there are many different types of women, it does not follow that we cannot talk about ' women'. Just as there are many feminisms it does not mean that we can no longer talk about feminism." (George, 2003: 52)*

There are several critical issues facing feminist writing in the wake of such poststructuralist debates, and as Francis (1998) highlights, there remains contradictions and tensions in unproblematically combining feminism and poststructuralism. These issues focus around a need to explore the causal factors underpinning the continued gender inequalities, and the need to reclaim the category 'woman'. This is in order to be able to collectively politically mobilise, without resorting to the sex-gender divide of earlier decades and associated accusations of essentialism. One way forward, Francis suggests is to acknowledge the 'historicity' of the feminist project as a product of modernism (Francis, 1998). As a feminist researcher, I must confront such issues, and I believe there is need to explore young women's experiences whilst recognising the commonalities

and differences in the way girls are positioned and experience their gendered identities. George (2003) argues that there is a need for feminist poststructuralist work to be 'reconstitutive', rather than merely 'deconstructive'. This reconstitutive feminist work would explore the commonalities in experience between women that intersect boundaries of location, 'race', social class, age and sexual orientation. I want to retain the categories 'man' and 'woman' (and 'boy' and 'girl'), as continuing to be analytical meaningful for myself as a researcher and for the young people that appear in this study. Indeed, my position only borrows theoretical elements from poststructuralist work, as I wish to retain the central tenets of feminism, and come to this project as a feminist youth worker and researcher.

#### *How to 'do' girl: Multiple femininities and Girl studies*

Following these poststructuralists debates, much has been written about the multiple and fragmented nature of modern femininities and girlhood (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Reay, 2001b; Renold, 2005b; George; 2001; Ali; 2003; Bloustien, 2003; Driscoll; 2004, Harris, 2004). Reay (2001b) argues that femininity is not a unified category, but a process through which girls and women are gendered. This notion of multiple femininities, opens up ideas of the kinds of female one might become, and the range of ways one might 'do' girl. As Reay states:

*"Femininity is always overlaid with other categorizations, generating understandings in which minority ethnic women and working class women of all ethnicities are often positioned against normative concepts of femininity. (Reay, 2001b, 153)*

Whilst femininity might be best thought of as multiple and mutable, Reay suggests that the continuing dominant forms of femininity continue to be based around essentialist notions of the biological



sexed body and gender role. Such dominant notions of femininity, cast those who transgress from this norm as 'other'. In addition to Reay's (2001 b) categories of minority ethnic and working class women, I would also add a range of other factors, including age and sexual orientation, that position an individual in opposition to dominant discourse of normative femininity. Indeed, studies exploring schoolgirl femininities have observed how girlhood is classed (Hey; 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 1991; George, 2003), 'raced' (Mirza, 1992; Ali; 2003; George, 2004) and sexualised. (Kitzinger, 1995; Kehily, 2004). How one might *do* girl, is thus influenced by issues such as age, 'race', class, sexual orientation and subcultural style.

For poststructuralists, perceiving femininities as discursive constructs allows for a degree of flexibility in how one might choose to negotiate and take up girlhood. However, dominant forms of femininities based on biological sex, can create limitations in the ways one might choose to perform girl. Similarly, there are temporal and spatial aspects to this identity performance. As girls enter their teens they become under increased pressure to perform an overt heterosexual femininity, which can lead to reduced participation by girls in active sports and more time on appearance and grooming (Hey, 1997; Reay, 2001a; Paechter; 2006b).

For instance, the young school children in Thorne's (1993) ethnographic work had clear ideas of how girls and boys behaved. In this study, Thorne noted an element of 'borderwork' where young children policed gender boundaries in order to maintain a coherent gender identity. However, this did not stop children contextually crossing, subverting and reinforcing normative genders on a situational basis. Some children took a dim view of individuals crossing and transgressing boundaries into the gendered territory. Such work highlights how even very young children have clear ideas

about what it means to be a boy or a girl. Gendered practices are guarded and policed within wider social networks.

Young women thus maintain the capacity to assume, reappropriate, reject or challenge particular gender identifications. However, within social networks, certain gender performances may be valorised above others, creating local forms of dominant gendered practices. There are a range of ways that individuals may take up oppositional or resistant forms of femininity, for example, by taking part in so-called 'masculine' activities, such as certain sports, leisure activities, career choices, or for younger girls, by taking on a 'tomboy' persona. The performance of alternative gender identities creates the space to take up oppositional femininities or adopt aspects of hegemonic masculinities.

On one level, performing the 'wrong' kind of gendered performance may be an active attempt by an individual to subvert and resist dominant gendered practices. For example, tomboys may be viewed as girls attempting to resist or subordinate normalised heterosexual femininity (Reay, 2001a; Paechter, 2006b). There may be a range of consequences for girls who choose to take up and perform such alternate and oppositional femininities. These sanctions may include exclusion and othering from other girls, through enforced isolation, or physical or mental bullying (George, 2001; George, 2003). Renold (2005a; 2005b), in a study of primary school children, argues that girls may disrupt hegemonic gendered discourse in a variety of ways. Some of the girls in Renold's study took on the position of 'honorary boys', whilst others drew contextually on the discourses and practices of 'tomboyism'. Such contextual appropriation of hegemonic masculinity allowed girls to disrupt normative heterosexual scripts of what it means to be a girl.

Furthermore, Renold argues that there was a temporal dimension to these girls being able to cross gender boundaries and create counter discourses of dominant femininity. She suggests that the assumed sexual innocence of girls in middle childhood, enables girls to cross gender boundaries in the performance of their gender identities. This is in contrast to the potentially fierce censure that older girls face in the overtly heterosexual climate of teenage femininities explored later in chapter 6. Similarly, other commentators note the increasing difficulty for young women to maintain alternate femininities past puberty into the later teenage years (Halberstam, 1998; Reay, 2001a; Renold; 2005b; Paechter, 2006b). However, girls' adoption of so called hegemonic masculine coded practices of drinking and drug taking in teenage years, could provide a way for young women to create alternative and resistant counter discourse to normative ideal femininities of being a 'good girl' (Griffin, 2005).

#### *Communities and Identities in practice*

Earlier, I described how I am eager to explore how girls shape their identities through smoking and drinking without using a deficit model of young smokers and drinkers. The focus of my enquiry is about how young women's identities may be shaped through their friendships groups, whilst still affording young women individual agency. I also want to understand how girls' position themselves against dominant forms of gendered practices, and be sensitive enough to explore how these gendered practices are intersected by age, ethnicity and location.

As an attempt to overcome the *structure/agency* debates which have marked the late nineties, recent work by feminist commentators have appropriated theories of how identity is negotiated within the social realm through the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990a, b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and anthropological writing by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave &

Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This is to provide feminism new tools in order to analyse how individual subjectivities are positioned and produce various 'raced', classed and gendered selves (Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997; Moi, 1999; Lovell, 2000; Adkins, 2004; McNay, 2004; Davies, 2006; Paechter, 2002; Paechter, 2003a, b; Paechter, 2006a).

Feminist scholars have selectively appropriated theoretical concepts from the social theory of Bourdieu to theorise gender and social agency and classed femininities (Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997; Lovell, 2000; Adkins, 2004). The three key Bourdieuan concepts drawn upon in this feminist work are that of *habitus*, the *field* and *social capital*. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, encompasses a vast range of factors, including an embodied culture, the totality of learned skills and an ingrained disposition. One's social position is thus written on the body, and the use of *habitus* as a theoretical tool, allows an insight into how identities are individually and collectively 'raced', gendered and classed. Identity through *habitus*, is constructed as a social form, and the continued dominance of certain gendered, classed and 'raced' *habitus*, can provide an insight into how social inequalities are sustained and reproduced over generations. The concept of the *field* is the social space where the *habitus* and one's social position is played out. The *field* blends concepts of game play and struggle, and thus connects issues of social position and culture with issues of domination and power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu's notion of capital has also been central to much of his social theory. Within the Bourdieuan conceptualisation there are four types of capital. These are: *economic*, *cultural* (such as a state of mind or embodied disposition), *social* (in relation to friendship and peer networks), and *symbolic* capital (which involves the legitimisation of other forms of capital, and as a resource can be used to mobilise power). These capitals are not equally distributed throughout society, and by mobilising certain legitimate forms in

particular contexts, individuals may potentially acquire power and prestige. For example, Skeggs (1997) argues that femininity might be perceived as a form of *cultural capital*, that can be transformed into social capital depending on the version performed, and the legitimate status conferred within the context. Further work drawing on this notion of capitals have considered the role of further capitals, for instance, that of bodily (Shilling, 1993) and emotional capital (Reay, 2004). These ideas of physical and emotional capital are particular pertinent to feminist work exploring gender. For example, Shilling's work (Shilling, 1993) considers the role of bodies' symbolic value in late capitalism, in particular, the ways that individual bodies can be shaped to be recognised as bearers of value within certain social fields. Reay's work on emotional capital explores the invisible emotional labour as a specific gendered resource that is drawn on within networks of family and social relationships (Reay, 2004). Within this research on girls' friendships and social relationships, particular practices and presentations of girls' bodies were clearly valorised and could be transferred into bearers of symbolic value. Similarly, the young women's emotional realm and investment in their close friendships, family relations and peer groups had clear value within these young women's social fields.

This idea of the individual being shaped and positioned as a social process also emerges in work on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Within the communities of practice theorisation, individual identity is shaped by interaction with the collective in the notion of an *identity in practice* (Wenger, 1998). Lave & Wenger's work on communities of practice explores the notion of community as a group engaged in a common practice, and as a symbolic system and a process of acculturation, rather than a shared community as a spatial entity or locale. Lave & Wenger's initial work reflected on learning within various apprenticeships in a variety of cross-cultural settings, from Yucatec midwives, Vai and

Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, and members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Within this study I draw loosely on Lave & Wenger's initial conceptualisation to use Paechter's 'communities of femininity practice' to consider young women's apprenticeship into 'adult' womanhood rather than a workplace, vocational or formal apprenticeship.

For Lave & Wenger, communities of practice are ubiquitous, and everyone is involved in them in some capacity, either in a marginal, or more central role. Furthermore, for young people, such communities can take many forms, from formalised structures, such as school classes, to informal networks of learning, such as friendship groups. Such communities of practice are about mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires, where certain sets of skills are valued, and expertise in these skills can enable members to take a central role in the group. In order to illustrate these points, Lave & Wenger draw upon a range of examples of apprenticeships, to illustrate how coded behaviour is negotiated through participatory practices, to enable individuals to move from the periphery to become central members of a particular community. Individuals are often members of several communities of simultaneously, and travel between such communities during the course of the day. However, there are clear limits about what constitutes a community of practice. Lave & Wenger, in their initial conception, focused on the learning arenas of workplaces cultures and support groups, rather than the much wider notion implicit in Paechter's (2003, a,b,c) later communities of masculinities and femininities.

For Lave & Wenger, communities of practice are relations tied to practice through which knowledges are developed, interpreted and shared, and much of the development of this work has been based around workplaces and organisational learning. Communities of

practice are thus tied to particular times, places and sets of relations within particular locales. It is perhaps contentious then whether Lave & Wenger's initial model would recognise as *de facto* communities of practice the potentially diffuse overlapping matrix of relations that make up communities of masculinities and femininities. However, within this thesis, I also want to consider young women's friendship groups as 'communities' of shared practices; from that of storytelling, to snapshot photography to drinking and smoking, and argue that all of these practices were subtly gendered in their construction. Although within this thesis I consider localised communities of femininity practice, I am aware that these communities were not just taking place in the physical space of the youth work settings and surrounding town, but were also lived out in the virtual space of internet bulletin boards and chat rooms. When I refer to the young women's communities of femininity practice in this thesis, I am therefore referring to a particular space of interest, rather than a specific geographical locale.

Lave & Wenger's communities of practice theorisation moves away from the idea of individualised learners as passive vessels, waiting to be taught and guided. Instead, learning becomes a social phenomenon, and members of communities actively create and negotiate meanings between each other and construct community and individual identities. Wenger (1998) uses the concept of identity to explore how individuals and collectives negotiate their experience of membership between various communities of practice. Identity, in Wenger's conceptualisation, is a pivot between the individual and the social, and so is immensely useful in exploring how young people's interactions with others may shape their gendered performance. As Wenger states:

*“Our practices, our languages, our artefacts, and our world views all reflect our social relations.” (Wenger, 1998: 146)*

Wenger (1998) argues that producing and sustaining a community of practice, involves a constant process of identity negotiation. As a result, individual and group identity becomes an experience of participation in the community of practice. One must therefore learn how to engage with others, discover a shared focus, and negotiate a common repertoire and history to participate in a community of practice. For Wenger, such a process of identification will be supported by reference to memories, histories and events through the sharing of stories, photographs and certain ways of doing particular actions. *Identity in practice* becomes an interplay between participation and reification in the process of making and recognising oneself as a community member.

Individual identity is thus formed within the collective, and is perceived as a display of a competent performance of community membership, within one’s community of practice. This process of identity making is always ongoing, as individuals are members of various communities, and identities are temporally and relationally constituted through social context, and negotiated from time and place. For example, a community member may have differing identities depending upon their trajectory through the community and their overlapping community memberships. Moreover, an individual’s role in the group, whether as an established member or newcomer, affects the process of identity formation in the process of bringing new members into an established community.

Wenger uses the notions of participation and reification to explain how group identity is produced and sustained. Wenger’s use of reification is more expansive than the dictionary definition and is



both a product and a process, through which abstract ideas take form in particular objects. As Wenger argues:

*“I would claim that the process of reification so construed is central to every practice. Any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form”.* (Wenger, 1998:59)

These abstractions, tools, symbols, stories and terms within this study embrace young people’s use of language, drinking stories, party photographs and the role of particular brands and types of alcohol and cigarettes to mark membership of their particular communities. Reification is the ‘thingness’ around which communities build symbolic meaning, and such reified items have strong cohesive power to community members. These objects, whether a particular brand of cigarettes, a snap shot, or a fake identification card, function to communicate the norms and values of the group, illustrate bonds of friendship, and allow the performance of group and individual identities. Such objects may merely mark club membership or communicate group norms that are held in high regard by group members.

Wenger’s (1998) analysis explores how identity is formed through a process of practice and reification between the various communities that an individual may belong. For Wenger, participation and reification are irrevocably entwined. An individual thus negotiates and produces a personal identity by reconciling the norms of the various community memberships. Moreover, for Wenger, individuals can be defined as much by the communities that they do not belong to, as the community that they fully participate in. For example, an individual community member may not have the same level of inclusion in all the communities he or she participates. In some communities, one may be a central integral figure, but in others, may only have a fairly marginal role that may change over time and

place. By participating within a group, one comes to recognise oneself as a community member and shape one's identity accordingly by adopting or resisting the group norms. The communities of practice model creates spaces where young people form their identities, and learn how to become adults and members of those particular communities, or alternatively risk rejection, by not following the implicit community codes.

Communities of practice can therefore be to varying degree exclusive spaces, upheld with a range of exclusionary practices, as individuals have a differing degree of status and a variety of roles in their membership, between, and within, differing communities. This status may alter over time as an individual status moves from novice to established veteran in various community contexts. Wenger uses the term trajectory to explore these different community statuses, and an individuals' movement within a group. An individual's trajectory in a community of practice may take a variety of forms. These forms can include: *inbound trajectories*, where an individual becomes acculturated into the norms of the group, with the possibility of becoming an eventual community veteran, *to peripheral trajectories*, where a community member only maintains a marginal status, never achieving full membership of the group. Other versions can include: *insider trajectories*, where an existing member continually renegotiates and reproduces identities within a community, and *outbound trajectories*, where an individual moves beyond the community, or example, through graduation from school or college communities. Beyond this, many members may experience *boundary trajectories*, as they move between and across various communities, for instance, in the ways, young women may navigate the boundaries of various age banded communities, as they attend school during weekdays, and at the weekends enter the world of 'adult' work through a Saturday job. In later chapters I return to examine issues of generational identities, in addition to exploring

how control and conformity are integral tools in sustaining group membership and moulding gender identities within such communities.

There are clear parallels within the conceptions of *habitus*, *cultural capital* and *communities of practice*. Unlike discourses of ‘peer pressure’, Bourdieu’s work on *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990a,b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and Lave & Wenger’s work on communities of practice, do not deny individual agency, nor are they based on a deficit model of the individual, but are instead a recognition that wider social practices inform individual social identities. Whilst Bourdieu’s work explores issues of domination and the reproduction of social inequalities; there remains potential inadequacies in the Lave & Wenger’s initial conception of communities of practice. These deficiencies, including the under analysis of power within communities of practice model, which has been somewhat remedied in later work by Paechter (2006a) who deploys a Foucaultian analysis of power, to explore the reproduction of gender inequalities within communities which I will outline in more detail in the following section.

### *Communities of Femininities*

In feminist poststructuralists accounts of ‘doing’ girl, gender identity work is a complex intersubjective process, which is not merely about the internalisation of gender norms, but is also about the projection and response to one’s performance by others. Whilst poststructuralist work has explored ideas of multiple femininities and masculinities, certain gendered performances have greater legitimacy than others, and a shared repertoire of what it means to enact various genders. In a series of recent writings, Paechter (2003 a, b, 2006a,b, forthcoming) outlines a theory of masculinities and femininities based on communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation, in which gender identity is collectively

constructed contextually and relationally. Paechter summarises her argument below:

*“I am arguing that the learning of what it means to be male or female within a social configuration results in shared practices in pursuit of sustaining particular localised masculine and feminine identities. “ (Paechter, 2003 b: 71)*

Within girls’ friendship groups certain ways of ‘doing’ girl would be valorised, and the knowledge and power to produce, for example, a legitimate form of community femininity practice, would thus enable a girl to potentially become a central member of the community. Prestige and status would be afforded to girls who were the most adept at projecting and performing this particular role (Paechter, forthcoming). However, whilst sex and gender may be mutable entities, the permitted range of possible femininities or masculinities open for an individual to inhabit is far from limitless. Rather, individuals may enact certain identities within wider group norms. These norms are dependent upon an individual member’s role within a set context and particular community of practice (Paechter, 2006a).

In common with other poststructuralist feminist writings, this model of femininities as a *work in progress*, potentially allows young women to transcend boundaries and take up a range of gendered personas at different times and places. Gender identity, is thus contextual and relational, as a product of, and by, community membership. Gender ‘norms’ would not be located in one particular place, but instead would be negotiated and (re) learned in an ongoing process. Normative masculinities and femininities can thus vary significantly between groups and are intersected by issues such as class, ‘race’ and age. Individuals therefore can inhabit several communities at different times and places. There are explicit membership markers to indicate belonging and the communities boundaries are marked through initiation and leaving processes.

Paechter (2003a) argues that masculine and feminine boundaries are defined through and by a process of 'othering' outsiders who do not conform to group norms. Wenger's (1998) notion of reification that I described earlier, is also a way of perpetuating the symbols and practices of the community of practice. Reified items, within a community of femininity or masculinity, may take the form of bodily deportment, style of dress, hairstyle, or interest in a gendered activity such as a particular sport. The recent feminist appropriation of theories that explain how individual identity is produced and negotiated within the social realm, provide new ways of exploring how girls' subjectivities are gendered, raced and classed, without denying young women's individual agency. Whilst gender inequalities may be enduring, both the models of *habitus* and communities of masculinities and femininities, do not see all gender inequality as inevitable and provide scope for the negotiation of alternative gendered forms.

#### Power/knowledge and gendered practice

Previous studies have noted the hierarchical structures of girls' friendship groups (Hey, 1987; Reay, 2001; George, 2001; 2003, 2004). It is of importance therefore to explore how power operates within girls' friendship groups and how young women position themselves in relation to each other, and to wider discourse of femininities. In this section I outline how questions of power/knowledge come to structure girls' friendship groups and the behaviour of individual participants enable the continuation and centrality of certain dominant gendered practices. In the initial theorisation of communities of practice model, Lave & Wenger (1991) position such communities as relatively benign entities. Subsequently, various commentators (Smith, 2003; Paechter, 2006a) suggest that issues of power and of exclusionary practices are key to the formation of communities of practice. Paechter (2006a) argues

that although a range of femininities or masculinities may be tolerated within a community, certain dominant forms of gendered and sexualised practice prevail within wider society. The maintenance and enduring nature of these dominant forms of masculinity and femininities arise through the fluidity of enacted genders within communities (Paechter, 2006a). Although individuals may have the scope for individual agency and experimentation, this may only be within a limited range of permitted practices that are reproduced over generations. Following Foucaultian concepts of power/knowledge (Foucault; 1977; 1978; 1980), Paechter (2006a) explores how dominant hierarchies of gender can work within and between communities of practice. Paechter argues that the process of legitimisation of certain acts, not only encompasses gendered performances, but also those of age, (dis)ability, class, and 'race'. For example, notions of what it means to be a man or woman may vary greatly across generational, cultural and social groups.

Issues of power and exclusion, therefore, remain integral to how particular forms of gendered practices are sustained and reproduced. There has been much written on the nature of power. In this thesis I use the Foucaultian notion of power/knowledge, to explore how practices and processes produce particular kinds of subjectivities. Foucault (1976) maintains that power is inter-relational and multi directional.

*"Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. " (Foucault, 1976: 93)*

Following Paechter (2006a,b), I draw on two concepts that Foucault uses in his analysis of power/knowledge, to explore the micro dynamics of how communities of femininity practice uphold particular gender identities. These are *panopticism*, and the concept of *pastoral power*. The concept of *panopticism*, as a continuous

regulating gaze, found its architectural form in Bentham's plans for a kind of prison known as a *panopticon*. The prison design was constructed around a central tower where the unseen gaolers, could monitor the movements of inmates. The *Panopticon*, as a disciplinary technology, connects space, power, knowledge and the control of the body (Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982). Power, as demonstrated within the panopticon "... is continuous, disciplinary and anonymous." (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 189) Within Foucault's analysis, power does not originate from one particular place, rather, the controlling gaze becomes internalised by the inmates, who rectify their behaviour under this scrutiny. Foucault (1977) highlights how the technology can control bodies within space, and as a result can be used beyond the regulation of prisoners and function within a range of institutions including education and medicine. I want to suggest that such micro-power processes are also replicated within young women's friendships groups, as girls' constantly self-monitor and scrutinise others in reproducing appropriate gendered behaviour.

The second conceptualisation is that of *pastoral power*. For Foucault, pastoral power has ecclesiastical roots within the Christian church, in the role of the pastor. This traditional use of pastoral power is concerned with achieving the salvation of one self and others. Foucault (1976, 1982) argues that this pastoral power has expanded and become reconfigured in the modern state. However, this new pastoral power has a more earthly dimension than the previous form that focused on life after death. Furthermore, the role of the officials of *pastoral power* no longer resides within the church, but within state apparatus, welfare authorities and the family, through a host of individualising tactics. Within communities of practice this power as a disciplinary force can take a range of guises, and can be both coercive and invasive in controlling and monitoring the behaviour of other members within a group

*Pastoral power*, within girls' friendship groups, can take similar forms to older versions within the church. As highlighted in chapter 6, through stories and gossip, girls are encouraged to share intimacies and confess to other members of the group. Young women learn to perform to themselves and others in the group elaborate displays of 'good friendship' and being 'nice' as an embodiment of ideal middle class femininity (Hey, 1997). Similarly, girls may achieve status within groups as being a 'good friend' and a 'shoulder to cry on', whilst gaining influence within the group and securing the boundaries of membership through kindness to others.

Such pastoral power in action is apparent in various studies on young women social groups (Hey, 1997; George, 2001; George, 2003; George, 2004). In George's (2001, 2003, 2004) research into 11 and 12 year old girls' friendships groups had clear hierarchical structures. George observed that the leaders of the friendship groups created a persona that created a dependency from other girls, and as a result cemented their social position and could control others in the inner circle and periphery of the group. Power, within girls' friendship groups, are thus upheld through the monitoring and regulation of behaviour by the self and others (Hey, 1997), as one moves through differing roles within overlapping communities. This is not to suggest that the power within girls' friendships group is located within the central leading members of the group, rather, that young women have a range of roles within these communities of femininity practice which may alter depending on time and place and also contribute to the maintenance of the group. Similarly, by perceiving of these groups as composed of a matrix of power relations, where there are exercises of power there will also be resistance (Foucault, 1976). Although certain forms of hegemonic gender may seem to be at the fore within certain contexts, at other times, resistant and alternate gendered identities will be played with and performed. This subversion may be a challenge to dominant



forms of gender, or alternatively, can be an accepted cathartic temporal subversion within permitted boundaries.

Furthermore, this temporal and spatial aspect of power relations is of great importance when understanding the nature of communities of femininity practice. As Wenger (1998) argues, individuals are members of multiple communities of practice. At any given time, an individual must negotiate and reconcile the divergent norms of these various communities. However, within the concept of hegemonic gender, there may be some broad similarities between the gendered norms between these various communities. Indeed, it is in the repetition of such practices that hegemonic forms of femininities and masculinities take shape (Paechter, 2006). However, in the variations between particular communities, resistant and alternate forms of gendered practice may continue to exist. Furthermore, the communities of femininity practice are not merely about the differences between various friendship groups or contexts, but are also shaped by structural forces, such as cultural and class variations. Such differences produce a multiplicity of femininities, which are reproduced within group and individual identities, depending on social context and location.

#### *Generational Communities and friendship groups*

In this chapter I argue that generational practices can influence and shape gendered identities, and that young women may adopt differing types of femininity across their life course. The questioning and deconstruction of the essential categories 'woman' or 'girl' (Davies, 1989; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1993; Jones, 1993; Francis, 1998; Connell, 2002; Reay, 2001a), has been mirrored within childhood and youth studies, and it has been argued that there is no essential 'child', 'youth' or 'adult' (Aries; 1962; James; 1993; Jenks, 1996; Jeffs & Smith, 1999; Hockey & James, 2003). All of these

categories are changeable, and as discursive constructs are intersected with factors such as 'race', class, gender, sexual orientation and (dis)ability. The differences within such gendered and age banded categories may be as great or as small, as the differences between such groups. Whilst the physiological processes of infancy and puberty may be grounded within biology, the experiences of these events will vary across time and culture (Jenks, 1996; Hockey & James, 2003).

Within the prevailing media discourses of 'youth', is a concern that this time of life is one of particular strain, and that young people need help in making the successful transition to adulthood (Head, 1997; Griffin, 1993; Griffin, 1997). The social categories and experiences of childhood and youth vary between and within cultures. Within the UK, an individual experience of being a child is fragmented through such factors as class, gender, ethnicity and location. Childhood and youth are institutionally produced as social categories, and upheld by various restrictions on space, such as compulsory schooling, and age specific laws relating to sexual activity and tobacco and alcohol consumption and political enfranchisement (Jenks, 1996, Smith & Jeffs, 1999).

Within contemporary western discourse, youth as a liminal time between childhood and adulthood, is often perceived to be a time of 'risk', as highlighted in the range of panics and fears around individuals in this age category (Sibley, 1995; Valentine, 1998; Winchester, 1999; Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). Such social marginality is reflected through young people's social and spatial practices, which are constructed through and by membership of different communities of practices. Youth as a liminal temporal status, between childhood and adulthood, is constructed and upheld by the various ways contemporary western society is age banded through public discourse and institutions such as compulsory

schooling and policy interventions are aimed at youth. Recent writings on youth and transition have noted that former traditional pathways to adulthood are changing, and dwelt on the protracted and fragmented nature of contemporary adolescence (Jones, 2002; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Jeffs & Smith (1999) critique the instrumental transition literature, and question the notion of an age banded experiences of youth on the passage towards an imagined 'adulthood', which they argue apparently equates economic independence with adult autonomy. Equally, Jeffs & Smith critique the use of the psychological notion of adolescence as a developmental stage of 'storm and stress' (Erikson, 1968), by arguing that people, regardless of age, may experience periods of emotional insecurity and personal turmoil. Despite Jeffs & Smiths critique, the 'storm and stress' model of adolescence has continued resonance in the host of welfare interventions aimed at young people.

In the wave of policy and pedagogic interventions, young people are constructed in a number of contradictory ways. Jeffs & Smith (1999) state that UK policy discourse positions young people in three ways , as thug, victims or users. As potential aggressors, innocents or potential drug users, young people are deemed in need of protection from themselves and others (Jeffs & Smith; 1999; Griffin, 1997). Such concerns are deeply gendered (Griffin, 1993) with fears regarding criminalized youth gangs terrorising public space focusing predominantly on young men, and concerns around young women seemingly more fixed on the body and safety. As Aapola, Gonick & Harris (2005) argue, the contemporary prevailing representations of girls are split between 'girl power' and young women 'at risk', and the notion of good girls gone bad, is threaded throughout various health, educational and media discourses and their depictions of drinking, drug taking and violent women. In such discourses, young women's bodies appear to be a source of great anxiety. Whereas social interventions aimed at young men are often about anti social

behaviour and getting youth, often imagined as male, 'off the streets' and away from the perils of youth offending and petty crime, young women are perceived to be highly at risk of teenage pregnancy and virulent sexually transmitted infections (Hudson, 1989; Kehily, 1995).

The policy responses to these issues about the moral and physical health of the nation's youth, push in directions that are both protective and punitive. Within the UK, many of these concerns focus on the perceived fragmented and delayed transitions have created a growing industry to aid young people's passage into adulthood from *Connexions* advisors<sup>2</sup> to youth workers (Jeffs & Smith, 2001). Through age banded legislation, young people are excluded from many of the rights of citizenship. To illustrate this point, currently within the UK, under 18s have no formal political representation, have a relative lack of autonomy and within policy legislation such as the Children's Act (1989) are deemed in need of protection. In such a social climate, young people illicit appropriation of 'adult' activities, whether by participating in underage sex or substance use, draws concern and attention from policymakers, practitioners and researchers.

Teenage girls, can potentially inhabit a range of gendered and generational communities of practice, and perform a range of gendered and age specific personas. This flexibility is reflected in policy discourse within the UK, which positions under 18s as children, yet on other occasions, such as on Saturday nights, young women may take part, albeit often illicitly, in adult communities in bars and clubs. Within the various gendered and generational communities there are different ways of performing girl, teenager

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<sup>2</sup> In England, *Connexions* is a youth support service for all young people who are aged between 13-19. The service aims to provide help and advice on issues such as housing, career and health.

and adult woman. These differences create a set of tensions, and on occasion, young women may be seen to do the 'wrong' type of generational and gendered performance in a particular setting.

This idea of a range of embodied femininities, enables notions of contextual and situational gendered performance. Girls who smoke are participating in particular communities of generational and bodily practice, and gender thus mediates the way young women take drugs. These practices, such as drinking, smoking or having sex, cement particular gendered and generational practices. Using Paechter's communities of masculinity and femininity practice theorisation (Paechter, 2002), teenage girls' use of tobacco and alcohol can thus be understood as gendered acts in creating individual and group identities within teenage communities of femininities. These differing kinds of femininity are subtly shaded through the understanding of the meaning behind different substances and acts within communities of femininity practice.

Moreover, communities are not static, and young women may reflect back on their own girlhood, or forward to an imagined womanhood, and consider doing differing types of femininity at different points in their life course (See chapters 6 and 7). For some, the future may be viewed with excited contemplation, and the adoption of some of the trappings of so-called adult femininities. However, other girls may consider aspects of this transition with trepidation, and seek to reject the responsibility and limiting social positioning of their potential future. A young woman may reflect on her future at different times with an element of ambivalence. Indeed, she may be eager to try on some of the freedoms ascribed to normative heterosexual adult femininity, but at the same time, as illustrated in the next chapter she may not always view the responsibilities of womanhood as much fun. Such a sentiment is reflected in the title of this thesis and echoed throughout the later empirical chapters.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to establish the theoretical groundwork for the following chapters. I outlined some of the debates upon gender identity, including recent poststructuralist work on gender and communities of practice, as a space for constructing group norms and learning and performance of femininities. This work takes an interdisciplinary approach to exploring the ways the young women produced their drinking and smoking identities. Later in this thesis, I draw on theoretical writings within social geography and anthropology to explain specific community practices in order to analyse my research findings in detail. In this thesis I wish to substantiate work on communities of femininity practice, and contribute to the growing literature on girlhood and friendship groups. I draw on these theories many times within the space of this thesis, as I demonstrate how young women use a range of practices, from storytelling to drug use, to uphold gendered conventions and norms within friendship groups and teenage communities of femininity practice. By doing so, I wish to substantiate elements of Paechter's work of communities of practice as spaces to learn masculinities and femininities, by looking into the social world of the teenage friendship group, and problematise some of the applications of concepts such as 'peer pressure' within mainstream drug education discourse.

Whilst I argue against the notion that young people are passive vessels waiting to be socialised by parents and peers, I recognise structural constraints within young women's own sense of personal agency and autonomy. Later chapters explore how young women construct and negotiate temporal and relational alternate and resistant femininities, as a response to hegemonic gendered and generational norms through bodily acts. The community of femininity practice model is a useful analytical tool in examining the

lives of teenage women because it allows for young women's own agency in the performance of a range of individual and group femininities. This model, as a result, can help gain understandings of how and why young women may resist the wider health education messages of adults.

My argument in the rest of this thesis is that teenage girls as apprentice women experiment through a range of activities in living out a range of gendered and generational personas. Some of these personas may support hegemonic normative gendered codes, yet other versions may subtly subvert or resist dominant gendered forms within wider society. Throughout the following chapters I provide an account of how young women perform and negotiate different kinds of femininities, and how such norms of gendered performance are spatially, relationally and temporally variable. Although young women may have the scope to resist dominant depictions of wider adult normative femininities, through activities such as drinking and drug taking, I would suggest that many young women still find themselves positioned within wider gendered and generational communities of practice, which often reproduce these traditional dominant femininities on a localised level. This can be through overt modification of behaviour by other central community members, or alternatively, by an individual's self-regulation under the scrutiny of others in a quest and struggle for feminine respectability (Skeggs, 1997).

The teenage social groups described within the following chapters thus have the potential to be either experienced as emancipatory or controlling. Peripheral community members may often find themselves edged out or ignored, in the face of the dominant normative gendered discourses upheld by the central members of the group. Through this power/knowledge matrix, certain acts and knowledge may be valorised above subordinated discourses of

femininity. Whilst alternative ways of 'doing girl' are not universally subordinated, in these teenage communities, young women voiced a desperate clamour and need to fit in and find a place of their own. In such a social world, drinking alcohol to be *one of the girls*, or finding solace in the supportive bond of cigarette smoking, created spaces of belonging and calm. In such spaces young women can feel they develop and define their own identities within wider teenage communities whilst still enacting a sense of personal agency and control.

The next chapter examines the ethics and methodology of this research. I explore the tensions that arose from my status as a researcher and a youth practitioner, and my attempts to create an ethically congruent study.



### **CHAPTER 3: ‘What is it you exactly do?’ An account of the research process.**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline some of the methodological, ethical and epistemological issues that marked the research process. In this chapter I am going to provide an account of some of the tensions in producing an ‘ethical’ participatory research project with young people, and reflect on some of the ethical concerns and power issues within my research. This chapter also explores some of the problems of attempting to secure ‘informed consent’. The title of this chapter, “*What is it you exactly do?*” arose from a young man who was puzzled over why a thirty-something woman should be ‘hanging out’ with teenagers.

My research questions outlined earlier concerned the gendering of young women’s alcohol and tobacco use, and how gender is ‘learnt’ through such social practices and interactions. This emphasis on meaning and discursive practices, led me to favour a qualitative approach to data collection. The combination of a multi method, multi site investigation, on a sensitive topic with minors, whilst entering the field as a researcher, a youth practitioner and a feminist, created many interesting ethical dilemmas. Although I could explore each of these issues at length, constraints on space mean that I will visit each issue briefly.

During the fieldwork process I was employed as a volunteer and paid youth worker in the local area. This work put me in daily contact with the young people either in the local youth centre, college common room, or occasionally, as an outreach worker, in the outdoor locations of the street, park and riverside, where young people gathered at evenings and weekends. Youth work, as an activity, is mobilised around notions of empowerment and

participation. However, at the onset I was naive about the emerging difficulties in ethically handling this data and protecting the identity of my informants. At the end of the process my initial enthusiasm has been tempered by the difficulties implicit in attempting to achieve an 'ethical', participatory project.

I will begin by describing the research context and strategy, before exploring the ethical background of the research, and the peculiarities of combining the dual roles of researcher and youth worker. The first part of the chapter outlines the field setting and my research methods, before commencing on a discussion of the wider ethical issues raised in this multi-method study. These issues arise from the subject matter, and my position as a research practitioner *and* feminist. I explore how post-modern and feminist critiques of traditional approaches to ethnography have opened up debates of power inequality and questions of authority. I consider from the outset the ethical basis of a study in its entirety, including the process itself, the writing and construction of the narrative and the final dissemination of the findings.

### Research Context

This research took place between October 2003 and March 2005 in an affluent borough on the edge of a large city in England. The leafy suburb contains a mixture of expensive owner occupancy housing and large estates of social housing, often in close proximity. Although it is a relatively prosperous area, the young people involved in this study came from a wide range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The study involved two settings in close proximity used by different young people, a generic youth centre and youth provision in a large further education college. However, it must be noted here that whilst I wanted to use two distinct field settings, in the event there was an overlap and flow of young people between these spaces. The porous boundaries

between the research settings meant there was always a movement of young people, and the communities of femininity practice between the two settings. These communities of femininity practice were thus only loosely tied to a specific locale, although they may have initially been based in the college or youth centre, they spilt out into young people's social spaces in parks, nightclubs and girls' bedrooms.

### **The Common room**

The college was a large modern building in substantial grounds, some 1000 yards from the youth centre. The college offered a range of vocational and academic qualifications for young people aged 14 and older. This research was based in the *common room* which was a recreational space upstairs from the college refectory where students could spend free time between lessons or use the kitchen. The college students were older than the youth centre users aged 16-19, and were ethnically mixed, as the catchment area for the local college was extensive, with students often commuting large distances across the city.

The recreational areas within the college were clearly split down class, 'race' and subcultural lines, and despite the *common room* being used by young people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds including White European, Lebanese, Indian, Black British, West African and White British, the dominant culture was white, middle class and 'alternative'. The *common room* was seen by young people in the college as a hang out for 'grungers'<sup>3</sup> and 'gays', in contrast to the working class Black British 'rudie'<sup>4</sup> heterosexual

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'grunger' was used pejoratively to describe young people who listened to rock music and wore dark clothes, particularly hooded sweatshirts and baggy jeans.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'rudie' was a shortened version of rude boy or rude girl. This term was used sometimes pejoratively to describe young people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who listened to urban music and dressed in an Black British cultural style, including streetwear labels like Nike, Avirex and Fubu.

cultural space of *the refectory*. The young people involved in this research at the college were mainly *common room* users. However, many of the common room users would go down to the refectory area to smoke cigarettes, and I also would occasionally visit the refectory to make contact with young people in the smoking area.

### **The Youth Centre**

The youth centre was centrally situated within the suburban town. It was based in a large house, with gardens and connected gymnasium. The centre was open Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings from 3.30 until 10pm, with a large monthly music event on a Saturday evening until 11pm. The local youth centre users at the time were predominantly white British and aged between 13 and 18 years old. These centre users were from a variety of class and subcultural backgrounds, including young people into rock music, in addition to those who listened to urban and rap. However, as the college students began to frequent the space and the centre organised 'urban night', more Black British young people began to use the centre. Many of the friendship circles overlapped, and students and youth centre users mixed, as year 11 pupils began to enroll at the college, and the college's students began to socialize at the youth centre after lessons. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the youth centre became almost an extension of the college common room, with *common room* students arriving *en masse* to socialize, play pool and use other youth centre services

I worked as a youth worker in the youth centre for over 12 months and volunteered at the college youth provision known here as *the common room*. The participants from the *common room* were more ethnically mixed, but subculturally homogenous, as most of the young women interviewed identified as 'alternative'. The participants from the centre were all White British, but

encompassed a wider variety of subcultural identifications, including young people were into rock music or hip hop. Throughout this thesis the 'common room', refers to the college setting and the 'centre' refers to the youth centre.

### The Research strategy

This research involved a variety of techniques which evolved over time and included: participant observation, group and individual interviews in youth work settings, bulletin board postings and photography. In the course of this research I had contact with hundreds of young men and women in the two fieldsettings. In addition, there were over 100 registered users on the bulletin boards. A crowded night at the youth centre could involve over 80 young people, and the college common room was frequented by over 40 regular users. However, over time, I built up a relationship with a key core group, who became involved in the various interviews and conversation on the research topics. In all, 36 young people were involved in these formal and informal interviews. These included 30 young women and 6 young men. Of those interviewed, 24 young people identified as White British and/or Irish and 12 participants identified themselves as being part of a Minority Ethnic group, including: Hispanic, East African Asian, East European and various mixed ethnic identities. For a breakdown of these participants, see table 1 in appendix. For many of the young people defining their ethnicity was complex exploration of self, as they felt they did not fit simply into census tick boxes, as highlighted below.

*Fin: How would you describe your ethnicity?*

*Ella: Well let me tell you. I'm born in England, my mum's from Barbados, my grandparents are from Turks and Caicos, my dad's whole family is from Iran, and I've lived in the Caribbean, so I've lots of Caribbean influences in me, and that's about it really. I have a bit of French in me, a bit of Irish in me, and maybe a bit of German, but I'm not sure.*

*Fin: And if you had to tick a census box?*

*Ella: Mixed race other (pauses) or... White and Asian.*

Girls' social class positions were also often complex and difficult to establish. The young people, in common with many other studies, rarely described themselves using traditional class categories, and struggled to identify themselves clearly with a class position. However, young people could clearly identify others that they felt were 'posh' or 'common'. For example, the common room users remained predominantly middle class, with one young man disparagingly commenting that the 'rudie' refectory users were all in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAS)<sup>5</sup> payable to families with low incomes. Despite such comments, several of the common room users were in receipt of EMA or other benefits, or were homeless or insecurely housed, although this was far from common knowledge in the space of the common room. Although I did not ask directly questions regarding sexual orientation, during the course of the fieldwork, six of the young women identified as bicurious or bisexual, and one girl as lesbian. The ages of the participants ranged from 13-19 years old, with the bulk of the interviewees falling within the 15- 17 age group.

There were 29 semi structured formal individual or group interviews and numerous informal interviews that were recorded either on Dictaphone or by hand. Eighteen of these interviews took place at the college field setting and the remaining eleven at the youth centre. Several of the key informants were interviewed several times over the course of the fieldwork. 12 girls were also interviewed using party photographs previously taken by the young women, in order to elicit responses from these shots. These young women's photographic practices are discussed at length in

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of the research, EMAs were payable on a sliding scale to families with incomes lower than £30,810 per annum. They aimed to encourage students from low income families to continue in full time education after the age of 16.

chapter 7. The interviews explored a range of themes including: current and past socializing habits, young people's use of space, cigarette, alcohol and other drug use and sources of information about tobacco and alcohol and girls' photographic practices.

The material in my fieldwork diary was collated from centre based and detached youth work sessions. This outreach material came from streets, parks and skate areas in the local vicinity. Both research settings had websites and bulletin boards. The youth centre's board was officially moderated by the youth service, whereas the college provision bulletin board had been set up unofficially by young people. I also used visual methods in the form of photography after noting that girls' friendship groups regularly traded party snapshots. Participants received disposable cameras to record events, so I might use these images as interview prompts and elicit narratives from the resulting images. After interviews, young women would receive a copy of the prints, and these pictures would be excitedly passed around, with members of the group reminiscing and commentating on particular shots. I felt that a participatory visual approach would challenge to an extent some of the inherent power inequalities inherent in this study.

I reported back to respondents, via email, on emerging findings, and young people were happy to provide suggestions on language use, chapter titles and omissions within the data. Tape and minidisk transcripts, postings from the websites and field notes were constantly coded for themes in an approach influenced by the writings on Grounded theory by (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I constructed research memos from these themes to guide this study further and to make interconnections between the arising data.

### *Introducing key participants*

Whilst this research is about young women's experiences and behaviour, the fieldwork settings were mixed sex and young men and young women socialized together. As a result, it would have been obtrusive to insist on only including young women in the open ended informal discussions that took place within the youth work settings. Similarly, my fieldwork notes would often include observations about the young men's behaviour within the peer group. To ensure anonymity, all young people's names in the final study have been altered, and any names that do appear are pseudonyms selected, where possible, by the young people themselves. Several of the selected names originated from figures they admired such as musicians, or in the case of one girl, from a character in the US TV show, *Sex and the City (Samantha)*. Other names were those that a participant would have liked to have been called (*Becky, Amy, Rachel*). Images that appear in this text have been altered to obscure the young people's identity.

I will now briefly introduce some of the key participants in this study in the two main settings in order to provide a little more background to the young women. The key contacts at the college were: *Becky, Sade, Tiggy* and *Maria*

### **Becky**

Becky was a 17 year old Black British female who was born and grew up in the nearby city. Becky commuted daily to the local college to study for her A Levels, and she lived at home and had a close relationship with her mother and sister. Becky's parents were divorced and her father lived nearby. At the college, Becky moved between friendship groups in the common room and refectory. In the first year of the study Becky was a central figure in the common room. In the second year of the study Becky used the common room far less as her friendship groups shifted to other



groups' in the college. Becky went to bars and clubs at weekends in the city, often with her gay male friends.

### **Sade**

Sade was 16 years old at the beginning of this study. She had been born in Nigeria and had moved to the UK at the age of 9 with her mother and her two younger brothers. Sade's mother and father were divorced. Sade lived with her mother and siblings in a small suburban town a few miles away from the college. Sade was often responsible for taking care of her brothers and keeping house whilst her mother worked. Sade had attended a secondary school with many of the other college common room members. Sade socialised with friends at a local rock pub.

### **Maria**

Maria was a 17 year old White British female. She was born and grew up in the local town. She had recently moved back in with her parents after spending some time living in a student house share, after leaving college the previous year. Maria had a difficult relationship with her parents and despite her family's relative affluence, she often found herself insecurely housed because of the continuing domestic conflict at home. Maria regularly attended raves and clubs in the local city and parties at the student house, as well as 'hanging out' in the park and graveyard.

### **Tiggy**

Tiggy was an 18 year old A level student. She was born and grew up in the town and lived with her mother. Her parents were divorced and her father lived in another city. Tiggy aimed to go to university to study biology, and in the second year of this study went travelling on a gap year. Tiggy had been close friends with Maria before this trip away. Tiggy regularly attended rock nights at clubs in the city and promoted music nights at the local rock pub.

At the youth centre the key participants were *Amy, Chloe, Jodie, Lisa* and *Betty*.

### **Amy**

Amy was a 14 years old White British female. She lived in the nearby city and regularly travelled to use the centre. At the beginning of the study Amy used the youth centre during the day to complete school work, as she had been excluded from her fee paying school. Eventually, Amy was accepted into a comprehensive in the nearby city, and Amy stopped attending the centre. Amy socialized on weekend evenings with a group of older male friends at the local Park and riverside.

### **Chloe**

Chloe was a 19 year old White British female, who had grown up and lived with her parents in the local area. Chloe had lived in her early childhood with her Nan, but at the time of the study lived with her parents. Chloe was a part time student at a college in the nearby city, and regularly attended the youth centre throughout the fieldwork period, eventually becoming close friends with Betty. At the time of the research, Chloe socialized in bars and night clubs in the suburban town.

### **Jodie**

Jodie was 14 at the time of the study and attended the local girls' school with her best friend Lisa who was in the year above. Jodie lived nearby to the centre with her mother and father. Jodie felt that her school was '*stuck up*', and often voiced antagonism to other girls and teachers. After year 11, Jodie used the centre considerably less, and she began to go local pubs and social clubs with much older friends.

### **Lisa**

Lisa was 15 at the time of the research and lived with her younger sister and older brother and parents in the town. In 2004, Lisa left the local girls' school and spent some time looking for work, before eventually finding a job as retail assistant. During this time Lisa used the centre regularly. Lisa was close friends with Jodie.

### **Betty**

Betty was a 14 year old White British female and lived with her mother, father and older sister in the town. Betty attended the same school as Jodie and Lisa, although her school attendance was often erratic, and Betty would try and use the youth centre during the school day. At the beginning of the study Betty socialised with a group of young women from the local girls' school and went drinking in local parks, and at the riverside. However, during the course of the research Betty changed her social group and began to travel with her older sister to visit city centre clubs and bars. Betty became friends with Chloe at the centre.

### *Entering the field*

At the time of the research, despite spending several years living within the city, my knowledge of the hinterlands on the edge of town was somewhat hazy. Eighteen months prior to commencing my PhD research, I was a contract researcher, and had interviewed young people at the suburban youth centre. During these interviews, it appeared that the young people's use of the local terrain was inextricable from their socializing in outdoor locations. Around the time I began my studies, a part time youth worker post arose at the Centre. In accepting this post, my position as a qualified worker meant that I became leader-in-charge during my sessions at the centre.

I was eager to find another complementary setting where I would not be potentially so much part of the management structure. In December 2003, I met a youth worker, Debbie, at a local youth provision in a further education college. Debbie was keen for me to take part in research at her provision. However, although this provision had been used for prior research, this had been more of a formal affair, involving focus groups and questionnaires on issues such as local transport and youth provision. The concept of a longer-term participant observation role was initially viewed with a little bemusement. My entry into the field was done on 'trust', because of my existing relationship with the local youth service. This study was also sanctioned by the college head of student services, on the proviso that I would eventually 'feedback' my findings through a report to college authorities as part of dissemination. I took this 'feedback' to be partial, as my commitment to my participants, meant that I did not wish to compromise their anonymity, nor create undue concern for either students or college authorities. As a youth worker and a researcher, I was seen to be part of the 'community of youth workers' and in a process of exchange I offered my time to gain entry to the field and I became a voluntary youth worker in the setting.

This might be seen as a distraction from my main role as researcher, and certainly, towards the middle part of my fieldwork, I found being tied to one location within the college occasionally problematic. However, my forays into the refectory and smoking areas meant I could 'check in' with girls who wished to participate in the study. The indoor space of the youth provision was a fairly exclusive space frequented by a select number of youth club *regulars*. This provided the study some focus, as self-selected friendship groups became involved in the research. Through my everyday interactions at the youth centre, I began to meet young

women and their peer groups who were eager to be involved in the study, and I interviewed young people and distributed cameras on my nights off. Occasionally, I recorded everyday conversations about weekend activities, and these informal chats would involve both young men and women. There were also various groups in the college and the centre that chose not to be involved or did not access the youth provision. This research remains 'partial', due to a multiplicity of factors, the settings, my position as a researcher, and the self-selecting groups who chose to participate.

Early in the fieldwork, it emerged that because of my (old) age and status as a youth worker in the town that it would prove difficult to do participant observation in outdoor young people's space at night without influencing the data. I discussed my research approach with one 16 year old young woman, who suggested that if I did 'hang out' with young people I would resemble a *'paedophile or undercover police'* (Field notes: 29/9/04). One tactic might have been to employ a younger researcher to 'hang out' with the young people, in a similar approach to the work of Moore (2003) who used young researchers to collect data from young people in his work on rural youth geographies. However, due to financial considerations, and my wish to not be removed from the immediacy of the data, I chose to use interviews and participant observations away from these outdoor spaces where young people gathered at evenings and weekends. Indeed, as Bloustien (2003) argues, a participatory visual approach provides participants space to exert authorial control and potentially achieves a greater degree of research 'reciprocity' than other methods. Indeed, the use of cameras in this research created an interest for many of the young women and allowed an air of 'reciprocity' in the research process, as the participants could control elements of their representations. The use of visual methods with young women producing images, allows participants to move beyond being purely research 'subjects'. Girls

gained a copy of their set of photographs, which proved a great incentive for involvement with just over half of the young women returning the cameras for development<sup>6</sup>. However, not all cameras were returned, with some young women losing cameras, developing the images themselves, or no longer using the youth provision.

*“Speaking posh”: The interview process*

Individual interviews often lasted over an hour and a half, but on occasions young people wanted to be interviewed in pairs or small groups. Interviewing, in the excitement of a club night, brought its own drawbacks. Firstly, it took me away from the everyday events in the centre, and secondly, it disrupted the naturalistic flow of the club, with other young people questioning why only some were being interviewed. Finally, with the alternative attractions of pool, friends and other youth centre activities, my interviewees could appear distracted and eager to return to the club night. At the college setting, participants accompanied me to the café for a coffee and an interview. These interview moments could transform into arenas of therapeutic value, with disclosure of break ups, bereavements and family circumstance. In one instance, I stopped the recording as during a discussion, a young woman broke down and spoke about a recent bereavement. The interview was temporarily abandoned as I comforted her, and pushed the research business away to another time.

Whilst the naturalistic style of participant observation could put young people off their guard, and lead to a potentially exploitative research relationship, I found that often my attempts at a more formal interview style complete with microphone, led to a somewhat staid and stiff interviewee. For example, during one interview, a

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<sup>6</sup> In all 21 cameras were distributed and 12 returned.

young woman apologised for swearing and was trying to 'speak posh'.

*Jodie: Yeh, I keep wanting to swear but I got to ..*

*Fin: You can swear if you want.*

*Lisa Yeh it really takes the piss.*

*Jodie: Like my mum says I'm terrible, like just everything that comes out of my mouth, I always swear.*

*Lisa: Yeh, she always has a swearing word in the sentences.*

*Jodie Yeh, people always say, do you like come from the middle of (Name of City)?*

*Cos...*

*Lisa: ...and we're like 'ewwww shut up'*

*Jodie: Cos like now I'm posh speaking but like when I'm outside I'm terrible.*

*Fin: Are you speaking posh now?*

*Jodie: Cos it's taped, I'm terrible. Isn't this posh for me?*

*Lisa: Yeh.*

*Jodie: Cos normally...*

*Lisa: She would have swore at least twice by now.*

*Jodie: And normally I'm like proper loud, it's just like now, I'm trying to pronounce my words properly.*

*Fin; If I switched this off would you speak differently?*

*Lisa: Yeh*

*Jodie: Yeh*

(Jodie, White British female, 15, Lisa, White British female, 16 -Interview at Youth Centre, March '04)

I observed this phenomenon in previous interviews, where relaxed and garrulous young people became tight lipped, or 'spoke posh', the moment the record button was pressed or the microphone appeared. In such moments, I reverted back to note taking, or I found that a simple Dictaphone without a microphone, appeared less forbidding than my mini disc recorder and obvious microphone. Young women perhaps felt that they had to self monitor their conversation due to the formalising tone of the interview. Indeed, the issue that Jodie and Lisa disclose that they become guarded in their use of language in the interviews, also provides an insight into how careful these girls may have been about the information they imparted during the interview.

I recorded informal exchanges in my fieldwork diary, as a way of overcoming the formal barriers of the interview situation. Fieldwork notes were written down as soon as possible after the event, although as in many studies there were times when my note taking was far from ideal. I would return home late at night and fall asleep before writing up, or alternatively, when looking at my scribbled notes from the field on a back of scrap paper, I would have some difficulty in recollecting the chronicled events. On other occasions, during interviews my technology, or more precisely, my grasp of the technology failed, as either the mini disc failed to record, the dictaphone tape snapped or the batteries cut out completely. Some of my most effective data collection arose from these dictaphone recordings. However, the background noise, and often somewhat chaotic circumstances of the recording makes much of the material inaudible.

#### *Ethics and the Research process*

This study attempts to place the 'ethical' at its very heart. There are a range of definitions of 'ethics' which focus of notions of appropriate behaviour from the '*morality of human conduct*' (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002:14) to a '*framework of thought concerned with morality*' (Stanley & Wise, 2002:200) In common with many studies, this research focused on a relatively powerless group in society. I wanted to explore whether there could be a feminist ethical approach to researching ethically contentious areas. However, the question of what a feminist methodology or feminist ethical approach might look like is one that has engaged feminist writers for decades (Stacey, 1988; Stanley, 1990; Skeggs, 1995; Wolf, 1996; Ramanazaglu & Holland, 2002; Stanley & Wise, 2002). Due to restrictions on space, I cannot explore in great detail the arising feminist epistemological and theoretical debates over the past three decades, but I will draw on some of the issues



around power inequality and ethnographic method later in this chapter.

The particularities of the ethical questions within this study were primarily around the age of the participants, notions of 'informed consent', and my position as a research practitioner. My age and status within the fieldwork settings meant that I had power over and beyond my social status as a white, older middle class woman. Furthermore, the gatekeeper agencies acted as 'loco parentis' in granting access to these groups of young people. Moreover, my multi method research approach combined participant observation and the use of photography and internet material, which meant that young people might have been under surveillance without their expressed, informed consent.

Currently, in the UK there are no laws to require research proposals to be submitted to ethical committees, however, there are many codes of ethical guidance for would be researchers, including British Education Research Association (BERA, 2004) and British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002) guidance for research with human subjects. Voluntary agencies, such as Barnardos, have additional sets of guidance that govern their agencies' social research with children and young people. My research takes both BSA and Barnardos (2003) guidance upon working with children and young people. Although such guidance is helpful, it does not provide clear 'how to' statements in approaching research. Indeed, Bell & Miller (2000) maintain that the code of ethics that governs individual research projects must be part of the very fabric of the research process, as issues of ethical conduct are an ongoing element of research. Such ethical decisions in the field might be taken on a split second, *ad hoc* basis, with the potential for human blunders (Aubrey et al, 2000), which means that ethical codes might be perhaps something we aspire to, rather

than something that can be fully realised in everyday interaction. As Miller & Bell (2002) argue, it is questionable that any age group can any consent be truly informed, in relation to both the research process and final dissemination of the results. Beyond this, I was not always aware what data might be of use, until many weeks after these initial observations. Often, tiny and seemingly innocuous events in the field had much greater significance later when reflecting back and analyzing the data.

There remained issues around child protection and consent. Many of the participants in this study are minors, and I feared that if I gained parental consent for all these young people's involvement in the study then I might 'out' individuals as underage smokers and drinkers to their guardians. Similarly, in my role as a youth worker, it would also be highly unlikely that I would similarly disclose such activities to parents. Such disclosure would constitute a breach of trust, and it is conceivable that participants would have withdrawn their consent, if their parents were consulted. However, regarding issues such as those of child protection, I was duty bound to liaise with line managers and other agencies, if I felt a child was at risk of '*demonstrable harm*', which could include issues of abuse or self harm. I was clear with the young people around the boundaries of confidentiality as a result of these duties.

In this research, the 'field' is constituted by youth work settings and the continual flow of young people created ongoing and continual issues about consent. The host organisations provided consent for the research, and I spoke frankly with all individuals involved in the interview process about the nature of the research. In addition, the ethics of an ethnographic approach of young people's public behaviour further complicates issues. On occasions, my research diaries have included incidents that I have witnessed

on the street. For instance, late one Friday evening, two 13-year-old young women were drunk outside the youth centre. One young woman, Betty, was semi conscious, lying on the pavement and vomiting. Her friend was swigging lager and shouting at a group of jeering young male onlookers. When she found three youth workers administering first aid to Betty, the second girl became enraged at the adult intervention and pushed and slapped my male colleague. The very real issues of child protection, in this instance, resulted in the need for me to flag down a passing police car to get the unconscious young woman and her angry friend some assistance.

This incident had occurred in a public setting, and so according to Sieber & Stanley (1992) it precludes issues of consent. Yet, these young women were vulnerable, and due to alcohol consumption, 'informed consent' would have been impossible. My concern was that I felt that I could be seen to 'objectify' and build my research on the vulnerabilities of others, recording data without 'informed consent' and with scant regard to their wishes. However, in this instance, my role was very much a participant rather than an observer, and the wider ethical responsibility to society took precedent over any code of research ethics I might choose to observe. Since the incident, Betty became a regular user of the youth centre, and chose to participate in the study. Betty's participation thus opened a dialogue, where we discussed the events of the evening and became a key theme in our eventual interview (see chapter 6).

This example highlights how quickly everyday events can become part of field data, and it remains difficult to demarcate what *does* and *does not* constitute 'the field', when describing the research project to stakeholders such as young people, host agencies and other youth workers. It is perhaps necessary to take a context sensitive research approach, which reflects that young people are

both social actors in their own right, and sometimes, as in the case of the drunken young women, in need of protection (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). In my own responses to such complex ethical and methodological dilemmas, I need to consider what ‘truth claims’ (Clifford, 1986) I can make for the research, but there is also a need to reflect upon the everyday power inequalities in the research process and dissemination of the final product. The positioning of myself as a *practitioner-researcher*, to use Bell & Nutt’s (2002) term, is to consider the complexities of my relationships with the young people, the field settings, the academy, and my interpretations of events. The notion of *praxis* is useful in order to consider a way of thinking through these dilemmas, as it is drawn upon by both feminist researchers and educators alike, in a commitment to an agenda of empowerment and social justice.

For Smith, *praxis* for an informal educator is fundamentally about ‘*informed, committed action.*’ (Smith, 2004:1), and is not merely about reflection, but melding theory with qualities and action. Any research that is theoretically informed is also grounded in the practical, and feminist academics such as Stanley (1990) share Smith’s notion of a politically and ethically informed *praxis*. Indeed, Stanley (1990) argues that knowledge through *praxis* is not about merely knowing the social world, but using the knowledge we acquire to ‘*change the world.*’ (Stanley 1990:15). This study as a piece of feminist research has an explicit agenda congruent to this notion of *praxis*, in informing drugs education practice and contributing to wider debates on gender and drug use.

#### Ambiguous Authority – Youth worker as Researcher

This idea of *praxis* necessitates a degree of personal reflection on the research dynamics within this study. Rather than being a detached ‘outsider’, studying an ‘exotic’ group, as in the work of many early classical ethnographic studies, I was already well

established in one of my research settings as a youth worker. There are tensions in combining the roles of youth worker and researcher. In common with Back's (1996) reflections on his own youth centre based ethnographic work, it places the researcher in an occasional difficult authority position to the young people. Other researchers have utilised the role of youth worker in order to build relationships in the field. In a study of Asian youth, Alexander (2000), began her research as purely an observer, but soon found that this position was untenable in her chosen field settings, where she struggled to engage with the young people. Finally, Alexander writes about how her decision to become a volunteer youth worker aided the building of relationships between herself and her informants. Similarly, Desai (1999) describes how his initial attempts to engage with young people as a youth worker/researcher, resulted in the young men giving him short shrift and telling him to '*fuck off*'

Rather than blank stares and the initial hostility faced by these youth worker/researchers, the young people in my settings were largely welcoming. This might be in part about my existing relations with some of the young people from contact at summer play schemes and evening club work, and my friendly existing relationship with the 'community of youth workers' in the respective youth service. Such pre-existing relationships eased the social interaction between the individual research subjects/young people and myself as youth worker/researcher. Similarly, for the young people at the further education college setting, my age and style of dress at the time of the research meant there was a common currency between us, as the young people spoke to me about music or youth fashion. However, I was not an insider, and at the time of the research, as a thirty year old woman, considered myself distinguishable from a 16-year-old A Level student, despite

security guards, and occasionally, young people, mistaking me for a teenage student. Indeed, I eventually abandoned my initial quest for 'objectivity', realising as Nespor (1997) highlights, that observers always have an impact upon the observed, and both myself as a researcher, and the young people as the researched projected readings onto one another.

Whilst I was engaged in youth work, my position as authority figure could usurp my role of researcher. It proved difficult to attempt to observe and write field notes when struggling to serve the tuck shop, facilitate group work, and break up a fight simultaneously. My early anticipation that my additional setting of a youth work provision in the college would allow space to move into the field as purely a researcher was unfounded. In the college setting my role remained ambiguous, with young people viewing me as a youth worker because of my age and ambiguous status, often calling me the '*pretend youth worker*'. As mentioned earlier, towards the later part of my fieldwork, many of the *common room* users had become youth centre members, possibly because they discovered I worked at the centre during the after school session and adopted the space as a new 'hang out'. This development led the young people to encounter me as primarily a youth worker and thus negated the potential for my position to enter the field as '*purely a researcher*'.

Many approaches to feminist research highlight how fieldwork reciprocity should be at the heart of such studies as a way of 'giving something back' to those who are studied (Edwards, 1993; Skeggs, 1995). For example, Alexander (2000) describes how she only became accepted by the boys at the Asian youth club when she took an 'active' role in running the provision. In Alexander's account she muses on how she eventually becomes accepted as a volunteer youth worker, rather than her initial excluded and

excluding role as observer/researcher, as in this position, she *gives* as well as *takes* from the young people. This reflects Skeggs (1995) observation in her work with female college students that a feminist commitment to research reciprocity creates a less unequal power dynamic and opens up channels of communication. However, as Bell & Nutt (2002) warn 'practitioner-researcher' roles can lead to conflict and tension between these two roles, as guidance governing professional conduct might contradict that of guidance for ethical research. There were many levels of reciprocity within this study, as over time, items were exchanged as part of a complex route of trades and favours between all participants in this study (see chapter 5). As a paid worker, I exchanged my labour for income in the youth centre context, but moreover, in both settings, I exchange time, my experience and my labour to gain access to the field. The relations of exchange with young people were more complex. On occasions, young people made me gifts ranging from small badges they had made, to regular lunchtime gifts of samosas from one young Indian man. In addition, many formal one to one interviews took part in cafes, where young people gave interviews in exchange for coffee, cake and lunch. In building relationships with young people, I found myself in a variety of discussions about homework, and helping fill in university entrance forms.

#### *The emotional and ethical researcher*

This section discusses how the emotional influenced the shaping of the research. Initially, I thought I could take a 'hands off' approach, in a vague attempt at 'objectivity'. By 'objectivity', I mean an attempt to cultivate 'detachment' from my research, in order to gain an insight into the 'truth'. Many researchers have questioned this stance of neutrality and non-intervention as 'good practice' (Griffin, 1991; Nespor, 1997; Alexander, 2000), as 'detachment' itself can be read as intervention, and silence and inaction can be interpreted by the informant as compliance or agreement to a given action or

attitude (Griffin, 1991:115). From this position, Griffin argues that no research is value free.

My research thus was imbued with particular values that privileged and shaped particular interpretations. Similarly, as Skeggs (1995) argues *all* research is emotional. She suggests that in this heady mix of emotion and disparity in power those researchers might find themselves floundering. It might therefore be ethically easier to shy away from researching sensitive topics with minors, yet many issues that are sociologically pertinent are also emotionally and ethically sensitive.

*“My research was and still is a highly emotive affair. Ideas are emotional; they can be inspiring, satisfying, rage and guilt inducing, terrifying etc. They involve you. (Skeggs 1995:194)*

The young women’s emotional disclosures *did* involve me. I was sometimes amused, bemused, and occasionally shocked and embarrassed. During one incident, two young women in the youth centre used their regular tactic of attempting to embarrass and bully adult female authority figures with lurid and explicit questions about my personal life (*“Do you eat pussy? I bet you like eating pussy!”* and *“Do you take heroin?”*). On other occasions, during the course of my fieldwork, young women have disclosed a range of highly emotive issues including self harm, physical and sexual abuse and bereavement. Many of the ‘key informants’ reminded me of social groups I had been a part of since childhood. The young women’s experiences and interpretations may be unique, yet there seemed to be a commonality of experience across the generations. Within my friendship circle, women in their thirties and forties often reflect on their own adolescent alcohol - fuelled adventures in graveyards, fields and parks in the seventies and eighties



At other times during the research, I felt frustrated, angry and despondent with the direction and pace of my research, or occasionally, incensed or enthused by the ideas contained within another scholars' writing. At the end of the research process I find myself in agreement with other scholars who argue that emotional 'detachment' may not always be useful or necessary in the pursuit of 'truths' (Rosaldo, 1993 ; Stanley & Wise, 1993). There is a complex interplay of emotion in understanding and interpreting the actions and needs of another group. Indeed, the pursuit of 'objective knowledge' may be fruitless when examining people's interpretations and discursive constructs. These complex emotional responses, and my personal memories and life history, form my own understanding and interpretations of the data, which must thus only ever be 'partial' (Clifford, 1986a).

These concerns with ethical research, reciprocity and an exploration of creating a less exploitative ethnography have been the subject of much debate within feminist research over the past decades. There are issues in assuming that ethnography is itself easily equated with feminist ethics. I have sympathy with Stacey's (1988) suggestion that ethnography has a much greater potential for exploitation, betrayal and abandonment, than the positivist methods often spurned by feminists. Stacey's (1988) critique of ethnography is powerful, and it becomes difficult to think how as feminist researchers and practitioners, we can highlight such issues and still operate as ethnographers. However, Stacey's argument fails to engage with the micro power dynamics of individual moments in fieldwork settings, where 'informants' might turn on and disempower the researcher, as clearly in some situations and contexts, 'informants' can *and* do have considerably more clout than the researcher. One way through this moral maze, might be to consider ethics as a kind of matrix, involving the research process, dissemination and feeding back to respondents

on our findings (Aubrey et al, 2000). By focusing on the totality of the study, rather than purely the research process, there might be less potential for betrayal and exploitation. It remains impossible to get rid of power disparity completely. In short, it is difficult to find away out of the power disparity within the research process, other than to acknowledge and openly confront the issues, be reflective in my practice, and operate in a congruent and respectful way.

These ethical difficulties go beyond the research process to the dissemination and writing up of the product, and Stacey's criticisms of ethnography have similarities to post-modern critiques (Clifford; 1986a; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). However, Stacey argues that feminist perspectives and collaborative approaches potentially might enhance ethnography. This sentiment is similarly echoed in Skeggs' (1995) commitment to accountability and reciprocity in her research. Whilst Stanley & Wise (2002) argue specifically for a 'feminist methodology', I would suggest that the quest for accountability and reciprocity, underpins much contemporary research, regardless of whether the researchers consider themselves as feminist.

### Virtual Ethics

This research not only involved the 'real' fieldwork setting of the youth centre and college, but also that of the 'virtual'. Due to the pace of technological innovation and adoption by young people, many of the technological practices described here are already outdated. For instance, at the time of writing in Summer 2006, personal WebPages and mobile phone photography have largely replaced the bulletin boards and non digital photography detailed here. The main virtual sites were a bulletin board attached to the youth centre web pages and moderated by youth workers, and an unofficial bulletin board established by students at the college. A

website is an information source on the internet that can provide links and host services such as a bulletin board. A bulletin board allows individuals to post comments and replies on certain topics of conversation. The youth centre website detailed the club activities and hosted a bulletin board to enable members to discuss issues online. Young people used other mobile phone technologies, to capture still or moving footage from social events and post these on the web, or use the images to illustrate stories.

The ethics of internet research raised many questions of how to gain access and informed consent from internet users for their involvement in the study. For example, I could merely cut and paste data, 'lurk' or interact with the participants on a bulletin board. By merely lurking and not flagging one's presence on a bulletin board, one can collate sensitive material without the 'informed consent' of the bulletin board user. Arguably, a bulletin board or open access web site is 'in public', and one might report on what is witnessed there as one might report on something witnessed on the street. I chose to flag my presence on both boards and ask questions relating to my study. I was invited onto the 'unofficial' college provision's website by the young people themselves (Fieldwork diary, Oct 2004).

Prior ethnographic internet-based studies have either taken place solely on-line (Hine, 2000), or combined online and offline fieldwork (Miller & Slater, 1999). In work on a breast cancer survivor support web site, Sharf (1999) contacted all of the women quoted in her final research, to gain their informed consent. Whilst ethically laudable, I argue that such approach was not applicable to this study due to several factors, including the issue that the net sites were open public forums connected to a generic youth centre, and that many of the young people with their short responses did not leave an email contact, or used a pseudonym. Moreover, young people often masqueraded as each other to tease and torment other

users. These factors would have meant that contacting individuals would have remained problematic, and regardless of my ethical intent, it would be difficult to solicit 'informed consent' when using this resource.

#### Origins of Visual methods.

Whilst visual methods have long been used within anthropology, the past decade has seen a wide interdisciplinary interest in such methods in a wide range of disciplines from educational studies, sociology and geography. Whilst visual anthropology has been a relatively long established sub division, visual sociology has been a relative newcomer, only emerging in the past few decades (Prosser, 2004). This is despite the fact that visual methods can be used in a variety of ways. The use of visual methods has been argued by Collier (1967) as a tool to 'standardize' and 'objectivise' research data, and an inductive interviewing technique to elicit information. Unlike Collier, I do not believe photographs represent a 'material reality', but rather they are a gateway to explore discursive interpretations of the visual. The use of cameras allowed young people to easily record their own experiences and perceptions, and such methods might have a more empowering emphasis than traditional ethnographic approaches, which focus on the ethnographer's interpretations of the verbal and the visual data (Bloustein, 2003).

There are various ways that researchers have utilised visual methods in the past. These have included semantic interpretation of photographs and films, production of moving and still images by the researcher and/or participants, and elicitation techniques using archive texts and materials made in conjunction with the participants (Pink, 2006). The use of disposable cameras by children and young people in recording their lives and cultural and material practices has become increasingly popular in recent years.

There are a variety of approaches in handling the resulting images, including leaving the images intact, or anonymising or excluding them entirely from the final report. Such approaches are drawn upon in differing contexts and for a range of ends, and clearly there are different ethical implications and outcomes depending on the methods used and the subject matter.

The disposable cameras allowed girls to easily record their own experiences and perceptions, and I hoped such methods would have a more empowering emphasis than traditional ethnographic approaches, which focus on the ethnographer's interpretations of the verbal and the visual data (Bloustien, 2003). Recent years have seen a growing concern reflected in policy, practice and the media around images of children and paedophilia. For instance, as a matter of course, many UK-based youth projects and schools request parental permission to take photographs and record events. In this case of this study, although young women's views were important in the design and dissemination of the study, the final images have been anonymised, against the wishes of some participants.

In the following chapters, the young women's photographs appear, but individual identities remain obscured to protect anonymity. However, as I highlight in chapter 7, there are still some potentially troubling arising issues in how to effectively anonymise images. I note that by obscuring young people's identities in the photographs, clearly changes the meaning open to the text. For example, the pixilation of images of youngsters in prior UK media coverage of child pornography, sexual abuse and youth offending cases, means that the blurring of participant faces to ensure anonymity in this study, potentially may have connotations of criminality and deviance.

In this final text I have excluded some images and altered others, despite the young women's assertions that they wanted these images to be left intact. This is because most of the images were of young people under the age of 18. My concern was that in later years as adults, the participants may want retract images of them drinking and smoking as teens. Further complicating the issue is that some of the images are available on the young women's personal websites, and thus are already on some level in the public domain. Clearly, the increasing interdisciplinary interest and use of visual methods necessitate a need for further thought on ethical use of visual and photographic methods in the use of visual and new technologies.

#### *Rhetorically Writing – The ethics of writing and dissemination*

Finally, in this chapter I turn to the ethics and power issues post – fieldwork, in the writing up of the account and dissemination of the findings. For Keith (1992), regardless of whether one uses scatter graphs or quotations from unstructured interviews, *all* are rhetorical devices designed to convince an audience. Each performative tactic might therefore reach out to a competing discourse, and whilst the use of statistics and graphs might attempt to claim some form of 'scientific objectivity', at the same time, they remain fundamentally rhetorical devices (Keith, 1992).

My commitment to social justice, and my wish for this study to be accessible and meaningful for the participants, will be tested by the conventions of the academy which continues to demands formal and abstract language in the final PhD report. The young people's voices in this study are thus shaped, edited and distorted in my writing, regardless of the safeguards that I have in place in an attempt to prevent such distortion. Similarly, as Skeggs (1995) notes, in much traditional ethnography the 'informants' accounts are flattened, as their interpretations trickle through filtered and

picked over by academics. The clumsy juxtaposition between the everyday utterances of the informant, and the abstract and abstracting prose of academia, positions and subjugates the informant's account. Thus, words might take different forms, and are shaped and potentially distorted by the discourse. Reading the final text, I am struck how the written form stifles the pauses, the winks, the mumbled words, the asides and the giggles, and presents them in a flattened version to the reader (Skeggs, 1995).

It may be the case that such power disparity within any research process is insurmountable. Instead, one could view the themes and exploration of the data by participants as a learning opportunity for all involved. It has provided the scope for young people to share experiences and reflections with their peers, and to gain the arguably therapeutic value of being listened to and given a voice. Equally, many participants were applying to enter higher education, and my position as a university student, thus potentially provided a positive aspiration role model for their own future careers.

Young women exercised their agency in choosing whether to be involved in this study. Several young people approached me to participate, demanding to know why they had not been interviewed. The participants did not necessarily share my anxieties around ethics and abuses of power. Some were cavalier about protecting their anonymity, stating that they did not care if their image or name appeared in the final text unaltered. This might have been partly due to youthful exuberance, or a disregard of the potential consequences, but there are a variety of other readings. One reading is that some of the young people wanted to be 'special', and perhaps felt that appearing in a report on under age drinking and smoking could enhance their kudos. For others, I believe it reflected a level of trust the young people had in the project and

me. Their wish to be involved was partly about wanting to be heard and share their opinions and experiences. Indeed, for some individuals, their role as 'top dog' in their social circle created a need to be involved in any important events occurring in the social life of the youth provision. For others, participation in the study cemented their self-esteem and feelings of self worth, in relation to having views that merited canvassing.

This eagerness to protect individual young people, by using pseudonyms and altering all non-relevant details, might not fully protect young people's anonymity. Ultimately, despite claims of 'reciprocity' within the research process, I benefit more than the girls from the research process. Participants when reading the final product may ultimately feel misrepresented, misquoted, or misunderstood. As Murphy & Dingwall (2001) highlight, much is transferred through the narrative through factors such as context and audience. Thus, the reading of my final research offered to an academic audience, will be radically different from a young person in a youth group.

Although there were some potential benefits for participants in this study, there also remain risks. For instance, my clumsy adherence to ethical codes or host agency child protection guidance, inappropriate use of research methods, or slipshod analysis, could potentially damage young people's self esteem and self worth. This research process was not one of full equality; however, I sought to find ways where the participants could help identify the emerging themes and shape the final product. I endeavoured to involve young people in a range of aspects in the research process. Young people took photographs, and commented on their own interview transcripts, papers, titles and chapter headings in an ongoing process of negotiation. Indeed, the young people occasionally told me to change titles and argued that



“*’Bitching’, ‘Boozing’ and ‘cotching’* for the main working title was preferable to my “boring” attempt of “*Why stop having fun?*”

I have no easy answers for these many dilemmas. The idiosyncratic grammar, spelling and syntax of the young people’s accounts in bulletin board postings and interview material are left intact. I plan to incorporate a youth event and construct a *my space* website into the final dissemination of my findings, as a way of ‘giving back’ something to young people who have become involved, an element central to the fundamental ‘rules of reciprocity’ within feminist research ethics (Skeggs, 1995) . However, as I stated earlier, I do not expect my relationship with either the young people or youth provision, to terminate completely at the conclusion of this study. Indeed, at the time of writing I continue to be a practicing youth worker in the borough, and remain in contact with several of the young women who appear in this research.

### Conclusions

Regardless, of how much preparation or books on ethical ‘good practice’ I consulted, the micro dynamics of everyday field settings, and the multiplicity of potential interpretations, meant that my desire for an ethically congruent research practice was somewhat doomed. In this chapter, I have attempted briefly to outline some of the pressing ethical, epistemological and methodological issues that arose in this study. I did not want to gain unassailable ‘social facts’, but an insight into how the young people in this study create and sustain individual and group identities. However, I hope the mere process of reflecting on issues of power and morality has been useful in creating a space to think through and problematise aspects of my current research. There are few easy answers in the ethical conundrums in research with human subjects, regardless of age. I am going to suggest a route of pragmatism. There remain

limits for what I claim for my research, but beyond this, as a feminist and a researcher, I can draw on suggested feminist ethical principles to inform and improve my practice.

I am reminded that 'truth claims' are always partial (Clifford, 1986; Rosaldo, 1993), and my writing and the understandings emerge as a kind of 'fiction'. There still remain questions around 'truth claims' and who 'owns' this research, but I want to argue that the final study should be viewed as a 'joint project' by the young people who have chosen to be involved and myself. In relation to 'truth claims', I turn to Back's (1996: 25) argument, that the events I describe are a product of particular situation and circumstance, and are an attempt to explore the individual realities of young women's experience. I make no 'truth claims' for the data, other than it provides a representation of specific times, places and sets of relationships amongst groups of young people who shared their time and experiences with me. I present here my personal reflections and an interpretation of these events. However, I hope it raises further questions about the gendering of substance use and young people's identity formation. I will make no 'truth claims' beyond this.

The next chapter introduces some of the findings from the empirical work in this thesis, and I explore young women's drinking geographies, as a way of understanding how embodied geographies are used to negotiate and reproduce particular gendered orders within the girls' social networks.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Cotching in the cotch: Young women's social geographies and smoking and drinking practices.**

#### INTRODUCTION

So far in this thesis, I have outlined some of the main theoretical themes and some of the key contemporary debates within youth policy and gender studies. This first empirical chapter explores how outdoor drinking locations operated as a site for the production of young women's gendered identities. The term 'cotch' was used as a verb and a noun and hence girls spoke of *cotching in a cotch*.

As college student, Tiggy stated:

*"It's like a little area where everybody sits and chills... a cotch isn't actually a cotch. You can cotch by finding a nice area to sit down; yeh...or you can cotch anywhere to be honest..."* (Tiggy, White British female 18, College)

As a verb, *to cotch* meant to hang out with other young people and sometimes drink and smoke. A cotch could also be a place where young people hung out and relaxed. Some cotches were established spots where young people had met in the evenings and weekends for years to chat, smoke and drink. Other cotches, were more fleeting, often these were based around a favourite park bench, bus shelter or patch of grass, disappearing for a time to reappear at another location as illustrated by Amy's photograph of a parkland cotch ( fig v).



Fig v. Photography by Amy(White British female, 14) Setting parkland cotch, 2004

Cotching, for the young people in this study, was inherently about relaxing, not shouting, vandalism or any other activity that might be deemed anti social by adult society, but socialising with friends. This chapter focuses on young women's use of outdoor hidden locations for drinking, and the use of these spaces in finding a stage to perform and negotiate drinking identities. The use of such cotches were explicitly gendered and by exploring girls' experiences and spatial practices I want to illuminate some of the processes that substance use becomes gendered by exploring girls' use of cotch spaces. Cotches provided a social backdrop for young people to perform culturally enacted drinking personas. This chapter therefore provides an exploration of the social and spatial gendered drinking and smoking practices in these semi autonomous youth zones

Within much of the thrust of New Labour's anti-social behaviour legislation in the UK, is a seemingly explicit wish for the removal of young people from public space. The serving of anti social behaviour orders (ASBOs), youth curfews, increased surveillance and the use of community wardens and police, serves to highlight that groups of young people are an unwanted and unwelcome presence on the streets and in parks and playgrounds. This is made clear in the language underpinning some of the debates around anti social behaviour and youth curfews.

*We must protect the rights of people who are so intimidated that they will not use public facilities, such as parks or cashpoint machines or playgrounds, because they are fearful of the groups of people loitering around them. We want to help communities to reclaim their streets from intimidation and anti-social behaviour..... We want to ensure that the police and community support officers have the confidence to act where vulnerable young people are out in these areas at night, at risk of coming to harm, and take them home. Hansard; 2003, The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Scotland of Asthal): House of Lords, 18/7/03)*

As I have previously argued on in chapter 2, in such legislation, Britain's 'homogenised' youth emerge at once both 'risky' and 'at risk' (Griffin, 1993; Davies, 2005; Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005), somehow out side the definition of the 'public' who wish to use these public spaces. Moral panics regarding out-of-control young people are far from new, but the criminalisation of youth in public space arguably further excludes already marginalized groups, and the recent UK Anti Social Behaviour Act (2003), once again spotlights the contested nature of public space.

Within the UK, young people under the age of 18, are largely barred from drinking alcohol in the 'adult' spaces of pubs and nightclubs. There are few spaces they can smoke and drink with impunity, and their social actives are increasingly under scrutiny from the police, welfare authorities and close circuit television (Toon, 2000; Sweeting & West, 2003, Davies, 2005). For example, many of the

cotch areas described in this thesis became “youth dispersal zones” in the months following the completion of my fieldwork. Under such legislation, the police have power to remove and prevent young people gathering at specific sites and times. Young people who are driven off the street by anti social behaviour orders, youth curfews and the close attention of the local constabulary, appropriate out of the way spaces such as graveyards, riverbanks and parks to drink, smoke and play in private (Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Toon, 2000; Brent, 2001; Sweeting & West, 2003).

Whilst Forsyth & Barnard (2000) argue that under-age drinking in hidden away, outdoor locations often result in higher levels of intoxication and risks to personal safety, work by Sweeting and West (2003) note that the banding together of young people can create a feeling of safety for young people within these groups to take care of one another. Whilst such spaces and places are deemed as ‘anti social’, by policy makers, in the face of age exclusions from other socializing spaces and city centres, the parkland and play parks in the evening and their use by local youth could be read as *pro* rather than *anti* social, as young men and women create spaces for their own community practices (Brent, 2001). Despite the young woman’s insistence that a ‘*cotch can be anywhere*’, the gathering together of large groups of young people in public space may, as an act in itself, be deemed as anti social and thus a challenge to civic authorities and adults.

A great deal has been written on children’s and youth geographies (Brent, 2001; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Valentine, Skelton & Chambers, 1998; Watt & Stenson, 1998; Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Malone, 2002; Toon, 2000; Sweeting & West, 2003), and the way young people have been constructed by the media and legislators alike as ‘troubled’ and ‘troubling’ youth, as highlighted by Griffin’s (1993, 1997) work on moral panics. This concept of moral panic

and folk devils expounded by Cohen (1978), has been taken up further in work by Sibley (1992, 1995) into geographies of exclusion, and how strong border classification and highly regulated space creates a matrix of controlled social relations. Purely by becoming visible through congregating in public space, young people disrupt the social order, and thus become the site of legislation and intervention to 'aestheticize' public space (Toon, 2000). The 'otherness' of young people in social life, as Valentine, Skelton & Chambers (1998) argue, is reflected in social planning with young people often pushed to the social margins.

Prior research on the gendering of urban space has often examined the street for women in two ways, either as a masculine space and a source of anxiety (Valentine, 1989, 1991), or alternatively, of potential empowerment and liberation for women (Wilson, 1991). My interest is in how identity formation through geography may create spaces as a source of anxiety and empowerment simultaneously. In my own experiences as a detached youth worker in inner city and suburban areas, I have found a simple gendered division of space to be often inaccurate. Indeed, Sweeting & West's (2003) recent work in the West of Scotland suggests that in the past decade, young women have increasingly socialized in public space, whilst young men, have retreated to videogame consoles in their bedrooms. Within my research, young women congregated in large mixed sex groups, often at night, in public areas like play parks, riversides and parklands. Whilst it may be the case that in some locations there maybe more boys on the street, in my own discussions and practice with young women, it appears that young women inhabit the social catch spaces of the green, the park and the riverside, just as much as young men. Nor did these young women hang out in exclusively female groups, instead, young people described congregating in mixed sex, subcultural packs. It seemed that youth space was not split on purely gendered lines,

rather, it was criss-crossed with fractures on the axes of class, ethnicity and subcultural style. The presence of the young women was in fact essential to the creation of cotch space, precisely because these were major spaces of identity formation and the construction of normative gendered behaviour.

In addition to this work on generational and gendered geographies, other work has examined issues of power, the body and identity in space (Massey, 1994; Teather, 1999) which suggest clear links between identity formation and where this process takes place. Geography is explicitly concerned with power relations (Allen, 2003). Individual and social identities rather than remaining static, become mutable and contested (Massey, 1994), formulated through the axis of space and time, such sites become a '*open and porous network of social relations.*' (Massey, 1994:121). Building upon this linking of space, time and the body, I want to argue in this chapter that young people's gender identity is created and evolves through location. My argument is that 'cotching' as an activity is not anti-social in intent or purpose, rather, it provides a forum where young people could practice and learn drinking and drug taking practices in their move towards adulthood. The cotch creates a space for young people to practice their own autonomy, developing communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999) where individuals learn and formulate their own generational, gendered and cultural norms. Cotching, therefore, emerges not as a resistant act *per se*, but one that supports and maintains the status quo and establishes social hierarchies. I examine how young women use public spaces and how the presence of young people on the street recreates and uphold normative gender relations.

I am going to look at cotching in two ways as an attempt to understand how it operates as a process in creating group and individual generational and gendered identities. Firstly, I want to



think about how the use of catch spaces forms part of wider temporal social process where young people inhabit age specific identities. By doing so, I follow Winchester, McGuirk & Everett's (1999) work on youth geographies and transition in South Eastern Australia, and draw upon elements of Van Gennep's (1909) seminal theory of rites of passage to explore catching as a transitional process into adulthood, before exploring how catching contributes towards the development of communities of femininity practice, of social cohesion and support between young people. Although such catches could include indoor spaces, this chapter particularly examines young women's use of the outdoor public areas as unregulated, semi-autonomous youth space, as these remain the contested sites at the heart of much welfare and police intervention, particularly around youth drinking in public space.

#### *Border work and Rites of Passage for urban youth*

For many years, anthropologists have examined how physical changes in the body are reflected in the landscape. Van Gennep's (1909) early theory on life transition (*Les rites de passage*), and the use of marginal space at the time of life crisis, defined these rites as a process to alter and make an individuals place, state, social positioning or age. There are three main phases to these rites and these include: separation (moving away), margin (a phases of liminality) and aggregation (joining again). Van Gennep's work on how an individual moved through the life course, was later developed by Turner (1967) to examine the '*structure of positions*' (1967: 93) within the wider flow of social relations. Such age-based positions are thus a product of social relations rather than physical maturity, as individuals may be ushered into particular age categorisations by participating in ritual activities. As Hockey & James (2003) state:

*“ In many societies it is through ritual passage that age-based identities come to be inhabited, regardless of bodily evidence of maturity.” (Hockey & James, 2003: 31)*

During adolescence, an individual inhabits the area of the margin, as they are no longer classified as a child, but are not yet socially perceived to be an adult. As highlighted earlier, this transitional period between childhood and adulthood is often vague, distinguished with various ages depending on arising social policy, for example, although the school leaving age and the age of consent in the UK is 16, young people may not vote until the age of 18, and various other pieces of legislation and funding streams define youth as extending to the relatively late age of 25 in relation to access to various social welfare benefits and educational grants in the UK.

These variations in age indicate a distinct lack of clarity of when a child becomes an adult, leading to a relatively ill defined and blurred period of ‘youth’ (Valentine, 2003). Contemporary work by geographers has begun to build upon this work on transition, the body and social space, exploring how at different stages of the life cycle and social position influence how and when an individual uses space. However, as Valentine (2003) highlights much of this work on children's geographies has focused on the 7-14 age range, rather than those at the cusp of adulthood aged 16-25. The participants in this study are aged from 13-19, and so therefore include individuals at the cusp of this transition.

One of the central concepts to the notion of a rites of passage is a liminal phase ‘*betwixt and between*’ (Turner, 1967) established social categories. I want to suggest that the ill-defined status of youth (Griffin, 1993 Sibley, 1995; Valentine, 2003; Hockey & James, 2003), and the peripheral, catch locations are both liminal positions, beyond conventional social categories. Young people, therefore emerge as *liminal personae*, and catches as *liminal places*

(Turner, 1967). This liminality in status is reflected by Malone's (2002) observation that young people are comfortable with inhabiting multiple, often contradictory identities. It was clear during my fieldwork that individuals would often attempt to increase or decrease their age regularly throughout the day, by attempting to 'pass' for 18 to buy alcohol, or alternatively 'passing' for younger to pay child train fares. These 'passing' attempts were often facilitated by the use of fake identification, complete with the required false date of birth. I saw two examples of these fake ID cards during my fieldwork. One method was to alter official Student Union ID, or alternatively purchase fake ID from specialist websites, which enabled one 14-year-old young woman to get a tongue piercing without parental consent (Fieldwork diary, October, 2004).

Youthful transitions, therefore, are rarely linear or straightforward (Valentine; 2003). I want to suggest how work by anthropologists (Douglas, 1966; Van Gennep; 1909; Turner, 1967) work on small scale societies can be relevant in considering the spatial and social structuring the body in a contemporary western urban context. Douglas' (1966) work on the polluting natures of marginal states is borne out by the imagining of this life stage as problematic and dangerous; in need of protection from itself and others. This position of liminality is reflected in the marginality of the spaces where young people congregate, on the edges of the town, where boundaries between spaces begin to fray, creating sites outwith adult control. However, I recognise that 'rites of passage' theorisations have more recently faced criticism for being '*over-rigid conceptual devices*' (Hockey & James, 2003:37), which ignore individuals' embodied experience of ageing and individual senses of agency. However such work remains useful because of the clear use of spatial metaphors to describe age course transitions and

social structures, in addition to the generational symbolic use of space.

*“Why stop having fun?” Entrances, exits and non-linear transitions*

Liminal spaces are places where the outside world's rules no longer apply (Turner, 1967; Winchester, McGuirk & Everett, 1999), these sites may therefore carry elements of risk, as out of the way locations, they are imbued with a sense that they are also beyond dominant rules around social order. Although the definition of catching was to 'chill' and relax, it was clear in the young people's accounts that these spaces at night, were places to let off steam, drink, smoke tobacco and cannabis and potentially meet sexual partners.

Other work on young people's transitions and space has noted the need for extreme physical experiences such as being drunk, using drugs or having sex, as a fundamental part of the process of growing up. Winchester, McGuirk & Everett's (1999) work on school leaver's celebrations in Australia focused on 'Schoolies' week', an annual pilgrimage for school leavers to holiday in the sun, go clubbing, drink and meet sexual partners. The schoolies' week phenomenon was mirrored in this UK based study by several participants' post examination pilgrimage to Newquay in Cornwall, or by 18<sup>th</sup> birthday celebratory trips to Amsterdam. Winchester et al. liken Schoolies' week to a rite of passage marking the transition from school to work or university, or more widely from child to adult. Many of the events of Schoolies' week take place in the liminal pleasure zone of the beach, and there are clear parallels between the beach in the Australian study, and the town's pleasure zones of the riverbank and park catch areas in this work. The beach, the park and the riverside are all leisure locations separated from the world of work and responsibility. Young people in reclaiming these spaces, particularly at night and at the weekend,

revive a carnival like atmosphere where as Winchester et al argues, everyday power structures can be temporarily inverted through play.

Previous writings on drug and alcohol use have also suggested a spatial dimension to patterns of consumption. Measham (2004) argues that there is a clear spatial dimension in the rise in alcohol use by young people in the past decade, and the rapid commercialization in UK city centres, through chain pubs and café bars, has led to a wider availability of cheap alcohol and places to drink. Most of the young women in this study were under 18 and thus too young to legally drink in bars, and few could openly drink to excess within the parental home. However, some of the girls, as young as 13, could 'pass' for 18 and frequented pubs, clubs and bars. Outdoor public drinking remained popular for the girls in this study, reflecting prior work on young people's preferred drinking locations (Forsyth & Barnard, 2000; Coleman & Cater, 2005). The cheap availability of alcohol in urban centres, via supermarkets, off licenses or theme bars, place alcoholic drink within these young women's economic reach. In this study, younger girls combined finances with friends to buy alcohol from supermarkets and off licenses, and consumed these purchases in local catch spaces.

Catches were largely age segregated spaces, and young women clearly identified the entry and exits points to catching as an activity. It was suggested by many participants that the practice of catching at riverside and park locations started at the age of 12-13, before graduating at 15 or 16 to the pub and house party. Indeed, many of the young women who felt too mature to catch in parkland areas, spoke about the activity and the participants with disdain, eager to ally themselves with the 'adult' world, with their own under age use of the pub, rather than the park, for socialising. The catch

as a social space provided a potential site outside the regulatory gaze of parents and other adults, to drink alcohol, smoke, flirt and socialize. This of course meant that young people could get considerably more intoxicated in these hidden locations than if they were drinking in the parental home or in commercial outlets.

However, the cotch was seen as an age-specific locale, and the young women at the youth centre and college saw themselves as 'growing out' of using these outside secluded areas to drink and socialise once they reached, or could 'pass' for the legal drinking age, or had friends that moved into independent accommodation, and could create their own inside autonomous cotch space. However, older young people(16 years +) who still used the cotch spaces, were often hostile to the encroachment of younger people, and so there was a continual carving up of space by the users based on age, friendship group and subcultural affiliation.

Themes of trade and exchange appear throughout this thesis as processes central to gender identification and belonging within teenage friendship groups. As noted later in chapter 5, the young women in this thesis, used spaces, cigarettes, alcohol and stories as resources that could be accumulated and traded, in order to secure individual and group prestige and status. As a result, in the research settings there were constant tussles for the acquisition for space and resources. On a small scale, this took the form of groups monopolizing the computers and sofas in the youth centre, and on a larger scale, young people came into conflict over cotch spaces. For example, in bulletin board postings and in several of the interviews, young women named specific subculturally groups as creating conflict, aggression and robbery (jacking) in these cotch spaces.

*" I was at (name of cotch) for about 10 mins on Friday night because as I walked in I was questioned by a bunch of rudies why "dirty grungers" shouldnt be allowed there, at first we ignored but then thought "we wer the ones that started coming here ages ago"... why can't you leave us alone and stop invading our cotch's and places to meet our frends without being scared of having the shit beaten out of us ! !...We've had enough now, find you own fucking places." (Anonymous, Youth Centre Bulletin Board- Sept 2003)*

Whilst this anonymous posting described intergroup rivalry and aggression from *rudies*, for youth centre members, Jodie and Lisa, the imagined aggressor is the threatening *grunger*.

*Jodie: ... That's the good thing about the youth centre, cos it's a mixture of people. You all get on, but if you're like walking down the street , and like a grunger*

*Lisa: They follow you.*

*Jodie: Come up, like one or two grungers come near like a group of six or eight rudies it would be liked killed. (With emphasis) Literally!*

*Lisa; Yeh, you would you'd be beaten up.*

*Jodie; Yeh, they like get knives out and that. Whereas like, if it's just like, well it's the same, say there's just one rudie going along like near ten grungers then it's the same. They'll get threatened; it's like a thing of gangs.*

*(Jodie, White British female, 14, Lisa, White British female, 15, Youth centre)*

This fear of potential aggression from other subcultural groups was similarly echoed by 14 year old Amy, in her description of the main reason groups moved into new cotch spaces to avoid street robbery by other young people.

*Amy: They've all moved from triangle and went up to the hill.... The gardens bit, that's like the new sort of spot to go... We started going down there when it was sunny and things, for picnics and drinking.*

*Fin: Where did it used to be?*

*Amy: It used to be more just around the corner from here, ...the dark side which is the other side of the river. The riverside, the bit with the sort of grass and everything....*

*Fin: Do people not go down to the darkside anymore?*

*Amy: It's mainly the rudes and stuff. We've stopped going down to the triangle so much 'cos every time we've gone down there someone has got jacked and stuff, or something.* (Amy, white British female, 14, Youth centre)

In the UK, the difficulty faced by young people under 18 to legitimately access pubs and nightclubs, meant that young people with diverging musical and style tastes were pushed together, and thus they attempted to colonise the same space. Indeed, when young people were old enough to access commercial outlets, this enabled individuals to frequent night clubs that catered for particular musical subcultures. For example, several alternative young women would travel great distances to attend rock and industrial nights at bars and clubs in the nearby city.

Whilst there could be conflict within these settings, the outdoor catch spaces also held connotations of 'home'. Indeed, many catches were located in play park areas where the teenagers had played in their younger years, but were now used for 'adult' activities such as drinking and having sex, as Maria explained:

*Maria: It is a bit but it's kinda like our home. You know we've been there so many times it used to be standard Friday evening lets go to the playground in the graveyard. Everyone would meet there.*

*Fin: What do people do when they are there?*

*Maria: Drink! Drink so much that you can't see and have to be dragged onto a bus. Make out. People would have sex behind tombstones and stuff.*

*Fin: Have sex behind tombstones?*

*Maria: Uh huh. You know the big ones?*

*Fin: Yeh.*

*Maria: There a string of them. There's like four and then there is like one, surrounded by trees, and if you flatten it out underneath it is quite dry, and you can put your coat down there.*

(Interview with Maria, White British female, 17, college)



In this extract below from the unofficial college bulletin board, young people use cyber space to discuss the local youth geographies of graveyards and playgrounds, spaces that were used at night to drink.

*"Where are we gonna go, i seem to remember there being two graveyards, but i can't for the life of me remember where one of them is... too much alcohol!*

*"... it will have to either be in the Graveyard/kiddies playground round the back of Woolworths... Or the bigger graveyard next to the shell petrol station. Friday would probs be best... but the sole issue is, the feds<sup>7</sup> used to come to the kiddies graveyard, so the other one is a safer bet... (Exchange on unofficial college bulletin board, October 2004)*

At the beginning of the study, young men and women used cotech space together. It was clear that there was a clear temporal aspect to the young people's use of these cotech spaces, and certain times of day (evenings rather than daytime), times of week (Fridays and Saturday nights), and times of year (April – September) were most popular for young people congregating in these spaces, where they could make use of the lighter evenings and warmer weather. The young women often spoke of walking home alone late at night, and viewed this as fairly unproblematic. However, part way through my study several women were attacked, and one young woman in her twenties was murdered by an assailant in an established cotech space. As a result of the attacks, there was an increased police presence, media coverage and more CCTV cameras, and the cotech spaces began to shift with young people shying away from the cotech space that was the scene of the murder.

On weekend evenings, girls still went out and drank, but this tended to be around friends' houses, as parents began to set

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<sup>7</sup> The term 'Feds' is a shortened version of FBI, and here is used by English young people to describe the police.

curfews and restrictions around their daughter's movements. Whilst many of the young women spoke of suddenly being afraid of attack, other young women felt frustrated with this lack of freedom over their movements and felt that things could return to normal once the attacker had been caught. Whether the shifting dynamics of fear in the locality will impact on young women's long term use of crotch space remains to be seen, but the murder created a climate for a time, where young women were again under stronger parental control and lost an element of their prior autonomy.

These crotches created a site for the production and negotiation of norms and values of young women's friendship groups. The young women viewed outdoor 'street' drinking as an activity of the young, and crotching functioned as a partial rite of passage, as the play space of the adolescent often overlooked the play space of the child. These links between child and teen space have found some form in youth provision, as seen in the introduction in some parts of the UK of youth shelters at the edge of children's playgrounds. The young people were keen to create a safe space to congregate away from the surveillance of their parents or the police. The qualities necessary for a popular crotch location were described by one 18 year old young woman as '*dark and away from the police*', and it is in these liminal and unboundaried spaces and times, where young people may be free to play, creating an autonomous space, a zone away from both adults, and younger children. Such spaces as targets of welfare and judicial intervention, via the police and youth services, potentially risk pushing young people into even more out of the way locations to avoid adult surveillance (Forsyth & Barnard, 2000). However, as highlighted later in chapters 7 and 8, young women remained under the surveillance of one another, in the controlling the bounds of acceptable gendered, subcultural and age specific behaviour within these crotches.

*“I never want to act my age.” Young women’s ambivalence and ageing*

Earlier in chapter 2, I outlined how poststructuralist writings have suggested that categories such as ‘child’ and ‘youth’ are mutable rather than essential constructs. This apparent mutability was also reflected in the data. The young women interviewed often voiced their desire not to ‘grow up’ and take up the responsibilities of being a woman. I record in my field notes when discussing the wish to be at once older and younger than their chronological years with a group of young women at the college setting, began to sing the lyrics of a song about refusing to grow up by US punk band, *Blink 182*, by way of an explanation.

*“No one should take themselves so seriously*

*With many years ahead to fall in line*

*Why would you wish that on me?*

*I never want to act my age*

*What's my age again?*

*What’s my age again?”*

(Blink 182 “What’s my age again?”)

The young women saw the song: ‘*What’s my age again?*’ as capturing their simultaneous reluctance and desire to be at once older and younger than their actual age. These sentiments are reflected in the interview data, as girls contrast being an ‘adult’ with the ‘fun’ of childhood. The transition between child and adult, through a young person’s catching career, was not seen as a clear-cut, one-way process (Valentine, 2003). Indeed, I am reminded of the huddles of adult smokers outside non-smoking cafés and workspaces, which mirror teenagers smoking surreptitious cigarettes on the edges of parks and playing fields. Smoking as a forbidden habit in many workplaces may thus create a kind of ongoing adult ‘catch’ activity.

It would be inaccurate to pretend the transition from child to adulthood is straightforward, and young women spoke of moving between different aged states and spaces during the course of their day, for instance in wearing the uniform of a school child during the day before *glamming up* in heels and make up in the evening. As Tiggy stated below:

*"I don't fancy growing up to be honest... I can be mature when I want to be, but why stop having fun?"* (Tiggy, White British female, 18, College)

Other girls at the youth centre voiced similar sentiments.

*Fin: "So are you a girl or a woman?"*

*Danni: A girl!*

*Chelsea: I think we're in the middle' cos we're not immature- all the boys say.*

*Janine: We act older than our age! Yeah and when we meet people, they're like how old are you and we're like 14."*

*Danni: Yeh but I can't call myself a woman 'cos I'm still like mucking around...*

*Childish like... like having fun as well.*

*Fin: Can't you have fun when you're a woman?*

*Danni: Yeh but people look at you...*

*Janine: And judge you...*

(Interview Youth centre: Danni, Chelsea, Sam. (All 14, white British, female))

The young women voiced wanting to occasionally perform adult womanhood in being sexually mature and desirable to boys, whilst retaining the capacity to 'muck around' and be 'childish'. Although somewhat depressingly, the girls viewed the potential for fun as adult women, as somewhat limited, and to place them liable to scrutiny and judgment by others. Although some young women were eager to become adults, other girls were reluctant to take the step from the teenage outdoor catch space, such as the park to the adult space of pubs and house parties. This unwillingness was based around the perceived responsibilities of using these 'adult' spaces and an acknowledgment of the differing set of social codes. The young women saw drinking alcohol as about pleasure, hedonism and losing control. As highlighted earlier, the pleasures of drinking and catching were viewed as age banded experience and so the young women did not necessarily want to drink in spaces frequented by younger or older drinkers. In a discussion with a

young woman, Amy outlined her reasons her social group, some who were as old as 21, still used established cottes to socialise and drink rather than pubs. Amy felt she could easily 'pass' for 18, but felt some of the group looked younger and she felt it necessary to keep the group together. Secondly, for Amy, she associated using the pub with needing to behave like an 'adult' and have 'less fun'.

*Fin: Why are you choosing not to go to pubs?*

*Amy: Just because a: Not all of us can get into pubs some of us don't get into pubs and things and they're more expensive, somehow they just are not as fun as going out and just drinking and just being able to do whatever you want... I guess.*

*Fin: So if you went to the pub, this group, what would be different?*

*Amy: we'd be drinking, we'd be having a laugh but we wouldn't be screaming as much or I dunno... like, in pubs, it's like it's not so much like that. It's just we would be sitting having a drink, we'd be, I dunno, like acting more mature....*

*Fin: So you have to be more adult if you're in a pub?*

*Amy: Yeh, I think so. I don't think that anyone thinks about it, it's just that subconscious thing that clicks in, you know, that you're not gonna start like dancing on the table.*

*Fin: Whereas if you're out with your group?*

*Amy: We'd be just like going mad... well most of the time (laughs)*

*Fin: Say if you danced on the table in the pub, what would happen?*

*Amy: You'd get kicked out. It wouldn't be like the best thing ever.*

*Fin: Whereas if you danced on the table on the Green?*

*Amy: It would just be funny.*

*(Amy, White British female, 14, Youth centre)*

Whilst alcohol may be the taste of freedom, to drink in a pub was to have to enter the world of mature adulthood and lose autonomy, whilst taking on an adult mantle of responsibility. As Amy stressed to get drunk and dance on a picnic table at a cotch space, was relatively unproblematic, but such behaviour in the confines of a pub would risk sanction and possible ejection. This did not mean that young women did not self police and take on an air of responsibility in the cotch. Despite the girls often repeated stories of drunken behaviour, to be too drunk, too sick or too violent through alcohol was seen in negative terms, as it might necessitate the unwelcome intervention of the adult world through the police, parent or medical involvement (For more on drinking stories see chapter 6).

Cotching, therefore, may not stop at the end of adolescence, but transform instead into picnics in parks, smoking breaks in car parks, and evenings in the pub. In this light, Amy speaks of using pubs, but then returning to the cotch and backtracking as a way of reclaiming childhood 'fun' when taking part in 'grown up' activities. Cotches, as autonomous youth social spaces to drink and smoke, also provided sites to practice and learn shared cultural values, and this includes normative heterosexual gender. Amy voices her frustration with the role of carer in her male friendship group.

*I left at ten after someone getting really drunk and me having to look after them, and then getting fed up half way through and deciding I wasn't going to do that anymore."* (Amy, White British female, 14, youth centre)

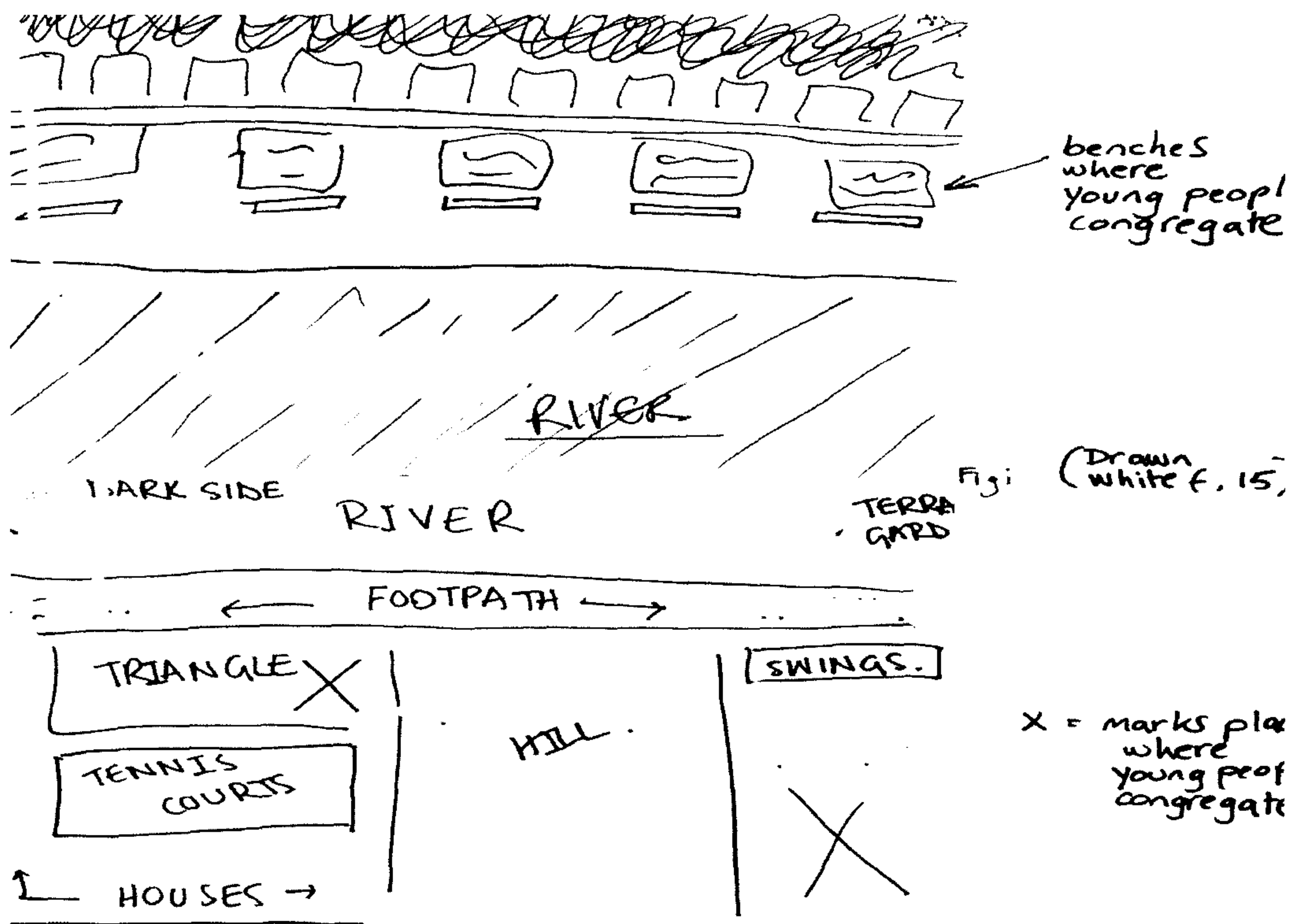
In this positioning, Amy mirrored other girls' status as carer or sexual object for the boys, rather than active participant in their own right in such mixed sex groupings. *To cotch in the cotch* was thus to walk a tightrope of child like freedom, autonomy and adult self-control. This marginal time of youth was seen by many of the young people as precious, and they would capture these fun nights taking snapshots using conventional cameras or camera phones to show to others at a later date as described in detail later in chapter 7.

#### On the edge: (in)visible space/time

Parallel to this '*betwixt and between*' (Turner, 1967) social positioning of young people, was a similar marginal spatiality. Although one can '*cotch anywhere*', young people congregated in outdoor cotch spaces, away from the prying eyes of adults in remote, out of the way locations. These spaces were often down by the river, in parkland, by children's play areas, in graveyards, or centred on benches in the town centre during times of day and week when the other sections of the populace did not use this

space. The young women's drawings clearly marked specific landmarks within these spaces such as gravestones, the pagoda or children's play furniture, which young people reclaimed as their own. This was especially true for children's play parks which were located where young people themselves had used during their own childhood, and now as teenagers played on the swings and drank alcohol, after parents and younger children had departed (See fig vi & vii).

Fig vi



River Cotch spaces

(Sally aged 15, White British Female, youth centre)

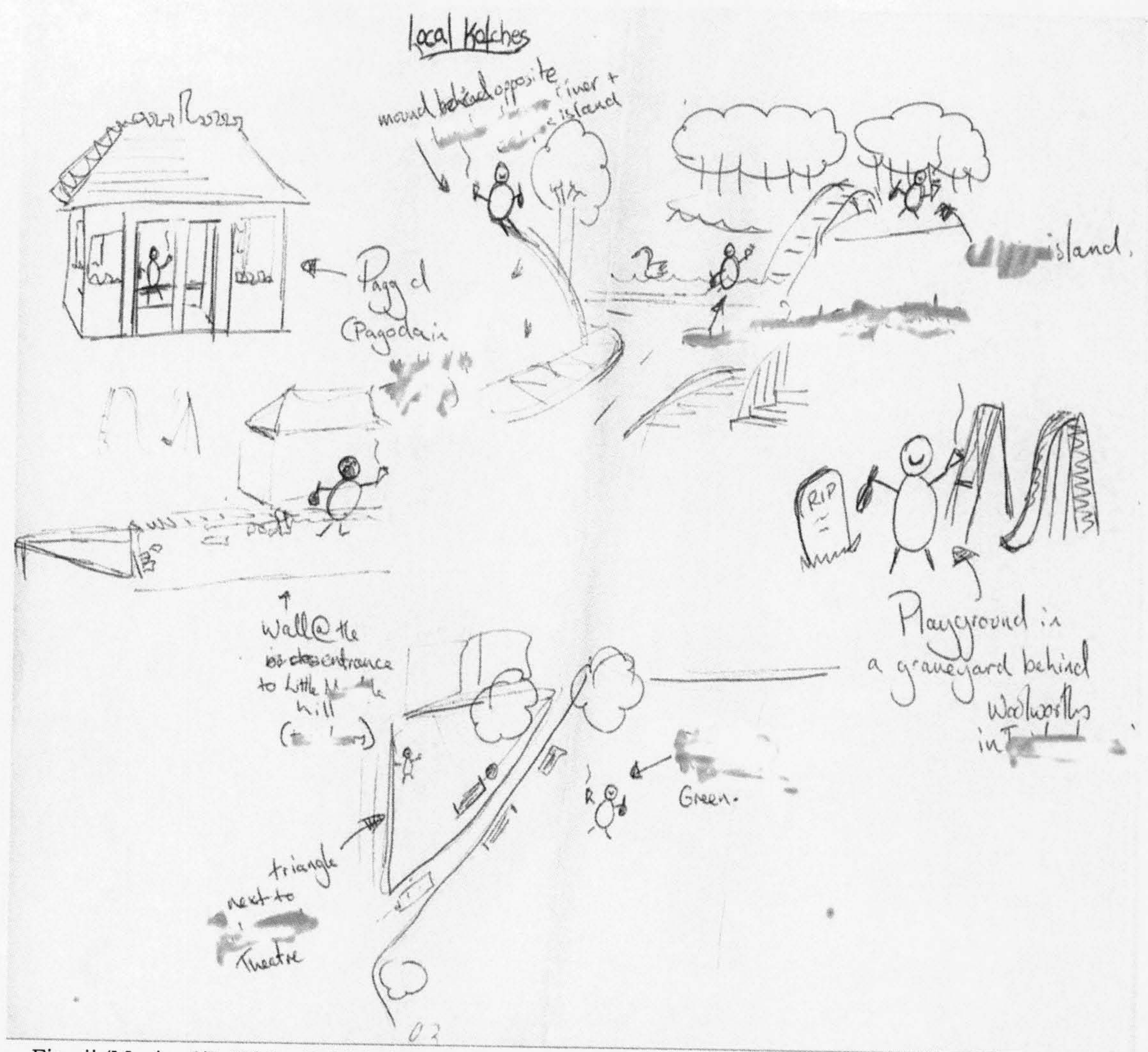


Fig vii (Maria, 17, White British female, common room)

Some of these cotch spaces appeared to have been used by generations of youth, with older young people looking back nostalgically three or four years, to when they used to hang down by the river on Friday nights. It was clear that the use of transitional cotch space, young people migrate from the cotch to the space of nightclubs, pubs and student houses as they grow older. Entry into cotch spaces was through existing friendship groups, and cotch spaces provided the scope for young men and women attending single sex schools to meet young people of the opposite sex. It might be easiest to imagine young people's use of cotch spaces as a trajectory that young people move through on their transition to adulthood.



Female cotch space users saw cotching as a group activity, frequenting these sites in mixed groups, or 'hanging out' with young men. Indeed, it was often the availability and presence of young men that first introduced young women into these cotch spaces through boyfriends or potential partners. Although some cotch spaces remained static over generations, personal and group geographies were ever shifting. Sometimes new cotches would emerge when unwanted people began to encroach on territory, with the old group moving on to find new cotch space of their own. Young men appeared to be central to the pioneering and territorial claims of new cotch spaces, entering into occasional fracas for new spaces, with robberies and territorial skirmishes between differing subcultural groups. These forays were predominantly by young men, with young women as supportive players, as in the gender dynamics of Campbell's (1984) work on girl gangs. In one interview, a young woman gave an account of how female group members would act as accomplices and decoys for their male peers, to help the young men avoid arrest when police entered the cotch spaces.

In a recurrent theme in this thesis, young women emerged as victims of their own surveillance and regulation, upholding and recreating gender hierarchies through this derision of oppositional femininities. I will return to these themes again in chapter 7 and 8 on drinking stories and girls' use of party snapshots. There was a clear classed and gendered dimension to this surveillance, and many participants from a range of social backgrounds viewed working class *rudie* young people, including young women, as 'rough' and 'violent'. Young women in general were seen as being noisy, over emotional, and too sexualised by other girls, if they regularly took part in cotch activities. This was in contrast to the one middle class, 13 year old young woman, Milly, who projected herself as more sophisticated than her peers with a preference for bars, clubs and restaurants, despite my knowledge that she did

frequent riverside and park locations to drink on summer evenings. I was aware that there was a clear economic element to cotching as an activity, as young people who were from less economically advantaged backgrounds may continue to drink in parks and riverbanks purely for economic reasons, whereas their more affluent peers progress to the wine bar, pub and restaurant with friends.

So whilst many of these girls used these outdoor youth locations, with or without the knowledge of their parents, there remained a view that respectable girls did not hang out in cotch areas too often. Due to the 'anti social' stigma associated to young women hanging out in public space at night and drinking, some young women chose to down play their own involvement in such activities, and project an air of responsibility. It is important to note that I engaged within this young woman as a researcher and a youth worker. The role of youth worker has an explicit mantle of moral authority, as both an adult and agent of the state, and in such interviews, young women chose to manage their presentation of themselves precisely because of my age and status, and their relative disempowerment within our research/youth work relationship.

#### *Cotching, control and community codes*

All rites of passage include elements of learning, as the individual who changes social status must learn the new cultural codes of the emerging social position. One way of understanding cotching as a learning activity is to turn to the work on communities of practice that I outlined earlier in Chapter 2. Although cotching could be deemed as 'anti-social', and therefore contra to some definitions of community, Brent (2001) argues the social elements of young people hanging around are synonymous with community, including peer and emotional support, group cohesion and solidarity. I would

like to go further, and suggest that these spaces and activities encourage young people to learn from one another, particularly in aiding their transition to adulthood. Through cotching, one learns the acceptability of certain modes of behaviour, communicates shared understandings, and potentially adopts gendered codes integral to the activity and use of space through participation within a community of practice.

Cotching, as an activity, also becomes a space for the reproduction and negotiation of particular ways of doing girl. Indeed, cotches provide a backdrop to portray aspirational identities, as clearly shown in the young women's eagerness to dress up and pose for snapshots as explored later in chapter 7. The teenage girls who flirt, drink, smoke and/or provide alibis for their male friends, are doing various forms of appropriate girlhood in these youth spaces. Thus, cotch sites are constantly being contested between adults and young people, between differing subcultural groups, and amongst young women themselves.

However, cotching as a practice was a central part of young women's construction and production of drinking and drug taking identities, and a negotiation of the power hierarchies within their friendship groups. As I outlined earlier in Chapter 2, within Lave & Wenger's theorization of communities of practice, there is an absence of a real engagement with issues of the power and exclusion within these communities (Paechter, 2003b, 2005; Smith, 2005). Such 'communities' are described predominantly in benign terms. However, the 'cotching practices' I have described, are imbued with elements of exclusion, creating spaces where young people negotiate and perform age-specific and gendered identities, or alternatively, risk rejection by not conforming and following the implicit community codes. For example, bulletin board entries noted the incursion of various 'othered' subcultural groups into

grunger territory, and criticism of violent, aggressive or over intoxicated behaviour by these unwanted invaders.

During periods of transition, bodily practices become central part of individual and group identity formation. Thus becoming intoxicated, with a resultantly out-of-control body, Winchester et al argue is intrinsic to the experience of liminality during adolescence. Whilst a certain amount of hedonistic excess could be seen as a positive experience for young women, those who became too intoxicated faced censure from other group members (see chapter 7). There were clear 'right' and 'wrong' ways of constructing a catch-going persona, and to perform an incorrect version would be to face sanction from the rest of the tightly regulated girl's friendship groups. Often young women criticized other girls' loud drunken antics in these catches as excessive and over sexualised. The young women in this study who grew frustrated by their friends' excess, reflect what Measham (2004) describes as '*calculated hedonism*'. Measham suggests that this 21<sup>st</sup> century '*calculated hedonism*' has set times (the weekend), and places (parties, pubs, clubs, catches), where one might seek excess. There are also certain codes of conduct, particularly around the desired levels of intoxication. As Measham states below:

*"The user not only pursues a desired state of intoxication, but also attempts to avoid an undesired state. The casualties at the toilet and the embarrassments on the dance floor are a reminder for most legal and illegal drug users of where to draw the line not only because of the financial, health and safety implications but also the lack of cultural credibility of extreme intoxication."* (Measham, 2004; 319)

Such calculated hedonism forms the boundaries of how young women can engage with alcohol and other intoxicants. Indeed, as Measham argues this is a kind of '*controlled out of control*' behaviour (Measham, 2002; 2004), which is clearly exhibited by the young women in this study, and as Measham (2004) suggests is far

from the unbridled images of excess within the media depictions of young people at play.

In this chapter I have attempted to explore how gender, thus becomes situational, as a product of, and by, community membership. The liminal state of 'youth' is '*betwixt and between*' (Turner, 1967), the established social categories of child and adult. Young people, therefore, move between the social world of the child, youth and adult during the course of a day. There are several ways that these communities of femininity practice may be seen to operate in the social activity of cotching. The situated learning of contextual gender norms occurs through the social policing and surveillance of young people upon one another within the cotch. This happens in several ways, either through the sanctioning of behaviour within the cotch space itself, or in the policing and coding of the social narratives that emerged from cotch activities such as drinking stories which I explore in further detail in Chapter 6.

### Conclusions

The cotch as a place is always in-process, and is constitutive of wider social relations, between the generations, between authorities and the populace, and between various groups of young people. The creation of anti social behaviour orders (ASBO's) and youth curfews in the UK, may lead one to conclude that young people's presence on the street is both 'anti-social' and contra to any notions of 'community'. Yet, these cotches and groups created spaces where young women negotiate, construct and learn from one another *how to* perform teenage and adult femininities. Furthermore, young people's presence on the street reproduces elements of social cohesion and supports marginalized groups such as teenage girls to reclaim space and power. Such spaces and groups are not always benign entities. In common with work on

girl's friendship groups (Hey, 1997; George, 2004), such sites have strict sanctioning and codifying of appropriate behaviour and gender norms between and within girls friendship groups. Cotching as a ritual within a rite of passage is facilitated by young women's membership of, and initiation into communities of femininity practice (Paechter, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, forthcoming).

Young men and women's relationships with these outdoor spaces are not about causing trouble, but about free association and having fun in an autonomous zone free from adult interference. However, such out-of-the-way spaces come with attendant risks in relation to either being a victim of crime, or potentially young people becoming intoxicated in remote sites without easy access for the emergency services. Such spaces appear to be regulated not just by the use of the police, community safety officers, and youth workers, but by young people. Through mutual observation by themselves and others, young women internalise the regulatory force of the community of femininity practice. Young women learn to emulate and adopt, and reject alternatives of the gendered norms of their 'community'. Thus, dominant gender norms are internalised on an individual level, within communities of femininity practice and through wider social sanctions. The cotch emerges as a space to practice and learn 'adult femininities' beyond the eyes of adult authority. Girls by practicing aspects of adulthood, negotiating appropriate boundaries and codes of behaviour, produce cotches as sites to learn civic responsibility.

This chapter has attempted to highlight the complexity in these transitions, and the multiplicity of youth identities is clearly echoed in the continued fragmentation of public space in the town. For these young women, cotches provide space to develop and perform gendered and generational personas. Cotches created a discursive space in which young people seek to contest and uphold 'authentic'

identities based on age, class, ethnicity, gender and subcultural style. This is perhaps a product of the fluid identity and 'out of control' bodies inherent in the liminal category 'youth', and catches as a transitory and liminal social space. The activity of catching highlights that the transition between childhood and adulthood is not linear in the fullest sense, as young women in the space of an evening, attempt to pass for 18 to buy alcohol, before returning to play as children on the swings and slides of park land catch spaces. Geography becomes an inherent part of identity construction and the formulation of this transition. At the same time, these spaces reflect the liminal position of the adolescent, between childhood and adulthood, perched on the edge of the child's area of the play park after dark drinking vodka, or smoking amongst the dead in the graveyard.

In the next chapter I explore the ways young women's smoking practices are used to acquire status and prestige within girls' social networks. I want to problematise some of the assumptions behind dominant discourses within current approaches within drugs education, and the potential negation of young women's agency and autonomy by examining young women's use of tobacco as an informal social currency.

## Chapter 5

### “Two’s up and poncing fags.” Young women smoking practices and gift exchange

#### Introduction

In this chapter I draw upon theoretical work on exchange, and explore how young women’s reciprocal networks of cigarettes operate to underpin friendships, and mobilize power within girls’ social networks. My intention in this chapter is to examine young women’s use of cigarettes as an informal social currency. This is in order to think about young women’s tobacco use beyond the deficit model of the young female smoker common to many drugs education interventions. This simplistic notion of ‘peer pressure’ prevalent within classroom drugs education, perhaps cuts to the heart of the *structure/agency* debates, previously outlined in chapter two, which have marked gender studies over the past decades. I explore how by viewing smoking as a reciprocal gift giving exchange practice illustrates how young women use cigarettes to support and maintain friendship groups and particular gendered practices. Moreover, that through reciprocity, young people gain status and learn the gendered rules of the group.

Within the girls’ friendship groups in the fieldsettings, the flow of cigarettes, as a resource, highlighted alliances, inter group rivalries, and provided a space for identity formation. Whilst work on drug use has often negated the enjoyable aspects of drug use (Measham, 2004; O’Malley & Valverde, 2004), this pleasure is not only about the pharmaceutical effects on the body, but also the socially cohesive aspects of the practice of drug taking itself. Moreover, through drug taking, one can perform gender in particular ways (Measham, 2002) The phrases, “*two’s up*” and “*poncing fags*” of the chapter’s title, relate to sharing an individual cigarette between two people, or “*poncing*” meaning to borrow a cigarette



from a friend or acquaintance. In order to share a cigarette, a young person would shout “*twos up*” or “*go twos*” or “*saves*” to the individual with the cigarette, who would then choose whether or not to grant the request and share the cigarette.

In this chapter I argue that the use of poststructuralist work on multiple femininities and the body can aid drugs education interventions, and create meaningful and insightful work on understanding how and why girls through smoking perform individual and group gendered identities. I highlight how simplistic notions of peer pressure flatten and over simplify the complexities of girls’ tobacco and alcohol use, by perceiving such practices as forming part of negative peer pressure in peer group relations. Moreover, as Denscombe (2001a, 2001b) argues, young people’s uses of cigarettes, for example, may be about an individual negotiation of risk taking behaviours and a development of a ‘cool’ persona, stressing individual agency, rather than openly admitting to adhering to a peer group norm.

I discuss the gendering of girls’ smoking practices and the various ways that young women used tobacco as a social currency in the field settings. Trading cigarettes was one of a range of gift giving practices taking place amongst teenage girls. Young women exchanged a variety of other material goods, including snacks, music files, clothes, text messages, mobile phone credit and photographs within the field settings. However, this chapter focuses on cigarette exchange, due to its relative ‘illicit’ status, and that unlike these other exchange practices, young women’s tobacco use provides a site for education and health policy interventions.

As Hey (1997) in her study of girls’ friendships observes, the “*ethical rules*” of sharing, reciprocity and trust are often central to participation within teenage girls’ friendship groups (Hey, 1997:65).

In this research whilst non-smokers generally did not participate in the informal exchange of cigarettes, they often accompanied smoking friends to the *smokers' corner*, or lent others money in order to purchase tobacco. Indeed, many of the girls' friendships and trading relationships existed before the young women began smoking. As such, smoking was not necessarily a pre-requisite for group membership. Young women's cigarette exchange must thus be viewed as one of a range of practices that are intimately connected to a host of informal daily trades and favours that pass between young women, and establishes their place within their friendship groups. This chapter initially analyses some of the ways the informal trade in cigarettes between girls was used to negotiate status and perform smoking identities. By drawing upon social theories of gift giving, I problematise the uncritical use of peer pressure within much drugs education discourse, and instead reframe young women's tobacco use as a wider process of sharing, and the construction of individual and group identities. Using examples from my fieldwork, I highlight how cigarettes are used as an informal currency to negotiate group relations, power structures and individual and group identities.

#### Social theories of gift giving

This chapter frames young women's tobacco use as part of a wider matrix of reciprocity and group relations. Firstly, I turn to the subject of the nature of the gift and gift giving, which might be seen as distinctive from utilitarian economic exchange (Mauss, 1950; Berking, 1999; Hall, 2005). I argue that through informal tobacco trade girls negotiate social relations and perform and consolidate 'aspirational' identities through the process of giving and receiving.

In his highly influential anthropological essay on gift exchange, Mauss (1950), argues that giving in archaic society was about a system where groups gave to others, unlike the individualised gift

giving of modern times. Contained within Mauss' theorisation of the gift and exchange negotiation, is not merely about the gift of itself, but the social obligation to give and to receive. Later work by anthropologists and sociologists have further developed Mauss' work, in exploring gift exchange as a social and ritualized practice in the modern West (Berking, 1999; Taylor & Harper, 2002; Hall, 2005 ). The symbolic item of the gift, enables negotiation of localised power relations and the establishment of a system of reciprocity. If one fails to accept a gift, or fully reciprocate in kind, this can be read as a unfriendly or hostile act (Mauss, 1950; Schwarz, 1967; Taylor & Harper, 2002; Hall, 2005). Moreover, Schwartz (1967) argues that gift giving *generates* identity, and is both a vehicle for conveying the wished for identity of the bearer of the gift, but also the bearer's projected identity onto the recipient. The acceptance of the gift by the recipient is also a tacit agreement of the values both imbued within the gift and the status of the giver. Hence, the ritual of exchange becomes a space for the creation and maintenance of the wider social order and hierarchical system.

The system of gift exchange described by Schwarz (1967) is one through which the ongoing system of reciprocity can highlight who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the group, and creates and maintains group boundaries (Schwartz, 1967: 10). Through gift giving as an activity, one may learn one's social place, the accepted codes of exchange, the social boundaries of group membership, in addition to negotiating individual and group identity. Furthermore, as Hall (2005) highlights, individuals are involved both within the formal commercial contractions in the purchasing of items from retail vendors, through to gift exchange between friends. I want to draw on these social theories of gift giving to explore how gift giving within my fieldwork setting established group norms, individual status and the maintenance of boundaries within communities of

gift giving practice. In order to do this I will provide examples from my fieldwork setting where young people used the exchange of cigarettes, music or other items to project an aspirational identity to the self and others, and include or exclude others.

### Defining Peer Pressure

The concept of peer pressure remains popular in much drug and alcohol literature relating to young people, where it is often used with negative connotations, and a suggestion of young people being compelled towards 'deviant' activities (Ungar, 2000; Denscombe, 2001a). One definition of peer pressure is to be influenced by peers to "*do something or to keep from doing something else, no matter if you personally want to or not.*" (Clasen & Brown, 1985:458). There has been a range of critiques of peer pressure over the past decade (Coggan & McKeller, 1994; Cotterell, 1996; Michell, 1997; Ungar, 2000; Denscombe, 2001a). These critiques are centred on four main areas of contention. Firstly, that the peer pressure model does not take into account the heterogeneity of young people's experience and the complexity of adolescent social networks (Cotterell, 1996; Michell, 1997). Secondly, that the model assumes that young people and adults have similar values (Cotterell, 1996). Thirdly, that the model presumes passivity on the part of young people and negates individual's own sense of autonomy and personal agency. The peer pressure thesis is seen to assume a 'deficit' model of children and young people who are pushed into a behaviour because of a personal 'lack' rather than active choice (Coggan & McKeller, 1994; Cotterell, 1996; Michell, 1997; Ungar, 2000; Denscombe, 2001a). Finally, such a thesis negates the inherent sense of enjoyment in taking a drug or participating in risky behaviour. Whilst work on drug use has often negated the pleasurable aspects of drug use (Measham, 2004; O'Malley & Valverde, 2004), this pleasure is not only about the pharmaceutical

effects on the body, but also the socially cohesive aspects of the practice of drug taking itself.

Michell's (1997) work on young people's social networks and smoking, argues that many young people do not smoke, and the likelihood of taking up the habit varied depending on their place in the social network. In Michell's research, 'top girls', 'troublemakers' and 'low status' pupils were the most likely to smoke. Michell concludes that despite its widespread use, the term peer pressure in relation to school based smoking prevention initiatives were '*almost meaningless*'.

*"There is pressure on teenagers, but it is mainly to do with purchasing the 'right' image and wearing the trendiest gear and logos. For girls, there is pressure to be seen to attract boys."* (Michell, 1997: 12)

This tension between individualised and group explanations for young people's tobacco is further expanded in Denscombe's (2001a, 2001b) more recent work on young people's identities. Denscombe suggests that one needs to consider young people's drug use as part of a wider reciprocal relationship with others in creating their own identities. Much of the material that arose from my fieldwork seemingly supports work that is critical of the unproblematic use of peer pressure in explaining young people's risk taking and substance use practices (Cotterell, 1990; Coggan & McKeller, 1994; Michell, 1997; Denscombe. 2001a, 2001b).

In recent Australian work, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, (2003) explored how young men reacted to dominant health education messages within the classroom. These young men, in an attempt to perform a 'cool' masculinity, actively rejected the hegemonic discourses of the health education interventions presented by their teachers. Martino & Pallotta-Charolli suggest that this is because

the drug messages within the classroom did not connect with the young men's personal experiences. As a drugs educator I felt frustrated with this simplistic peer pressure thesis within school based prevention programmes to explain why young people continue to resist health education messages and smoke, drink and take drugs. Young people, therefore learn to 'tell' themselves and present and filter their own experiences through the moral lens and framework of the health education classroom. This is not to say that young people necessarily agree with the idea of 'peer pressure', or cannot be resistant to such dominant discourses.

Moreover, I argue that social exchange within young women's social networks, creates space to perform aspirational gendered and cultural individual identities, creating social solidarity, achieving social status and creation bonds of belonging that moves beyond notions of peer pressure as a mere attempt to 'fit in'. Young women may not always strongly identify as a 'smoker', but rather a 'good friend', through their participation in these exchange networks. Similarly, these social networks may be dynamic and fluid entities with young women choosing to conform to some group codes whilst rejecting others, or instead use the prevailing codes for their own particular ends.

#### *Starting Smoking and social exchange*

Currently, within the UK it is illegal to sell tobacco products to young people under the age of 16. The young female smokers in this study reported obtaining tobacco from a range of sources including friends, family and from commercial outlets. Young women who failed to 'pass' for 16, to purchase cigarettes would therefore either trade with other young people who could, or alternatively, there was a word-of-mouth network of which local shops would sell cigarettes either in packs or singularly to children. Girls explained their particular patterns of use and allegiance to

certain brands by raising factors such as the cost and the availability.

*“When I was in secondary school every one smoked B&H (Benson & Hedges), and if you didn’t have enough money it was Sovereign, but now B&H are £2.50, and I remember when they were like £1.80 for Sovereign. Then my friend smoked Richmond because they gave discount.” (Chloe, White British, 18, Youth Centre)*

The girls in this study participated in a ‘mixed economy’ (Hall, 2005), in purchasing cigarettes from businesses and singularly from non-intimates. In addition, girls regularly gave or received whole or part cigarettes to friends. This process of ‘twos’ cemented girls’ friendships and ensured brand loyalty. Single cigarettes sales and the informal tobacco currency within friendship groups enabled relatively young people with a very limited amount of money into the practice of smoking and the networks of cigarette exchange. Young women described having close connections to a particular brand, and that factors such as taste and budget influenced their brand choice.

*FIN: What do you smoke?*

*(Both girls reply at once) JODIE: Richmond Superkings LISA: Richmond Superkings*

*JODIE: Yeh, we both do.*

*FIN: Why do you smoke Richmond Superkings?*

*JODIE: You get more for your money.*

*LISA: They’re cheaper.*

*JODIE: Yeh, like buying Superkings, ten fags are the equivalent, you get 12.*

*LISA: Cos it’s longer than normal sizes.*

*(Jodie, White British female, 14, Lisa, White British female, 15, Youth centre)*

However, it was clear that young women smoked the same brands as their friends, and that certain brands were linked to particular youth subcultures. Indeed, the local need to differentiate one’s subcultural identity from other groups meant that cigarettes, alongside music taste, clothing and hairstyle acquired a strong symbolic value, reflecting previous findings by Eckert (1989) and the central role of smoking and cigarette brands in her study of US

High school subcultures. Moreover, the subcultural dimension to this reciprocity meant that differing groups of young people smoked differing brands of cigarettes. *Grunger* and alternative girls smoked *Marlboro Lights* and loose tobacco 'roll ups', and *rudies* and *townies*<sup>8</sup> smoked *Mayfair* and *Richmond*. Young women's affinity to a particular brand identity and the cigarette as a unit of exchange was thus negotiated in the face of this strongly branded recognition and subcultural membership. *Grunger* girls disregarded cheaper cigarettes as 'trampy', yet continued to smoke rolling tobacco as a performance of their alternative 'unfashionable' identity, and its relative low cost in comparison to the expensive *Marlboro Lights*.

Many of the young female smokers suggested they would take whatever was offered if they were out of cigarettes and 'desperate' to smoke. Despite this claim, as the majority of the trade was between intimates or people within a subcultural group, smoking one's brand of choice could be fairly certain if one borrowed ('ponced') a cigarette of a fellow member of a localized exchange network. Girls identified being without cigarettes as the chief reason to break with their brand allegiance, particularly if they were the only one who smoked a particular brand within a social exchange network.

*"I always used to smoke B& H Silver before I met my friends, but they converted me. At first like I could always taste the difference I was like 'urgh', but I remember one day I ran out of cigarettes so I had to keep smoking. Marlboro Lights and I had to keep taking them off my friends and I got used to them."*

*(Ella, 17 Mixed race White/Asian, Common room)*

For instance, Ella describes her conversion to *Marlboro Lights* as a gradual process, and one in which the reciprocal trading

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<sup>8</sup> Townie was a term often used pejoratively and interchangeably with 'rudie'. However, it tended to refer to white working class young people who were seen to adopt 'Black' cultural forms such as Hip Hop and Garage music, and wore tracksuits and gold jewellery. Townie was used often in a pejorative sense, although some young people within the subcultures only grudgingly accepted these labels.



relationships within the friendship group facilitated this brand conformity. The cigarette brand, *Marlboro Lights*, thus had an elevated status within Ella's social group, and through a process of peer preference, young women begin to smoke the same brands as their friends. Within the college, young people particularly socialized with other young people from the same class, cultural and subcultural position as themselves. Certain brands thus became 'raced', classed and gendered through the norms of exchange, and their use within these social networks, and young people could define themselves against the loathed 'others' by eschewing brands associated with the out-group.

"I keep 'em in my pencil case"; *Networks of Exchange Practice*

There was a range of existing gift giving practices in place in both the field settings, and an intricate web of daily exchange and counter exchange around items such as cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, music and food. The rules of reciprocity concerning cigarettes were identical between the two research settings, with younger participants learning the codes of exchange from the older young people. These networks of exchange were apparent when young women described their first cigarette, as all the female smokers interviewed described being initiated into smoking practices via family and friends in their early teens. Girls voiced a variety of reasons for their initial entry into the practice of cigarette smoking. These included youthful experimentation, boredom, and social convention, relieving stress and wanting to 'fit in'.

Young women's smoking careers did not always originate within teenage friendship groups, and began at very early age within a family context. Chloe, describes beginning to smoke at the age of 8, but in the interview described her first experience at the earlier age of 6.

Indeed, 18 year old Chloe, described smoking as a kind of family 'tradition' in her father's family. Chloe recalled stealing her first cigarette at the age of 6 from her gran's packet, so she could pose with it in the bathroom mirror and try on aspects of her fantasy adult family femininity.

*Fin: What age did you start?*

*Chloe: 8... but when I was young I lived with my nan, and she is a really heavy smoker. When I was 6, my first cigarette, I stole one of my gran's cigarettes. I went into the bathroom and I stood and looked in the mirror and I went (makes sucking noise with her mouth). I tried to inhale and I was like Urgh- die! I coughed so much. I wanted to see how I look. I was like 'look at me with the cigarette in my mouth and I'm only 6.' I thought I looked not cool. I had a lot of respect for my grandparents. I followed my dad's family who drink and smoke."*

*(Chloe, White British, 18, Youth Centre)*

Other young women, such as Amy, Ella and Flo, reflected the experiences of the young men in Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, (2003) work, and described taking up smoking as a way of rebelling against adult authority. For example, Flo, in this bulletin board response below, suggests that she resisted the health education messages presented by her school, but now questions her initial decision and action to become a rebellious smoker.

*"p.s.h.e<sup>9</sup> lessons plssed me off and I wanted to \*rebel\* (how pathetic does that sound now?)"*

*(Flo, Youth Centre bulletin board, 24/4/04)*

Throughout these accounts, young women were keen to stress their own sense of agency and control. For example, ex-smoker Samantha below identifies smoking as symbolic of being sexy and in control.

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<sup>9</sup> PSHE lessons (Personal, Social Health education) are a non statutory part of the school curriculum in England and Wales. These sessions often cover a wide range of issues such as pastoral care, emotional, sexual and physical health and relationships.

*Samantha: (Smoking) can be sexy as well, like in the movies, all the erotic stuff, it can be sexy as well.*

*Fin: Can you give me an example?*

*Samantha: Well I see this programme about people who found it a turn on if women smoked and many people said it was a turn on. There was a clip of a woman lying on a bed and smoking and she looked really sexy.*

*Fin: You thought she looked really sexy?*

*Samantha: Yeah... maybe it's the control part of it, being in control of doing your own sort of thing, I think its mainly that for me. "*

*(Samantha, White eastern European female, 16, Common room)*

Many girls were keen to stress their personal autonomy. Amy rejected the notion of peer pressure, and she was keen to stress her own agency in the face of the norms of her friendship group.

*I think it was because all my friends smoke. .. I think everyone starts smoking 'cos like my friend is smoking, I'm gonna try it. You know I started smoking 'cos all my friends were doing it, I might as well do it as well. It wasn't like a peer pressure thing, but it's not trying to be cool, but just because I thought hey all my friends doing it. I may as well, and I ended up smoking. Now, I would give up. I wouldn't worry about what my friends thought of me... but just can't be bothered. (Amy, White British female, 14, youth centre.)*

Amy was not the only girl who dismissed the idea of peer pressure as a way of explaining her entry into cigarette smoking. When Lisa and Jodie described their first cigarette they stressed a strong personal sense of agency in choosing to smoke.

*FIN: Can you remember the first time you smoked?*

*JODIE: ... I wasn't pressurized or anything, I did it for my own thing..., I was having a bit of a bad patch with friends and there was this one girls who stuck by me, and I became quite friendly with her and I went round her house and she was quite a heavy smoker anyway, and her mum knew. And I just said to her, I said 'oh let me try?' and she was like 'well are you sure?' and I was like 'yeh!' And that's how I got into it, I kinda started myself.*

*LISA: There was this girl called Julie, you'll probably know her Jodie, and it was before school one time, me and my sister used to go and knock for her, 'cos she was at her foster parents at the time, she was like 'do you wanna try some?' and so I was like 'Go on then.' So I tried some and I thought I might actually keep this up... 'cos it was like all right... but so I tried it for a few times, and now I'm addicted and everything.*

*JODIE: Yeh, like it is nice but you get proper addicted 'cos like me and her, if we haven't had a fag... probably after this we're gonna need one.*

*LISA:: I need one now.*

*JODIE: Like if we haven't had a fag like in 2 hours, we literally cry. Cos like at school....*

*LISA: We get stressed out literally*

*JODIE: I have one at half eight and then I can't have another one, till twenty past eleven. And from like half ten I look at the clock and I'm like 'Hurry up'.*

*LISA: I always say to her. 'I need a fag!'*

*JODIE: Yeah, I like keep em in my pencil case and I look at them. And I think just another half an hour.*

*LISA: I just have to hold my pencil just like I'm holding a cigarette... Then I'm fine until break time.*

*(Jodie, White British female, 14, Lisa, White British female, 15, Youth centre)*

In Jodie's account she asked for the first cigarette, almost as a way of cementing the close social bond she had built up with her friend, Julie 'who had stuck by her'. Lisa described being offered the first cigarette by Julie, but was keen to assert that she decided to 'keep it up' herself, before eventually becoming 'addicted'. By drawing on the discourse of addiction, the girls attempted to negate their personal responsibility for their 'risky' health practices. This, of course, differs significantly from their refusal to accept the peer pressure thesis, and a wish to write a sense of personal agency into their initial entry into teenage smoking. For Jodie and Lisa, cigarettes punctuated the tedium of the long school day and demonstrated their resistance to school authority. The young women reproduced this close social bond as they bantered about the types of cigarette they liked to smoke, and the urgency for which to conclude the interview in order to go for another smoke. The girls' account does not fulfil the 'coercive' initiation by peer pressure into cigarette use, but one of curiosity, bonding and initial personal choice. Jodie and Lisa voice ambivalence about their own smoking 'addiction' as an entry point into a secret taboo adult world of substance use. This 'addiction', as a shared experience, led Jodie and Lisa to pool resources and trade breaktime cigarettes (Fieldnotes, March 2004).

These individualized discussions of smoking were underpinned by wider narratives. Although smoking was part of wider gift giving, it seemed that the open articulated management of emotion through

nicotine was a script utilized by the young women. However, many of the girls imagined their future identity as mothers and identified these as clearly motivations to quit smoking as they grew older. This was illustrated in this extract from the common room internet bulletin board.

*..Yeh, I've quit. I kinda want to look after my body, I still wanna be mobile when I'm old so what I do now affects me later on that's why I'm quitting.*

*Basically I enjoyed a nice smoke, I liked it. Everyone is quite aware of the consequences, its impossible not to these days so people make their own mind up. Most of the time we are just too young and hot headed to have the conviction to quit, but grow out of it later. (P posted 28/10/04)*

*(Extracts from young people established unofficial college bulletin board)*

The decision to stop smoking was led by a recognition that they had received a level of maturity to think about the health consequences and their future. The young person in asserting that young people 'grow' out of smoking, stated that adulthood was a time imagined by these young people of sobriety. There is a clear dichotomy here, as young women spoke about smoking to look mature, but 'true' adulthood was perceived to bring such irresponsible practices to an end. Smoking, despite being initially seen as a taste of adulthood and a mechanism of control of weight, emotion and image, was seen as activity that could be abandoned when they became 'true' adults. This view was similarly reflected in the young women's views on excessive drinking and drunkenness as examined in the next chapter.

The sentiments communicated within this bulletin board extract were repeated throughout many of the young women's views upon smoking and growing up. Cigarettes were not seen as a healthy part of a mother's coping strategy, and in the girls' imagined transition to adult woman and the fantasy position of 'mother', entailed the abandonment of cigarettes and the reduction of other

associated parts of a hedonistic lifestyle, such as drinking and drug taking for the uptake of respectable adult heterosexual femininity. Indeed, girls saw becoming a mother and raising children as a convincing way of doing 'real' womanhood. However, in various discussions many girls remained deeply ambivalent about marriage and taking on the role of wife, highlighting the break up of their parents' marriage (Fieldnotes, November, 2004).

The unproblematic adoption of normative heterosexual femininities of course, provides limited scope for alternative femininities, or for women who choose not to or cannot have children of their own. Indeed, it was seemingly impossible to fulfil both the roles of *smoker*, and *good mother* roles within such as discourse. Health education, has traditionally positioned women as the moral guardians of the nation (Siddell, 1997), and from the evidence within these fieldwork settings, it appears that young women have to an extent internalized these traditional gendered health education messages of the importance of being a healthy future mother. Indeed, as Tinkler (2006) notes that whilst male and female smokers face moral censure in the contemporary health climate, the strongest criticism remains levelled at pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. However, the position of 'mother' for these young women was one that came with an older adult chronological age and responsibility. Such health choices could be thus postponed until such time.

#### *The Rules of Reciprocity*

Young women, as they became established smokers, were acculturated into the wider norms and codes of reciprocity of cigarettes as an informal youth social currency. For the young women in these research settings, the closer one was to the centre, the more intimate and more frequent the social exchange. This intimacy secured one's place in the wider social network as

illustrated by the following extract, where a close friendship group contemplate the rules of reciprocity.

*Fin: What's twosing mean?*  
*LOUISE: It means do you want a couple of tokes<sup>10</sup>.*  
*Fin: Ok it's your last cigarette but it's your best mate?*  
*(Girls all speak at once)*  
*KAREN: You've only one left, you need it*  
*LOUISE It depends.* *SARAH: You'd two's it!*  
*LOUISE: Yeh you'd two's it... But if there in a really bad situation, they're really stressed out, then you'd probably give it them.*  
*Karen: Yeh, I think I'm generally a pretty generous person, So yeh under circumstances if I had few then definitely if I had enough.*  
*Fin: Ok, so is there other things you share with your mates?*  
*KAREN: Drink!*  
*LOUISE Drink, yeh, Clothes! Advice.*  
*Fin: Uh huh, what else?*  
*Sarah: Well it depends if they're your mates. Everything really!*  
*LOUISE Like me and Karen are best mates, so there is nothing I wouldn't share with her... maybe men? (Girls Laugh)*  
*LOUISE: Well depending on how you felt about the man.*  
*KAREN; yeh you'd have to pay them*

*LOUISE I dunno, say someone's ponced 5 fags off you , then I feel I could ask them. normally*

*Fin: Do you give people fags that ponce off you?*

*LOUISE Yeh!*

*SARAH: yeh I do.*

*Fin: So say it was a stranger that came up to you?*

*SARAH: If they offered money then maybe.*

*LOUISE: If I had them on me then I might.*

*KAREN: if I had a load*

*LOUISE: yeh*

(Informal interview, Sarah, White British female, 17; Karen, White British female, 17; Louise, White British female, 17; Common room, Further Education college, February 2005)

In the young women's social networks, factors such as gender, class, 'race' and subcultural identity worked together to allow entry into a particular trading network. Girls were keen to perform dominant normative forms of 'giving' femininity, and were keen to suggest they would offer cigarettes to all. As in other studies on young women's identities, (Hey, 1997; Reay, 2001; George, 2000; George, 2003; George, 2004, Clark & Paechter, 2006) the friendship group is of paramount importance in these girls' lives. Fundamental to the rules of friendship are those of exchange. Within the girls' friendship circle, they suggest they would share

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<sup>10</sup> Toke meaning drag or pull

drink, cigarettes, clothes, and advice, although following the rules of heterosexual feminine competition and monogamy, Karen and Louise draw the line at sharing a boyfriend.

Indeed, one of the young women described an instance where a 'rudie' had approached her and demanded a cigarette. Such behaviour by a member outside the social group and negotiated system of reciprocity dislocates the perceived social order. The young women, in fact, only traded cigarettes, and other items with those who form part of their inner circle and exchange network. The closer knit the circle, then the more intimate the item of exchange, with young women, occasionally talking of sharing underwear on sleep overs with their close female friends.

The reciprocal element of smoking reached a pinnacle in the reified practice of *shi sha* or *argileh* smoking (see fig viii). This involved the use of a water pipe and a pressed flavoured block of tobacco. This was a fairly marginal practice within some of the college friendship groups, and was saved for celebrations, parties and weekends. *Shi sha* smoking was seen as a fundamentally collective experience, as young men and women would take turn to pass the pipe and smoke.

*"Shisha. Do you know what it is? Well its a long pipe ... and you put flavoured baccy (tobacco) in it. That's purely all it is. You can smoke hash<sup>11</sup> out of it, but we didn't unless there is any left over and it's just flavoured baccy , loads of different flavours. It's moist and sticky, and it smells really nice and you just smoke it through the pipe."*

*(Ella, 17, Mixed race- Asian & White female, 17 Common room.)*

*Maynard: "It's not like a joint or something. It's like you hold it (The pipe) and then whenever..It's completely social as well. It's like a peace pipe in the westerns... It's*

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<sup>11</sup> Hash is a solid form of cannabis resin.



*only social. It's not like going downstairs (to the refectory) to smoke a cigarette. You only smoke it when you're in good mood. (Maynard, British Lebanese male , 17)*



Fig viii. *Girl with hookah:*  
Photography by Ella (Mixed race White/Asian female, 16)  
Setting: House party, 2005

Although originally a Middle Eastern male practice, the practice had crossed cultural and gendered divides, with several British male and female students participating and owning their own pipes. The smoking paraphernalia thus provided reified objects that cemented the smoking participation practices of the community. *Shi sha* smoking provided a form for individuals to demonstrate their prowess at preparing the pipe, and their 'giving' nature as they shared the contents. On one occasion, a British Lebanese student, Maynard, brought a *hookah* into the college, and lit it up at the *grunger* end of the smoking area, and attempted to demonstrate a rebellious 'cool' to the college authorities and his fellow students, as a group of his male and female friends gathered around to join him for a smoke.

Breaking the cycle of reciprocity

However, the cycle of cigarette exchange both at the youth centre and college did not always run smoothly. Individuals could become ill favoured if they requested to borrow cigarettes too often, without reciprocation, or bothered those they had not negotiated reciprocal-trading rights. The freely exchanged gift which is central to Mauss' (1950) influential anthropological analysis of gift giving, relies on a balanced equilibrium of exchange. For instance, if one took too much and gave too little would create tension, in what Hall (2005) describes as the '*give and take of friendship*' within a social group can lead to potential marginalization or effectual expulsion from the trading network. Certain group members could face exploitation in this trade by other more powerful members in the group. In order to prevent this, several girls clearly voiced their frustration at the expectation to always give. For example, in the common room I observed a terse exchange between two young women. Sylvia's request for a '*spare cigarette*' was greeted with exasperation by her friend, Sade.

*Sylvia: "Have you got a spare cigarette?:"*

*Sade: "There's no such thing as a spare cigarette. It's not like when I bought a 10 pack there was a spare... but you (to Sylvia) can have one, but it's **not** spare. I intended to smoke it... Do you want me to roll it as well? (with exasperation)... It's not like anyone taught me. I just watched and learnt"*

(Sade, Black African female, 17; Sylvia, Black African female, 17; Common room)

In this exchange, Sade demonstrated the limitations of her gift relationship with her friend, Sylvia. Sade was keen to display an autonomous, self reliant, active and economically minded persona. For Sylvia to request a cigarette, and then to ask Sade to roll it as well tested the boundaries of reciprocity. Sade suggested that smoking is a set of learnt practices, which enable one to become independent. In learning the set of smoking practices, Sade insisted that one needs to be an active learner and teach oneself how to roll

in order to become an autonomous and self reliant member of the smoking community. Moreover, in this exchange, it is implicitly assumed to be better to give than to receive, as Sade voiced frustration with the idea that any of her valuable tobacco is in fact 'spare'

One afternoon at the youth centre I saw another example of a power struggle over cigarettes that illustrated what might happen if the cycle of reciprocity broke down. Noel, a white British young man of 14 was angry. He entered the entrance hall, tussling with a young mixed race woman a few years older. Noel was known for his enjoyment of 'play fighting', so I gave Noel a hard stare and shouted for him to "*Quit messing about!*"

"*But she owes me 10 cigarettes!*" Noel implored, continuing to wrestle the girl into a headlock. The young women laughed and fought back, happy to tease Noel in this playful flirtatious banter, until she broke free and ran upstairs towards the female only sanctuary of the girls' toilets. Noel looked dejected, and he slunk off to play pool, as I called after him that I would sort out the conflict with both parties in a moment. A few minutes later, I saw Noel still on the look out for cigarette by the entrance lobby. He was negotiating with Lisa who told him, "*If you come to the shop with me I'll give you a fag.*" Noel obliged, and followed Lisa across the road to the shop.

Girls used the valued commodity of the cigarette to locally mobilise power in the trade of cigarettes with younger boys and girls. Noel finds himself angrily demanding cigarettes off the first girl in a mock flirtatious banter. Noel felt wronged, and that the older girl owed him cigarettes but refused to repay him. In this instance, the debt of obligation and social contract between the two participants had not been upheld, as the older girl shrugged off the mantle of

responsibility, in the girls only sanctuary of the lavatory, she escaped her conscious and social obligation, whilst still retaining the upper hand.

Lisa was a canny negotiator. She did not want to go to the shops alone so used Noel's need for a cigarette as a bribe to encourage him to accompany her. Lisa as the bearer of the gift had the power in this relationship, although Noel's need for a cigarette perhaps overshadowed his potential reluctance to accompany Lisa to the shops. I have seen this bribery with cigarettes on many other occasions, with young people in the common room at the Further Education college imploring friends to accompany them into the cold of the outside smoking area with a promise of a 'fag'. Indeed, to smoke on one's own in the draughty, lonely "smokers' corner"<sup>12</sup> in the far end of the refectory and young people would regularly negotiate with their peers to trade cigarettes for company.

There were sometimes clear strategic elements to cigarette exchange. Within the college setting two young male non-smokers occasionally distributed cigarettes as gifts to their friends, handing them out one at a time to those who proclaimed themselves desperate, but without the money to buy them. Such young men as non-smokers were not part of the ongoing process of cigarette exchange reciprocity, and so one may question what they gained from such an act. I would argue following prior work on gift-giving, that such an act was fundamentally about consolidating one's own status and hierarchy within the peer groups (Mauss, 1950; Schwartz, 1967; Berking, 1999; Hall, 2005). Mauss' (1950) study details a rite, *the potlatch*, which was a competitive form of traditional gift-giving, where North Western coastal indigenous Americans, competed in presenting neighbouring groups and rivals

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<sup>12</sup> Colloquial name for unofficial designated space outside college buildings for students to smoke cigarettes.

ever more lavish gifts. The obligation thus remains to provide an even more opulent gift than the one previously received. The process of *going twos* did not contain such an element. However, one might see elements of this competition and strategic giving in the young men's displays of benevolent generosity in the free distribution of cigarettes, for future unspecified favours. The recipients would feel obliged to reciprocate for this 'kind offer', and so through giving out of cigarettes, young people could cement their place in the wider social circle. Gift exchange, whether of cigarettes, music, or other items, enabled an individual to perform, create and negotiate a social identity through the exchange which bestowed status upon the giver and receiver.

#### *Ways forward- Rethinking peer pressure*

The popular policy and practice drugs education discourse of peer pressure rejects young people's own sense of personal agency, and contributes to the debates that position young people as part of a wider discussion of 'troubled' and 'troubling' youth detailed in Chapter 1 (Griffin, 1993; Griffin, 1997; Jeffs & Smith, 1999; Davies, 2005). Indeed, many of the recent 'life skills' based approach to drugs education initiatives move for work on 'self esteem' as the primary answer to young people's problematic drug use. However, the notion that low self-esteem is one of the main factors leading to drug use in young people is becoming increasingly contentious (Cohen, 1996). This is in the light of prior studies which reported that cigarette use is not always synonymous with low self-esteem, but for some young women is an attempt to achieve a sense of individuality, and they negotiated their social networks' hierarchy through smoking (Wearing, Wearing & Kelly, 1994; Michell & Amos, 1997; Michell, 1997; Tinkler, 2006). Such work challenges the notion that smoking is an activity taken up only by marginalized young people. These studies suggest there is a need to understand young people's social

hierarchies and notions of pleasure and risk, if health education initiatives are to make any headway.

Within the fieldwork settings, smoking was not a pre-requisite for popularity within the social spaces of the research setting, rather the social arena of the smoker was cast as an autonomous 'youth space', and created a site for the production of young people's individual and group social identities. In common with earlier studies of pupil's smoking practices, the informal trade allowed young women to carve out an exchange network, free from the involvement of the adult world (Croghan, Aveyard, Griffin & Cheng, 2003; Turner, Gordon & Young, 2004). Smoking as a practice emerged not as necessarily the activity of the 'dispossessed', or of weak willed socially isolated individuals pushed into the activity by negative peer pressure. Instead, girls articulated their cigarette use as a choice and a right to smoke. Smoking was identified as a beacon of a newly found 'adult' autonomous identity, and particular brands of cigarette as a 'reified', socially cohesive object (Wenger, 1998) around which young people's rebellious identities might be constructed. The girls' social networks that branched out from smoking as a social activity did not stress compulsory participation, but an emphasis on trade, belonging and exchange.

Whilst girls' risk-taking through smoking, drinking, drug-taking, sex or socialising, could be viewed as an enactment of newly found 'girl power', commentators have argued that traditional femininities continue to position girls and underpin wider responses to young women's actions (Pini, 2001; Sweeting & West, 2003; Aapola, 2005). Other interviewees revelled in rebellious and fun aspects of their tobacco use. They smoked and drank because it was pleasurable, well in the knowledge of the health risks associated with their recreational bodily practices. Beyond this, young women occasionally narrated their own use drawing on

discourse formed from a wider deficit model of being hooked, addicted and unable to cope with stress, and viewed cigarette smoking as an adult coping strategy to deal with turmoil and to manage unmet emotional needs, and as a salve against messy relationship break ups, exam stress, self-esteem issues and the management of an uncontrollable body.

Smoking became a controlling device to mop up the messy and difficult bits of being female. Girls, thus in the informal trade of cigarettes as part of their friendship strategies, also exchanged the idea that smoking could ease and help with emotional and physical difficulties. Whilst cigarettes are seen as a way of producing social cohesion, providing a stage for the practice of adult autonomy, and emotional coping strategies for girls, then young women will continue to resist adult health education messages that they perceive to be irrelevant to their own needs.

### Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to problematise the often over simplified notion of peer pressure, and argued that writings on gift giving can provide a meaningful insight into young women's social exchange. Within these fieldwork settings it seemed that there was a complex interplay of reciprocal relations for girls in forming individual and group identities. Such complexities led to the production and exchange of new cultural forms, and the appropriation of other cultural uses as a way of performing bohemian 'coolness', but also as a way of experimentation with aspects of adulthood. Teenage smoking for the young women had a variety of functions including forming part of a wider emotional coping strategy, and the sharing of cigarettes was viewed as an emotional salve, as a way of demonstrating companionship and care, and signaling membership of part of a wider network of exchange and friendship.

Adulthood was thus not seen to be about reaching physical maturity or a older chronological age, but was perceived to be about reaching an autonomous, self regulating state. Teenage smoking was thus viewed as an 'adult' coping strategy to manage unmet emotional needs, and as a salve against relationship break ups, exam stress, self-esteem issues and the management of an uncontrollable body. Girls, as part of their friendship strategies and the informal exchange of cigarettes, also traded the idea that smoking could ease and help with emotional and physical difficulties.

In the following chapter I continue to explore young women's exchange networks within their social groups by examining girls performing and mobilising various multiple and alternative femininities through the production and exchange of drinking stories.



## **Chapter 6**

### **“I was kinda paralytic”: Drinking stories, ‘doing girl’ and the production of drinking selves**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the ways girls’ drinking tales were shared in the fieldwork settings to accommodate and resist various normative femininities. I suggest in this chapter that young women’s drinking practices were partly shaped by the collective ways girls talked about their own and other’s alcohol use. Girls traded many stories about their own and other’s behaviour, personal and collective memories, and social life. This chapter particularly dwells on drinking tales in these fieldwork settings, as the girls often excitedly shared their drinking and drug taking habits. In contrast, there were few such stories about cigarette smoking, which was viewed as a mundane, non-intoxicating part of their everyday existence. However, unlike smoking, which was seen by the girls as a fundamentally optional, although an ‘addictive’ activity, regular alcohol use was a normative, and almost mandatory, part of a social night out. As a result, whilst a notable proportion of the young men and women did not smoke tobacco, almost all the young women in the research settings drank alcohol on occasion. This chapter informs the research questions outlined in the introductory chapter, by illuminating some of the competing discourses open to the girls in the construction and performance of their drinking selves. This is further emphasised in the following chapter’s examination of girls’ use and exchange of party photographs as a way of performing ‘cool’ girlhood.

Prior work by feminist scholars has examined children’s and young people’s practices of collective storytelling and role play as a way of performing gender (Davies, 1989; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Francis, 1997; Francis, 1998; Hey, Creese, Daniels, Fielding & Leonard, 2001; Angared, 2005). In this chapter I will also examine

storytelling as a way of performing and 'doing' girl, and illustrate how young women's meanings, experiences and identities, are mediated via the telling of such drinking stories in girls' friendship groups. Young women through such narrative exchange could acquire the kudos and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1992) of living an autonomous 'cool' teenagehood. Beyond this, I argue that storytelling was used by girls, as a device to structure and position young women's' friendship groups and the negotiation of localised forms of ideal normative femininity. I want to highlight how girls' role as either a storyteller or audience member structured particular narratives, and how the stories analyses and created spaces where young women could produce alternative and resistant femininities, in contrast to wider dominant depictions of *emphasised femininity* (Connell, 1987). I choose to focus on narrative as a key way of understanding how young women's drinking selves are produced.

Within feminist work, narrative has also been used to give voice to marginalised groups and 'hidden histories' (Byrne, 2002). As Byrne (2002) notes, narratives from a Foucauldian perspective, allow insights into the practices and techniques of the self. I want to think about how drinking stories are used to mobilise particular youthful femininities in order to produce an active, risk taking identity. I am particularly interested in the function of these stories for young women in their social networks; insomuch as drinking narratives can help young women construct particular drinking identities and communicate the shared values within the groups.

Whilst contemporary public discourse in the UK has focused on young women's drinking excess and out-of-control behaviour, I want to argue using fieldwork examples, how stories were used to police other girls' behaviour. Indeed, whilst stories were often about excess and hedonism, the young women in the fieldwork examples

navigate a tightrope of attempting to perform youthful rebellion within a framework of respectable heteronormative femininity. The young women shared drinking stories, but such tales were not just about the quantity and type of alcohol consumed, but also the antics and adventures of the protagonists, including what girls wore, who kissed whom, and who had ended the evening a drunken casualty. Such stories were exchanged verbally, and on bulletin boards, and sometimes illustrated with snapshots which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Prior work on girls' friendship groups have also noted the central role of talk, gossip and note writing as a way of controlling knowledge and regulating hierarchical femininities in girls' social networks (George, 2004; Hey, 1997, Clark & Paechter, 2005). In chapter 2, I outlined a Foucaultian analysis of power to reproduce localised ideal forms of femininity. In this chapter, I particularly draw on Foucault's notions of pastoral power and the panopticon to unpick how young women used and responded to such stories. I explore how the micro dynamics of power play between and within girls' friendships groups structured the telling and response to such tales. This chapter examines the types of stories, narrative mediums and the role of individual storyteller within the young women's social networks.

I initially explore recent writings on the purpose of narrative, before examining how young women use various storytelling strategies including drinking stories to navigate their position in gendered friendship groups, or as othering devices to construct group boundaries and hierarchies within the community of femininity. I have argued throughout this thesis, that young women's social networks create a space for a kind of apprenticeship into the imagined social world of adulthood, not only about generational specific behaviours, but also dominant forms of masculinities and

femininities. Indeed, in discussions about alcohol and tobacco use with young women in this study, seemed to suggest that whilst youthful excess could be part of a young woman's experience, adult sobriety was a preferential future goal. In this chapter I will also identify occasions where young women asserted active storytelling voice about their own and other's transgressive behaviour, and by doing so, negotiated personal status within the wider pecking order, and performed a 'cool' persona to their social group

### *Communities of storytelling practice.*

The recent interdisciplinary interest in narrative and storytelling has led to work that focuses on both on the content and form of these stories (Plummer, 1995). In my analysis of the young women's stories in this research, I explore the role and function of their multiplicity of narratives at bringing the communities of practice together, in the construction and performance of age specific and gendered identities. Previous work on storytelling practices have suggested that individual identity is constructed through and by involvement in the narrative practices of a wider group (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Plummer, 1995; Mason Shrock, 1996). Lave & Wenger's (1991) work on situated learning view the role of narratives as providing a learning route into a community of practice. In an example from an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, Lave & Wenger illustrate how through the telling of stories, new members begin to understand the emerging narratives of membership. Moreover, the audience's response to these testimonies shapes the meaning and construction of the story, opening up particular ways of interpreting the tales and closing down alternative interpretations.

This is just one way narrative can be seen to shape identity, and mark the 'practice' of a given community. In a similar way, Plummer (1995) argues, that stories are essentially 'joint actions'

(Plummer; 1995, 20) These meanings are never fixed, but emerge through complex interactions in shifting contexts. Such narratives contain and transmit power and a negotiation of the social order, in relation to which stories are given credibility, who has access to particular stories, and what strategies are used to 'open up' or 'close down' particular discussions (Plummer, 1995; Mason Shrock, 1996). Thus, story telling creates a shared past and brings continuity and order to recollections, as narratives are used to create social barriers and culturally reproduce through the group narratives. Mason Shrock (1996), in an exploration of transsexual narratives, argues that in times of flux, stories bring coherence. They allow individuals to construct a '*true self*' as they mould narratives to fit personal circumstances, and circumstances to tales.

There is a complex intersubjective process occurring as the storyteller and the audience trade interpretations and meaning. I want to think about stories as 'reified' objects (Wenger, 1998) that bring groups together and are used as overt markers of group membership. It brings Wenger's (1998) *participation* and *reification* together, with the joint action of the story being both a vehicle for community involvement and reified object in its own right. Gabriel (1995) argues that spoken stories are a '*loud social process*' (Gabriel, 1995), which allows individuals to make assumptions about the groups' desires and the possible interpretive frameworks, through the telling of the story. I will now outline some of the various storytelling practices that were present in the field settings, and the role that these took in shaping girls' storytelling identities and the dominant discursive femininities within the groups.

#### *Fitting in and producing 'ideal' selves*

There were various ways in which girls discussed drinking. Young women spoke about drinking and drug taking, not only as a topic

of itself, but also as a way of providing commentary about the weekend activities. Through such narratives, one could clearly demonstrate the social boundaries of the groups, acceptable behaviours and provide a stage to perform one's social identities, through the discussion of one's own or others drinking. Although the field settings were mixed sex, young women carved out female only space. Whilst the young men played pool, football or table tennis, girls would sit and talk. These conversations were wide ranging, and often provided a space to swap gossip and advice. The stories exchanged took a range of forms including, spoken and written narratives, which appeared on the college and youth centre internet bulletin board, and whether spoken or textual, would often be accompanied by pictorial representations, snaps on mobile phones or posted pictures on the web.

Blackman's (1998) earlier ethnographic work on female pupils' subcultural identities, describes how the 'New Wave' girls in the study would recount wild party stories to the assembled throng as a way of uniting the group with their anti-patriarchal practices, independence, and creation and projection of an aspirational identity. Similarly, in this study, young women told stories to cement one's social position, as there was kudos to be gained from swapping drinking stories and their accompanying images on camera phones. Such benefits included the creation of a social space, acknowledgment of the pleasure of intoxication and a culturally defining individual and group identity. In these drinking stories, there was a less clear cut subcultural branding of alcohol, as was the case with cigarettes as described in chapter 5. Rather, girls were keen to stress factors such as the perceived strength of the alcohol, taste, cost and efficiency in enabling maximum inebriation.

*Fin: What informs your choice?*

*Tiggy: The taste mainly... and the price I like beer though.*

*Fin: You like beer more than any other?*

*Tiggy: I like some lady drinks as well.*

*Fin: Some lady drinks?*

*Tiggy: Like Malibu and coke and stuff like that.*

*Fin: How do you know it's a lady drink?*

*Tiggy: You know it's a bit girly, it doesn't taste of alcohol. I like wine as well , Loads of my friends drink Malibu and coke.. it tends to be trendy girls to be honest... so it does look better to have a Malibu and Coke in your hand if you're a girl than a beer.*

(Tiggy, white British female, 18, Common room)

The teenage girls in this study rarely drank what might be described as alcopops, but instead consumed a wide range of alcohol including: lager, cider, stout, wine, liqueurs and vodka. Many of the girls were clearly aware of the gendering of alcohol and could identify 'masculine' and 'feminine' drinks. *Malibu* and *Coke* appears as a 'lady drink' because it does not taste strongly of alcohol, and because it is deemed more aesthetically pleasing for girls to consume than drinking beer. However, most of the young women in this study did not necessarily drink so-called 'girly' or 'lady' drinks. However, certain drinks, such as the sweet white wine, *Lambrini*, were colloquially referred to as 'bitch piss' (*Fieldnotes, September 2004*), and such drinks as subordinated forms of alcohol, were perceived to be drunk predominantly by younger, less sophisticated 'townie' girls.

Notions of control and personal autonomy underpinned girls' personal drinking, smoking and drugtaking narratives, as illustrated earlier in the previous chapter, with the young women's account of their first cigarettes. Alcohol use was also seen as enabling girls to perform a sense of personal autonomy, free from parental control, yet this did not mean that the girls did not recognise the potential associated risks to their health and personal safety.

*Fin: What does alcohol give you?*

*Ella: I dunno. I think I can have fun without alcohol. Maybe just a sense of independence. I had a lot of problems with my parents of when I started drinking, smoking and smoking cannabis, it was like 'yeh, they don't have any control over me'. That's why I started... and actually I don't have any control over myself when I'm drinking"*

(Ella, Mixed race, White/Asian, 17, Common room)

In reflecting on her personal substance use, Ella conflates drinking alcohol with smoking tobacco and cannabis. Each of these substances in Ella's case became vehicles to demonstrate her personal autonomy outside parental control. Even though all the young women interviewed said they drank alcohol on occasion, many of the young women's wishes to position themselves as a 'reformed drinker'. This position was taken by some surprisingly young women, including one 14 year old girl, who wished to depict her self as clean living and respectable, who had left her hedonistic days of excess behind. It seemed that girls could perform a kind of 'laddish' drinking persona, but that this identity would have to be bracketed in a newly found *sensible* drinking femininity. Whilst young women can, and do drink to excess, as Pini (2001) argues in relation to older women's dance drug use, older established femininities continue to underpin much social interaction. Girls could reflect upon the experience, communicate group norms and create a space for informal drugs education from other young people by including some of the downside of drinking in these drinking tales.

I record in my field notes that one 17 year old college student, Mindy, suggested that girls and boys differed in the subject matter and ways of that they told drinking stories. Mindy described the boy's stories were about ego building, about proving who was most 'hardcore' and 'alpha male'. She argued that although these issues



may form part of the narrative in girls' stories, they would take a secondary role to "*the whole weekend experience*", where they went and who they went with. In a quest for respectability, boasting about quantity of sexual partners or drugs and alcohol consumed would therefore fit uneasily within the narrative tightrope that young women attempted to fulfil.

Whilst prior work highlights the potential positive uses of women's storytelling practices as social cohesive vehicles of resistance (Blackman, 1998; Sanders, 2004), this was not always the case in these research settings. Whereas young women's stories in a female exclusive setting could be used as a survival strategy, to negotiate and model particular types of alternative femininities and exchange advice, in the mixed sex settings of the youth space, girls were often effectively silenced. It appeared that in the fieldsettings that key socially powerful men played to the crowd with stories of hedonist excess, and competed with one another to tell the most outrageous tale. In such cases, young women's voices were largely sidelined, as girls and socially weaker men remained the audience for the tales. In one instance, I noted in my fieldwork diary, a young woman was ridiculed in front of a large group of young people at the college, by a powerful male raconteur, Maynard, for daring to contradict his views on young women and sex. It would seem that the exuberant beer, sex and fighting tales used by male storytellers, included a subordination of femaleness and femininity.

Such an arena created a space where young women were effectively silenced; they could either laugh along, stay quiet, or in moments of resistance whisper amongst themselves how the boys' tales were "*bullshit*". Despite facing potential ridicule, young women had various resistant coping strategies of their own, and girls privately ridiculed young men's bragging and tales of excess, such as the

example below, where Becky and Helen privately dismiss a male peer's narrative style and bravado.

*Becky: "Have you ever noticed when Michael tells the same story over and over again?"*

*Helen: "uh huh"*

*Becky: Each time Michael tells his story it gets more full of bull shit!"(Conversation amongst young women in Common room, Field note diary, December 2004)*

With each telling there would be an enriching of the narrative, as the story was passed around the group, and elements were either incorporated or disregarded in each incarnation. Girls were acutely aware of their role in the storytelling practices of the mixed sex group in both fieldwork settings. As I will discuss later in this chapter, some young women took on the mantle of raconteur, other girls noted the young men's reluctance to laugh or participate in women's storytelling practices. In the extract below, Karen highlights the community code in the research setting of the common room, that placed young men as 'jokers' and deemed girls as 'unfunny'.

*I dunno, its like guys think if they laugh at girl's jokes a lot of the time that they go (Deepens voice to impersonate teen boy) 'oh no I'm not gonna do that!" I do find that some times.*

*(Karen, White British female, 17, Common Room )*

The apparent refusal by young men to laugh at young women's jokes, highlights the power play and policing of the gendered norms within this teenage community of practice with its powerful in-group male jokers. Such disavowal of girls' humour echoes Hey, Creese, Daniels, Fielding & Leonard's (2001) work, where lads used jokes and tales to exclude and dismiss girls. In this case, the boys' refusal to laugh at girls' jokes is a way of rejecting and '*keeping out femininity.*' (Hey et al. 2001: 129). When girls told jokes in mixed company, they crossed into the gendered territory of hegemonic

masculinity (Thorne, 1993). The girls' tales often reproduced hierarchical and normative femininities. A girl by positioning herself as a performer of stories could to an extent control the flow of information, but also this strategy worked potentially as a spoiling tactic, in order to claim a more powerful position within the community.

There were various competing discourses in play in the research setting relating to young women's use of alcohol and drugs. On one hand, the position of submissive, emphasised femininity of the *girly girl* was cast against the alternative femininities of the 'in-control' party girl, or the 'out-of-control' disrespectable, drunken girl or sexually and gendered *Other, the tomboy*. Young women had some scope to take up or resist or amalgamate these identities, depending on time or place. Indeed, as I will highlight in the next section, the teenage party girl often voiced a desire to graduate to mature feminine respectability in a fantasy adult future. Within the localised communities of femininities (Paechter, 2003a; 2003b) in the fieldsettings, ideal femininities were structured around a kind of *feel good 'calculated hedonism'*, identified by Measham (2002) earlier in chapter 4, which embraced pleasure, but still maintained control. This 'hedonism' had strict limits as reflected McRobbie's (2000) observation that the '*new hedonistic culture*' (McRobbie, 2000:207) enables young women to become more sexual active, yet traditional standards continue to curtail these freedoms. For if girls did not maintain an element of control, then they could face the censure of other young women, an issue I will explore further later in this chapter.

Girls' drinking stories were therefore constructed on a tightrope of expressing a youthful hedonistic fun, a sense of personal agency, and a quest for feminine 'respectability' (Skeggs, 1997). Young women had to show that they 'fitted in' the social whirl and norms

of the social network, yet at the same time, fulfilled the norms of a sensible 'good girl', (Griffin, 2005). This move towards 'respectability' underpinned many of the young women's tales. The quest for respectability for the young women, as highlighted by Griffin (2005,) creates a series of difficult negotiations for young women in creating and performing the position of '*respectable female drinker*'. As Griffin (2005) suggests to be a girl *and* talk about one's own drinking, is to negotiate the risky and impossible subordinated femininities of '*tomboy*', '*girly girl*' and '*slag*' (Griffin, 1982, Griffin, 1985, Griffin, 2005).

Although stories could celebrate the pleasure and hedonistic excess of nights out, at other times, girls would jointly revel in the not so pleasurable, aspects of drinking and drug taking. Whilst these tales would often celebrate the enjoyable aspects of drinking, they would also often include the downside, the sickness, the hangovers and the drunken fracas, framed within a particular moral take on the night's events. Although a certain amount of hedonistic excess could be seen as a positive experience, indeed some girls wore their 'hangovers' as a badge of honour, becoming a burden to female friends by being a drug or alcohol fuelled victim, opened one up to chastisement from other community members.

In chapter 3 I described an incident involving an unconscious young woman, Betty, and her friend, outside the youth centre late one night. In the extract below, Betty and I discuss the night we met.

*Fin: Do you remember when we first met?*

*Betty: Oh my God! (laughs) I think I was puking, paralytic outside.. I drank 18 cans of Fosters. My mate had drunk 11. I don't know... She got quite pissed and I was really really drunk and I was walking over the bridge to meet my friend and I started feeling really, really ill and I started puking so I sat down to wait for her.*

*Then I lay down and then I started being sick everywhere and I was kinda paralytic and I had to be taken home by the police, which wasn't so good ...*

<>

*Fin: Where did you get the drink?*

*Betty: The shop next to the park. I used to get served there. I was 13 at the time... I dunno they (Shop keepers) just liked me because I wore a short skirt. Just pervy Indian people.. We bought 30 cans of Fosters. It was Fosters because I can drink it easily.*

*Fin: Do you drink this now?*

*Betty. No I hate it. I drink Guinness if someone offers me a pint. It's creamy. I can control my drinking normally now. If I go out for a night and I want to get tipsy, I'll drink shots and it's a lot cheaper and you don't have to drink so much*

(Betty, 14, White British female, Youth centre)

Whether Betty really drank 18 cans of beer, and could actually remember her night with such detail is beside the point. What is important is that Betty in recollecting her 13-year-old self, is keen to frame this experience within a drinking career. The bingeing on beer in the park with her female friend, had been replaced as a 14 year old with visits to city centre bars and clubs, and the quest to get 'tipsy', rather than 'paralytic'. At 13, Betty says she uses her sexuality and femininity to be served by the ethnically *Other*, perceived sexually predatory males ("*pervy Indians*"), at the off licence. At 14, Betty drinks shots in bars, rather than beer in the park, and is eager, in common with many of the other girls, to portray an element of self-control and sophistication.

Very few participants chose to position themselves as a current or past 'abstainer' from alcohol. Indeed a period of 'excess' as a narrative trope was a necessary step into an imagined clean living adulthood. Sade illustrates this below:

*Sade :I was straight edge<sup>13</sup> until I was 15 and then I started drinking and then I thought 'no its really gay<sup>14</sup>' and then so I stopped. I drink now but I don't get drunk...*

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*Fin: Why did you drink back then?*

*Sade: Because I was bored and thirsty.*

*Fin... What made the difference?*

*Sade: I hate conforming to the norm... and now everyone is trying to be different now but everyone is exactly the same, 'cos they're all trying to be different. You just can't win can you?... Oh most people just drink to get drunk.. I dunno I drank because I liked to, not just for the sake of getting drunk. I never actually purposefully got drunk..."*

(Sade, Black African female, aged 16, Further Education College, March 2004)

Sade asserts her personal agency in choosing to drink and expresses her frustration with the conformity of her peers. Conformity and group norms, are therefore at the heart of young women's choices, but as Sade highlights this may be about choosing not to 'fit in'. Another student, Becky, also voiced frustration at feeling forced to conform to group and 'racial' norms.

*People often try to put me in boxes, and then they try and then they think 'oh well she's just confused'.... It's wrong cos I'm not! I just do what I want, which if that means I wear really baggy trousers one day and really tight trousers the next, which is what I'm doing now. (Becky, Black British female, 17, college)*

Indeed, the positioning of Sade and Becky as Black female 'grungers', within a predominantly white middle class subcultural setting, created tensions and contradictions that the girls negotiated on a daily basis. Sade and Becky's decision to hang out at the college with a white middle class alternative groups, meant

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<sup>13</sup> *Straightedge* is a youth punk subculture that valorises abstinence from alcohol and other drugs. For more on the straight edged subculture see Blackman (2003) or various *straightedge* sites on the web. ([www.straightedge.com](http://www.straightedge.com))

<sup>14</sup> In the young people's cultures within the area, the term 'gay' was ubiquitous and was used to describe people and things as weak and inferior.

that they were often singled out by other young Black students who would think they were *'confused'*, or demanded to know why they had abandoned their true *'authentic black identity'* (Fieldnotes, March 2005), with their perceived choice of 'white' subcultural style and company. Such tensions led young women to adopt a variety of strategies in performing young drinking femininities in creating and acting out an 'authentic' gendered, 'raced', age specific and subcultural selves. The next section examines how girls might appropriate aspects of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987) in order to perform tough, hard drinking personas.

*"Drinking like a boy" Appropriating hegemonic masculinity*

Although I have argued so far in this chapter that young women rarely took on the similar role to their male peers in the performance of drinking stories, certain dominant girls would perform a kind of 'laddish' story telling persona in recounting their drunken escapades to an all female group. In Thorne's (1993) earlier ethnographic work on the gendered play practices of primary age children, it appeared that children's play was highly gendered, and that some individuals regularly crossed into the opposite sexes' play territory. I want to argue that storytelling in these teenage communities was a form of 'play'. Stories, in common with children's games, allowed friendships to be formed, social codes to be reproduced, and the enactment of differing types of masculinities and femininities. If stories, in common with games, creates space to 'do' gender, then this opens up the potential to perform gender in a variety of ways and such narratives enable young women to be *'one of the lads'*, and cross into the masculine territory of beer, fights and *'taking the mick'* (Milnes & Horrock, 2003)

As argued previously in chapter 2, if individuals are multiple members of range of communities of femininity practice (Paechter, 2003), then young women may be able to 'tell' themselves through stories in a variety of ways in these communities. This would allow scope for the performance of a range of contextual femininities and drinking and drug taking selves, as young women gender cross into 'masculine' social and cultural drinking territory. Kehily & Nayak (Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Nayak & Kehily, 2001) in a study of the storytelling and humour practices of working class boys, suggest that play fighting, verbal assaults and humorous stories are used by young men to regulate gender and sexual hierarchies and '*structure the performance of masculine identities.*' (Kehily & Nayak, 1997: 84). In this study, key powerful girls regularly used bawdy humour and a performance of a '*macho identity*', but rather than supporting hegemonic masculine hierarchies, it might be suggested that such appropriation by the girls could be seen to challenge and trouble these particular gendered codes.

However, gender boundaries were potentially porous, and some young women could and did challenge, subvert and cross these lines through their use of jokes and stories. Particular girls in the fieldwork settings, such as Chloe (White British, 18) at the youth centre, and Becky (Black British, 17) at the college, were both physically large, and highly articulate women, who could verbally dominate rooms with their presence and eloquent stories, tales and jokes. Chloe and Becky did not share the diminutive charms of the dominant forms of valorised heterosexual femininity within these settings. Perhaps because the young women felt they could not achieve status through the localised conventions of normative heterosexual desirable femininities, Chloe and Becky acquired power through contextually appropriating certain group 'masculine' practices, and openly reclaimed young men's space and narrative practices.



Chloe, for example, would cross more explicitly into 'masculine' territory than Becky, and regularly performed a 'laddish' honorary boy persona to mixed sex groups with tales of her fights and drinking sprees. Becky, on the other hand, performed stories to other girls, asserting an 'active' girlhood, with tales of her alcohol fuelled and amorous antics. Becky's performance was not so much about performing 'laddishness' (Jackson, 2006), but potentially about a performance and reclamation of a powerful black femininity in the white subcultural space of the common room. However, both Becky and Chloe, as raconteurs, also had a central role in communicating the established gendered norms of behaviour for the group with their stories about other girls' behaviour. By having such a central role in the flow of knowledge within the group, these girls told tales of their own intemperance with relative impunity, by stressing their own agency and a personal choice in drinking to excess.

Chloe and Becky, as female raconteurs, appropriated elements of the kudos associated with their male peers, and partly adopted male storytelling space. However, this did not translate easily into heterosexual desirability, but did establish, for the girls, a leadership role in the young women's hierarchical allegiances. Indeed, girls such as Chloe and Becky through their size and 'loudness' could have easily been deemed 'other', but through the force of their personality, and by mobilising such survival strategies, negotiated the potentially risky social landscape of girls' friendship groups. However, there remained a risk, that these female raconteurs could also be rejected by the stories' audience, and *othered* for their lack of feminine discretion.

Similarly, the language and use of storytelling strategies appropriated by these female raconteurs echoed previous work by

Holland et al. (1998) on young women privileging heterosexual masculinity in their health and sexual choices. For example, Chloe often shared stories about her inability to get drunk, and how in the past she used to *'drink and fight like a man'*, told with much hilarity. However, Chloe's story was not purely that of daring, but also of reformation, as she was keen to place this fighting behaviour in the past, and project a reformed, non fighting identity, who resolved issues through words *not* fists. Moreover, Chloe was dismissive of other girls and girlyness:

*"I have no real good girl friends. Girls are too bitchy and too giggly. I even rate girls like a boy. I go like she's shaggable<sup>15</sup>... the only time I feel girly is when I go out."*

(Fieldnotes: Chloe white British, 19 years old –*The Youth Centre* 13/4/05)

In one reading it could be argued that Chloe's appropriation of 'masculine' pursuits revolves around a misogynistic rejection of 'heteronormative femininity' for the fun and freedom enjoyed by boys, and that in Chloe's appropriation of hegemonic masculinity, that she also simultaneously subordinates femininity (Reay, 2001). One might think that commenting on the sexual attractiveness of other girls, and saying that one *'drank like a boy'*, might destabilise Chloe's heterosexual feminine identity. It seemed that Chloe wished to cross contextually into heterosexual masculine territory, for instance, in relation to her friendship groups, conversation topics and rating of other women's sexual desirability, without acknowledging this as potentially an expression of same sex desire. In common with the teenage girls in McRobbie's (1978) work, Chloe rejects and complies with differing elements of normative heterosexual femininity in her quest to maintain heterosexual desirability to boys and the need to *"find a fella"* (McRobbie, 1978:106). Potentially, young women might do differing forms of

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<sup>15</sup> Shaggable is slang word meaning sexually desirable and describes someone with whom you could have sexual intercourse

femininity simultaneously, from the 'girly' make up and heels, to the 'boyish' quantity of alcohol drunk. These gendered enactments coexist in the girls' own understandings of their performance and production of a socialising party girl persona.

Many other girls interviewed similarly rejected *girly girl* femininities, but did not want to ally themselves with the sexually and gendered ambiguity of the 'tomboy'.

*Fin: What's a girly girl like?*

*Sade: Like 'Ah look at me!' Oh, I don't know... No I'm not like a tomboy or anything actually but since I got to college I got a bit more feminine <> Oh... my friend, that I met in secondary school, she used to hang out with girly girls. I don't know, they used to like talk about boys constantly, and ... well it's not that I talk about boys too, but they're like 'Oh my God did you see Britney Spear's new video! She looks so good!' It's just so be like Oh my God, how sad are you guys?*

*Fin: What do you mates talk about who aren't girly girls?*

*Sade: Not Britney Spears! (Laughs)*

*(Sade, Black African female, 17, college)*

The figure of the *girly girl* haunted this research. In Sade's account the *girly girl* overly invests in a normative heterosexual desirable femininity and thus she is perceived to be obsessed by boys and aesthetic appearance. The *girly girl* was referred to in many of the interviews, but not one participant in either setting, wished to ally themselves with these apparent figure of derision. This apparent invisibility of the *girly girl* in this study differs significantly from other studies into younger girls social networks, where the *girly girl* was an available and visible category that some girls clearly identified (Reay, 2001; Hey, 1997; Renold, 2005; Clark & Paechter, 2006). However, despite a *girly girl* identity being seen as too frivolous, vain and weak, for many of the young women in this study, such 'girlyness' might be drawn on and enacted at particular times and contexts, often in order to enhance one's heterosexual desirability. This was in order to participate within the framework

of heterosexual feminine attractiveness in such arenas as bars and nightclubs, where young women went to meet potential sexual partners. In common with Renold's (2005a; 2005b) work on femininities in primary school, I would suggest that a kind of contextual and spatially realised continuum of contextual femininities in action. This continuum of 'girlyness' was temporally and relationally mobilised, and was drawn upon by young women at different times, depending upon their position, the social codes within their social network, community of practice and a specific context. Much of the findings in this study support earlier work on femininities in junior school, with a clear distinction between discourses of *girly girl* femininity 'vs' constructions of *girl power* (Reay, 2001, Ali, 2003; Renold, 2005a; Renold, 2005b). The girls in this study, however, did not have the scope to cross into the territory of hegemonic masculinity to the same extent as the middle childhood girls in Renold's work. Indeed, I would agree with Renold (2005b) that the older teen girls' performances of appropriate gender and sexuality are policed more sharply than their younger sisters. Whilst there were girls who were 'out' as lesbian, bisexual or bicurious in the college setting, a heterosexual desirable femininity remained highly valorised. For instance, despite the relatively open gay male culture in the common room, alternative lesbian femininities remained largely invisible. Some girls were seemingly freer to experiment, particularly young women who were either leaders of their friendship group, or had carved or had been cast into a space as an 'outsider'. Outsider girls, because of their class or cultural status could call upon different counter discourses of femininity in appropriating elements of hegemonic masculine practice in particular settings.

#### *Pastoral power, Identity work and gendered storytelling*

For many of the young women in the research settings, drinking alcohol was about performing a (hetero)sexually desirable,

autonomous, in-control, drug taking femininity. Girls openly spoke of drinking specifically to get drunk as a way of ensuring a good night out. Whilst there were girls who could tell tall tales of weekend excess, to do so *too* often, would to face criticism from other young women, who remained eager to keep a mantle of normative feminine respectability. It may have been the case that such storytelling performance of a respectable gendered identity was relational, and varied from time and place. Indeed, drinking stories were open to multiple readings, and if a young woman misread the prevailing the localised social codes of the friendship group, she may be admonished, rather than admired, for her transgressive behaviour. The localised codes for storytelling thus provided limited space for young women to publicly perform drinking stories to mixed sex groups, and established sets of normative coded gendered and sexualised narratives which shaped the drinking stories that could be legitimately shared by girls. Such codes were not only upheld by the young men in the group, but also by young women who carefully policed and scrutinised narratives shared by other women. Various young women deployed a range of strategies, and although as I have illustrated the role of raconteur was adopted by some of the more powerful women in the group in order to appropriate masculine *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1992), for weaker or more marginal women, such strategies remained inherently risky.

In this section I argue that the Foucaultian notion of *pastoral power* provided an essential device in framing and shaping young woman's narratives. To recap, as previously stated in chapter 2, Paechter (2006) argues that within localised communities of femininities, this notion of power as a disciplinary force can take a range of guises, and thus can be both coercive in controlling and monitoring the behaviour of other members within a group. Girls, through stories and gossip, are encouraged to share intimacies and

confess to other members of the group. Young women may achieve status whilst gaining influence within the group, and securing the boundaries of membership through kindness to others. The leaders of the friendship groups can cement their social position and control others in the inner circle and periphery of the group. Indeed, in earlier research George, (2004) argues that the very role of 'listener' within girls' social networks is a cohesive element that secures the stability of the group. George notes that in these friendship groups, the role of listener, and the management of information creates a matrix of socially interdependent relations, that maintains the status quo and internal power hierarchies. Even relatively marginal members of the group can secure their position through listening and the acquisition of knowledge, without mounting an overt challenge to the group leader.

The Foucaultian concept of *pastoral power* forms a useful counterpoint to that of the panoptical controlling gaze, where girls are 'othered' and admonished for transgressing the norms of group membership. Pastoral power as practiced in these communities of femininity practice could appear to be both benevolent and coercive simultaneously. For example, young women, in the field settings told tales of drunken escapades at considerable risk to their own reputation, if they momentarily misread the gendered community codes around girls 'risky' behaviour. I witnessed several cases of these non-permissible narrative transgressions by young women. In one example, a 14 year old White British young woman, Rachel, recanted her previous nights' adventure at an established cove at the river bank. She had been drinking, and had drunkenly sat next to an older 'Chinese man' at the river bench. Rachel told the assembled girls how she had been offered and accepted a bottle of cider from the older man's crate. It was the transgressive nature of talking to a stranger, and participating in an illicit activity, that was this young woman's attempt to appear as a risk taker and daring.

Rachel wanted to demonstrate that she could interact with older, ethnically 'other' men and still live to tell the tale. The other girls listened to her story, and then reprimanded Rachel for taking alcohol off a stranger, in case he had put drugs in the drink. However, in the telling, Rachel attempted to appear as daring, but not foolhardy, as she explained she had checked that the bottle was already unopened.

For Rachel, it was necessary to portray her self as a risk taker, out of parental control, but not too out of control, or risk being seen in a dim light by one's peers. This did not mean that young women would not give support and advice to one another. There emerged codes of rules in telling these drinking stories that were deeply gendered, as in the case of Lave & Wenger's (1991) example of *Alcoholics Anonymous* groups, young women had to tread a tightrope of fulfilling the group norms in this peer group. These codes were not explicit, but in any time spent with the groups of girls emerged in a set form, and young women would gradually learn how to tell the story and become a greater part of the group.

Whilst listening to the story, the audience, including the youth workers, would listen, laugh and give support to the storyteller and exert the benevolent invisible force of pastoral power in negotiating particular hierarchical knowledge within the group. Rachel, in her cider story, momentarily misread the social codes, and instead of gaining support from the group for her daring, found her self getting impromptu advice about date rape drugs from young women and youth workers alike. On one level, the young women and the youth workers together acted out this element of *pastoral power* in regulating Rachel's behaviour, they clearly demonstrated the wider group's acceptable ways of behaving within the gendered community; by not becoming too drunk, not consorting with othered men, and not telling drinking stories to the crowd. This

power dynamic was articulated through a language of care and concern, whilst maintaining the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and simultaneously, the narratives of sexual violence and fear of rape acts as a cohesive agent in uniting the young women in their shared identity as women and as potential victims.

*'Bitching', Othering and power play*

So far in this chapter, I have examined how young women use drinking stories to create risk-taking identities, maintain social codes and normative femininities, and occasionally take on alternative femininities by appropriating contextually aspects of hegemonic masculinity to perform a rebellious self. Such a variety of potential functions meant that the storytelling landscape was very difficult to navigate.

Rather than the explicit jockeying for position through acts of bravado favoured by the boys, girls took a more complex approach that involved appearing sophisticated and respectable, whilst developing bonds of personal friendship and affinity. For the young women in this study, it seemed that an emphasis on maturity and experience within a wider framework of 'respectable' femininity (Skeggs, 1997; Weekes, 2002) was an important aspect to achieving the desired popularity in the group. In this I am reminded of Skeggs' work on working class women's quest for feminine respectability (Skeggs, 1997). Although teenage girls through the construction of hedonistic drinking personas could claim cultural capital within the friendship group, on a wider level, the young women's quest for sensible, respectability, meant that other subordinated girls could be 'othered' for similar drinking, drug taking or sexual practices.

The young women described these gossiping all-girl spaces as *'the bitching session'*, and although young men did occasionally



participate, the role of the *'bitch'*, and the cultural practice of *'bitching'*, were explicitly gendered as feminine. *'Bitching'* and gossip worked to produce normative femininities within the girls' friendship groups, by clearly marking non-sanctioned behaviour. Non-sanctioned behaviour could include drinking too much or too little, over sexualised behaviour, being *'too nice'*, or being a *'gossip'* or a *'bitch'*. Although some forms of respectable femininities were aspired to by many of the girls in the shape of being a *'good friend'*; being seen as *'too respectable'*, blunted girls' attempts at forging their own autonomous, sophisticated femininity. There were clear parallels in this work with the role of *'bitching'* for the working class friendship group in Hey's (1997) study who used *'bitching'* as a way of claiming popularity for themselves by *othering* girls for sexually immoral behaviour (Hey, 1997:74-5).

In this section, I do not want to demonise the girls' who negotiated and created their own power hierarchies through strategies such as scrutinising and criticising their female peers, but I feel that it is necessary to record how girls secured their own personal social status within the wider highly competitive environment. In these field settings, girls' community codes could be highly conservative, and whilst young women were urged to confess all, about their weekend activities, to do so inappropriately would to be the subject of girls' gossip. On occasions, I challenged the girls' overt criticisms of other young women, as I felt deeply uncomfortable with such scapegoating of socially weaker members of the group. Indeed, young women had an ambivalent relationship to this idea of *'bitching'*. Whilst young women derided *'bitching'* as a shameful practice, and girls could be exiled from friendship groups for telling spiteful stories, others publicly celebrated the role and the status of the *'bitch'*. One such girl, was the raconteur, Becky, who said she could get an A star, suggesting that *'bitching'* became a learnt activity, in which one could excel.

*“If there was a GCSE<sup>16</sup> in ‘bitching’, I would have got an A Star”* (Becky, Black British, 17, college)

As I described earlier, Becky, as a Black British woman in a white cultural space, already had a fairly marginalised position within the student common room. Becky’s reappropriation of “bitching” as a ‘truth telling’ device (George, 2006), echoes previous work on young Black women’s use of storytelling and gossip to assert an active, empowered femininity (Weekes, 2002; George, 2006). Through her avowal of this practice, Becky consolidated her position within the localised social hierarchies, produced an alternative, empowered femininity and reclaimed a voice and place in the community by speaking the unspeakable. However, these ‘bitching’ stories derided other girls who were in a similar marginal position, and by being the mouthpiece of the group, Becky risked marginalisation if her popularity waned, and she herself was ‘othered’ for her role as a ‘gossip’. Such empowerment through appropriation of the abject position of ‘*bitch*’ was thus provisional, and inherently risky, in the complex and shifting social hierarchies of the teenage social networks.

Drinking stories were thus part of a production of gendered, raced, classed and generational identities. Girls’ appropriation of drinking tales could thus allow for the production of resistant, alternative aspirational femininities. However, many drinking narratives focused on the production of normative respectable femininities which savagely critiqued other’s girls’ behaviour and drinking and sexual practices. On one level, girls were free to adopt, appropriate, resist or reject the positions of ‘*partygirl*’, ‘*bitch*’, ‘*drunk*’, ‘*girly girl*’ and ‘*slag*’, but such positions were interwoven in the shared

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<sup>16</sup> In England and Wales, the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is the national examination taken within schools at the age of 16. An ‘A star’ would be the highest possible grade awarded in this examination.

discourses produced in the girls' drinking stories, which were 'raced', classed and age-specific. However, such positions were rarely stable, and were adopted and rejected contextually depending on the situation and micro power plays of the girls' friendship groups. The navigation of such shifting and complex gendered drinking landscape for girls meant that it often proved difficult to claim gendered legitimacy in a similar way to their young male peers.

A Foucaultian analysis of power/knowledge proves insightful as a way into exploring girls storytelling practices. On occasions, pastoral power in the shape of mentoring, shaped girls narratives and highlighted legitimised localised drinking femininities for the group. On other occasions, power was exercised in a more coercive way, with girls castigated for performing the wrong type of femininity, by becoming too drunk, too loud, too 'girly' or too sexual. Such processes powerfully highlight the tightrope of appropriate femininities that girls attempt to navigate. Whilst young women could perform drinking and drug taking personas, such positions were unstable, and in the longer term problematic, as girls attempted to uphold positions of 'respectability' and 'hedonistic excess' simultaneously. Girls struggled in creating and negotiating stories, and often misread the relational and contextual storytelling codes they intended to follow. In such a context, even young women in socially powerful positions, attempted to position themselves firmly within 'respectable' normative mature femininities, or risk either expulsion or a marginal position within the group.

### Conclusion

Whilst I have concentrated in this chapter on how young women used drinking stories to construct gendered identities, girls were

clearly also mobilising 'racial', subcultural and generational identities for themselves and others within their tales. I have argued that girls' storytelling practices allowed young women to construct risk taking personas, negotiate teenage femininities and produce boundaries and hierarchies within friendship groups. I want to suggest that such stories provided a vehicle for the mechanism of *pastoral power* and the judgement of other girls to be mobilised within the communities. Indeed, 'bitching' stories as a 'feminine' form of storytelling were performed by young women about girls for primarily other females' consumption. Such stories were used to demonstrate the current 'pecking order' within the group, and demonstrate the sanctions for unauthorised transgressions of localised social codes of acceptable femininity. Such codes were temporally, spatially and relationally realised, and thus where one was placed in the hierarchy, and when and where the drinking took place, including what was drunk would effect the potential response.

The observations made in this chapter reflect Francis (1997; 1998) findings on gendered role play within primary schools. Although girls in a mixed sex setting took on diligent, sensible and responsible roles, in a girls only space, such drinking stories could be daring, with girls contextually adopting a range of alternate risk taking, tough femininities. In the single sex space, young women could thus contextually challenge, subvert, or resist notions of normative emphasised femininity through drinking stories. Indeed, young women were often keen to stress their difference from the vast majority of other girls, and there was a clear rejection of *girly girl* femininity.

Young women were central in the reproduction of normative heterosexual femininities within the group. The social networks that the young women inhabited, were rarely benign or liberating

spaces, and instead were imbued with heterosexual feminine competition and heavily gendered normative frameworks for participation. Apart from young women sharing the community practices and rituals with one another, they also provide a guide to the social dynamics within the group, with more established figures having greater flexibility in the range of gendered roles they were permitted to perform.

The storytelling practices within the fieldwork settings were deeply gendered. In mixed sex spaces, boys tussled for the centre stage, and girls' voices were marginalized and silenced. However, girls could reclaim the 'masculine social space' and roles of raconteur and joker in girls' only spaces. Even girls who experimented with a range of gendered identities depending upon the community codes, chose to reframe narratives within a self-monitoring regulatory framework, which erased elements of behaviour deemed to excessive to the norms of the wider group. Such discursive practices both produced young women as drinkers, and shaped girls' drinking practices, and the ways they understood their own and other girls' alcoholic consumption.

The kudos and cultural capital available from the performance of girls' drunkenness was thus relational, contextual and generational. For many of the girls there was need to perform and produce a 'sensible' reformed drinker persona in the interview, rendering their earlier behaviour immature, unsophisticated and unduly reckless. In contrast, the girls' present day drinking identities were often produced as knowing, in-control and discerning. Girls noted that hard drinking hedonism, had a diminishing return over time, in relation to the potential for prestige earned from their social group, and so they imagined graduating to a sober, sensible drinking adult femininity.

This chapter has examined the ways young women's use of drinking narrative were used to culturally enact differing kinds of femininity and were involved in the process of locally gendering alcohol use. In the next chapter I turn to examine how young women use party photographs to construct visual narratives and perform drinking and smoking identities to themselves and others. I will also explore the variety of potential readings open to the young women's social networks and the power play implicit in taking photographs, and being the subject of the gaze.

## Chapter 7

### **“Hey, let me see!” Teenage photo stories, performing gendered ‘communities of practice’ and the construction of young women’s identities**

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored young women’s oral drinking narratives and storytelling practices as part of a wider process of negotiating power relations and establishing normative ways of ‘doing’ girl within young women’s localised drinking communities. This final empirical chapter examines girls’ use of visual narratives, in order to look at how girls negotiated the competing localised discourses of teenage femininities. As mentioned earlier, Penny Tinkler highlights in her recent social history of female smoking practices, the historic centrality of the visual in women’s tobacco use via advertisements, health education messages and personal photographs (Tinkler, 2006). In the case of this thesis, I also want to think about how drinking also operates as a way of producing a visual spectacle, through which young women can construct and perform particular ways of ‘doing girl’. I aim to illuminate the research questions by exploring how research participants chose to visually portray their own and others’ drinking and smoking for the consumption of their group, via their use of party snapshots. These photographs acted as a memento and as a ‘reified’ artefact of the group’s history, and provided a visual reminder of the drinking and smoking conventions of the social group.

In the contemporary industrialised West, many rites of passage, such as marriages, births and baptisms are marked using visual technologies such as still photographs or video. In this chapter I explore young women’s use and trade of party photographs as a way of gendered smoking and drinking personas within their friendship groups. I argue that the centrality of the visual and the girls’ use of photography mark such rites in a similar way.

However, rather than capturing these formalised images and 'community' rites in the family album, young women record nights out by posting pictures on web sites and tacking them to bedroom walls. In recent ethnographic work on girlhood, Gerry Bloustien (2003) suggests that young women use visual technologies to explore and perform aspirational identities to camera. This chapter uses still images from cameras and mobile phones to expand upon Bloustien's earlier observations, and I discuss how young women use photography as a means of learning and performing gendered and age specific identities.

I turned to visual methods in this study, because I was interested in the centrality of the girls' visual cultures in the field settings, and as previously explored in depth in chapter 3, I was unable to socialise with girls at parties, bars, clubs and cotches because of my age and social status. However, I noticed how girls in the research settings regularly recorded social events on camcorders, mobile phones and traditional cameras, and excitedly passed around the friendship groups or uploaded to websites or exchanged via mobile phones. The girls' sense of *the visual*, was a key part of establishing a 'cool' autonomous identity. As previously argued in chapter 3 on young women's drinking geographies, there was a need for girls to make themselves visible in the 'right' places, with the 'right' company and wearing the 'right' clothes. Similarly, as Tiggy asserted in the previous chapter, particular drinks had a 'feminine' aesthetic value, and thus held connotations of a gendered 'cool'. However, whilst girls attempted to catch the eyes and respect of their peers, they also tried to avoid the surveillance of adult authority figures, their parents and the police, and the gossip about their own actions from their peers. This surveillance became reconfigured between young people into an authentic 'authoritative' gaze', that created levels of self regulation within the



social networks in establishing localised norms of age specific, gender conformity.

By embracing these visual technologies, young women emerged as cultural producers, and in the production and reproduction of such images recreated and performed particular gendered identities. Similarly, as I argued in chapter 5, the informal trade of images, in common with cigarettes, formed an informal social currency, and enabled young women to cement their position within wider social hierarchies. This exchange of images, whether via the web, mobile phone or traditional snap shot, allowed girls to create and map out visually their social world and their position within their wider social networks. At the same time, such party photographs clearly valorised particular kinds of drinking, smoking and party going personas within young women's friendship groups.

I hoped by drawing on the use of photography to gain an insight into the partying and socialising behaviour in girl's social worlds without cramping their style. To do this, I distributed disposable cameras to the participants, and the resulting images often captured elements of the exhilaration of the night. However, as texts they always remain one removed from the complete immersion in the experience offered by other methods such as participant observation. As highlighted in chapter 3, the images that appear in this chapter have been altered as an attempt to anonymise the picture. I have also chosen not to depict certain of the resulting images for reasons I will dwell on at length later in this chapter. The pictures in this chapter are thus perhaps muted, but were an arguably effective way into the topic as a technique to elicit responses about girls' partygoing habits, and to explore young women's use of visual technologies. This chapter provides a brief exploration of the different ways gendered codes were communicated via these visual texts. When a girl poses with a

cigarette in hand or a beer lined up for her next drink (see fig x and ix), these are 'adult' signifiers, and the young woman is 'performing' adulthood, and a hedonistic 'cool' youth through such bodily practices, and the cultural capital imbued within types and brands of tobacco and alcohol products.

My argument in this chapter is that young women are adept at using visual technologies, such as cameras and mobile phones to create and perform aspirational gendered and age specific identities. I will argue that these young women use photography to create a group identity and bond via their use of the snapshot. Such young women, through the production and reproduction of such images, capture particular community 'rites' such as drinking, and recreate and 'perform' particular gendered identities. Girls emerge as cultural producers in these visual communities of femininity practice through the use of visual technologies. A central tenet to much of my argument is Wenger's (1998) notion of the 'reified object', as part of the symbolic construction of a community of practice. Such reified objects as community symbols and have strong cohesive power to community members. Such objects communicate group norms and are often held in high regard by group members. Previously in chapter 2, I discussed Wenger's (1998) notion of 'reification' as a 'thingness' round which membership of a community of practice can be organised. The reified object of the snapshot, simultaneously includes and excludes young people from group membership.

Photographic images, and the practice of photography, function to communicate the norms and values of the group, illustrate bonds of friendship and allow the performance of group and individual identities. At first glance, young women's use of visual technologies can be seen as girls' celebrating friendship and fun. However, I want to suggest that this use of the visual, allows young women not

only to uphold normative aesthetics, but also challenge and subvert these norms. Following Paechter's (2006) use of Foucaultian analyses of power within 'communities of femininity practice', which was described earlier in chapter 2, I argue that these photographs are used as micro disciplinary techniques to regulate girls' friendship groups, rather than benign artefacts, purely used to create social cohesion and camaraderie.

This chapter builds on this work, to explore how young women scrutinised others in their friendship group, as a space to negotiate power relations and celebrate the existence of the in group. However, following work on girls' friendship groups by George (George, 2001; George, 2003; George, 2004), I suggest that the hierarchical structures of such social networks are also facilitated by young women's use of visual technologies. In the previous chapter, I outlined young women's storytelling practices in producing femininities and hierarchies within their social networks. The first part of the chapter describes the various ways young women used photography, before moving on to exploring the range of ways snapshot photography was used as a disciplinary device in young women's power play in social settings and I illustrate with examples from the fieldwork of how young women use photography to produce and police individual and group identities.

#### Communities of visual practice

In the 1980's, the anthropologist, Anthony Cohen (1985), explored the concept of communities as shared symbolic systems. Cohen argued that the shared recognition of the symbolic system is socially cohesive, and although there may be an individual variability to the meaning of these symbols, the 'learning' of these symbolic symbols is a fundamental part of acquiring the community culture.

*“People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity.” (Cohen, 1985:118)*

The centrality of a given set of symbols within a community, creates boundaries of belonging, and are constructed to differentiate community members from ‘others’. This is not to suggest a symbolic community remains static in relation to its creation and interpretation of meaning, rather, that a communities’ symbols are mutable, and can thus come to have a range of meanings over time and place. For example, a photograph can become a referent of a groups’ identity in the form of a picture of school form group or sports team. Such meanings can be mobilised in a variety of ways, creating a commonality of symbolic meaning, for instance, in the class photograph or high school year book. Cohen states that rituals and shared symbols create unity. There are clear similarities between the ‘communities of meaning’ in Cohen’s work, and the later work on ‘communities of practice’ and the ‘reified’ object. I want to think about the girls’ photography using both Cohen’s notion of communities as constructed through and by symbol, and Lave & Wenger’s notions of communities of practice. The girls’ photography is a process of image creation, and the individual and group viewing of the symbolic artefact, inform part of a larger ritual of ‘community’ construction.

Such snapshots provide insights and understandings into how young women learn gender in particular social groupings. The use of snapshots were also used as a form of narrative, and permitted a construction of a commonality of meaning, but also were used as a tool of social control. The girls’ use of visual technologies in this study produce ‘reified objects’ such as snapshots and *blog* pages, via which stories can be constructed, and individual and group identities performed and made. Such photographs illustrate who is ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the group, and create a kind of group membership

card to illustrate participation in wider community of practice, and the subtle social hierarchies within girls' friendship groups. Through the group viewings, girls learnt the associated stories and which readings of these texts were privileged within the group, and understand some of the localised ways of becoming a full group member.

Individuals within the social networks in play in the fieldsettings would consolidate their social standing through the trade in images and stories. Visual and oral narratives contain and transmit power, and a negotiation of the social order, in relation to what images feature, who has access to particular images, and who creates and views these shots. Thus, the sharing of images such as photographs and other visual media, created a shared history, as people create social identities and culturally reproduce through these images. If, as Cohen (1985) argues, communities are constructed through such symbols, the girls in this study, as cultural producers through their production, use and display of party snapshots construct a shared 'community of visual practice' where gendered norms can be negotiated.

Thus, normative codes of femininities and masculinities will be reproduced and consumed via such images. Of course, young women will be members of several communities of visual practice simultaneously. The code of a particular practice will be communicated through these 'reified' images within particular communities. For instance, the snaps shared in the family album may differ significantly in tone and content, than party snaps hosted on personal webpages for the consumption of girls' friends. Similarly, pictures of a girl high at a festival, or drinking cider in the local park will not have the same valorised status, or be read in a similar way as it potentially will be in her friendship group. The young women's own reading of such cultural codes will be open to

interpretation, yet the dominant cultural code will be communicated through a negotiation of shared symbolic meaning. If the girls' party photographs are seen as visual stories, then the meanings open to a group viewing are products of an intersubjective negotiation. Such visual stories have a variety of layers of meaning at each level, from the taking of the image, the trade and exchange of images, and the ultimate viewing by any given audience.

*Group snapshots – young people as cultural producers*

Girls actively produced and consumed images of one another in both the fieldsettings taking pictures on mobile phones and still cameras. After each interview, the young women would return to the group and these pictures would be excitedly passed around, with members of the group commentating on particular images and reminiscing about the occasion. The images of the party or holiday, thus gave the group space to repeatedly relive the moment in a recreation of group solidarity. The photograph was an affirmation of the group identity. It celebrated the group's existence and such photographs were reified objects, appearing on websites and the walls of the centre.



Fig ix, Photograph by Maria. Setting houseparty, March 2005

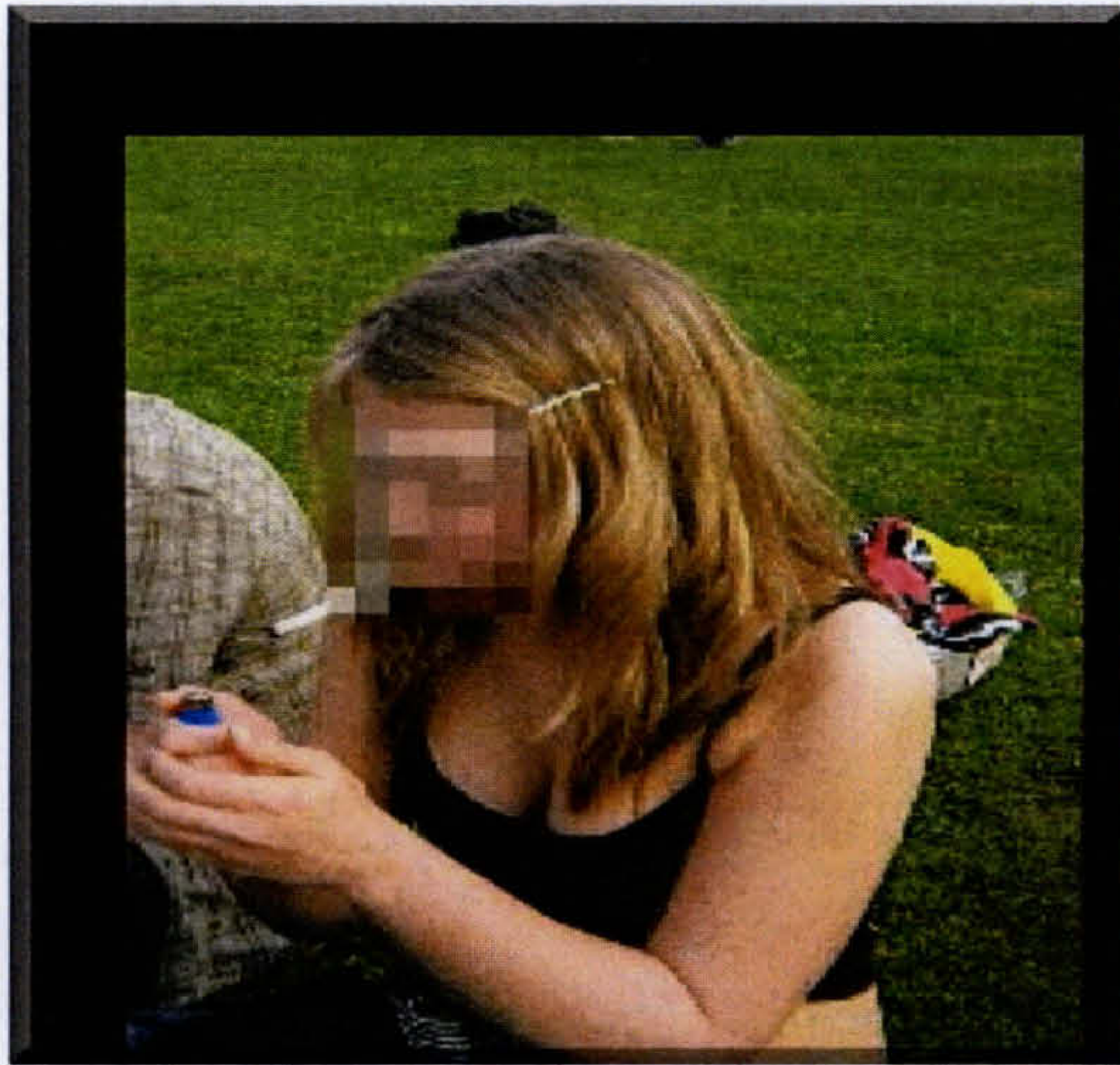


Fig x: Photo by Amy, Setting parkland cotch, May 2004

There were a variety of differing images produced by the girls. Pictures were taken at settings highlighting the sorts of places where young people socialized such as: festivals, parks, house parties, pubs and nightclubs. There were few pictures of adults, although one young woman took a picture of her mother and father posing in their home at the beginning of the reel. There were seasonal variations in the picture settings reflecting the UK climate. Photographs taken in the summer months often featured outdoor cotch locations. The images taken in the winter illustrated the English indoor culture of pubs and clubs. Many pictures featured group shots with individuals dancing, smoking, drinking or passed out on the floor. In several pictures, young people pose with a prop, including bottles of wine, cigarettes, a hookah<sup>17</sup> and mobile phones ( see figs ix, x, xi, xii).

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<sup>17</sup> A large water pipe popular in Arabic countries used to smoke pressed flavoured tobacco. (Shi sha)



fig xi. Photograph by Becky (Black British female, 17) Setting house party, 2004



Fig xii, Photo by Becky, Black British 17, Setting: House party, 2004.

A few images were seemingly unposed or featured unsmiling young people. The majority of images featured others from their friendship group, however, not all the images were taken by the young women themselves. Occasionally, the cameras may have been passed round at parties, or the research participant appears in the image, either by using a mirror, getting others to take their photo, or by stretching out their arms and turning the camera on the self (see below fig xiii, fig xiv and fig xv).





Fig xiii, Self portrait: Amy, White British 14 years old, youth centre

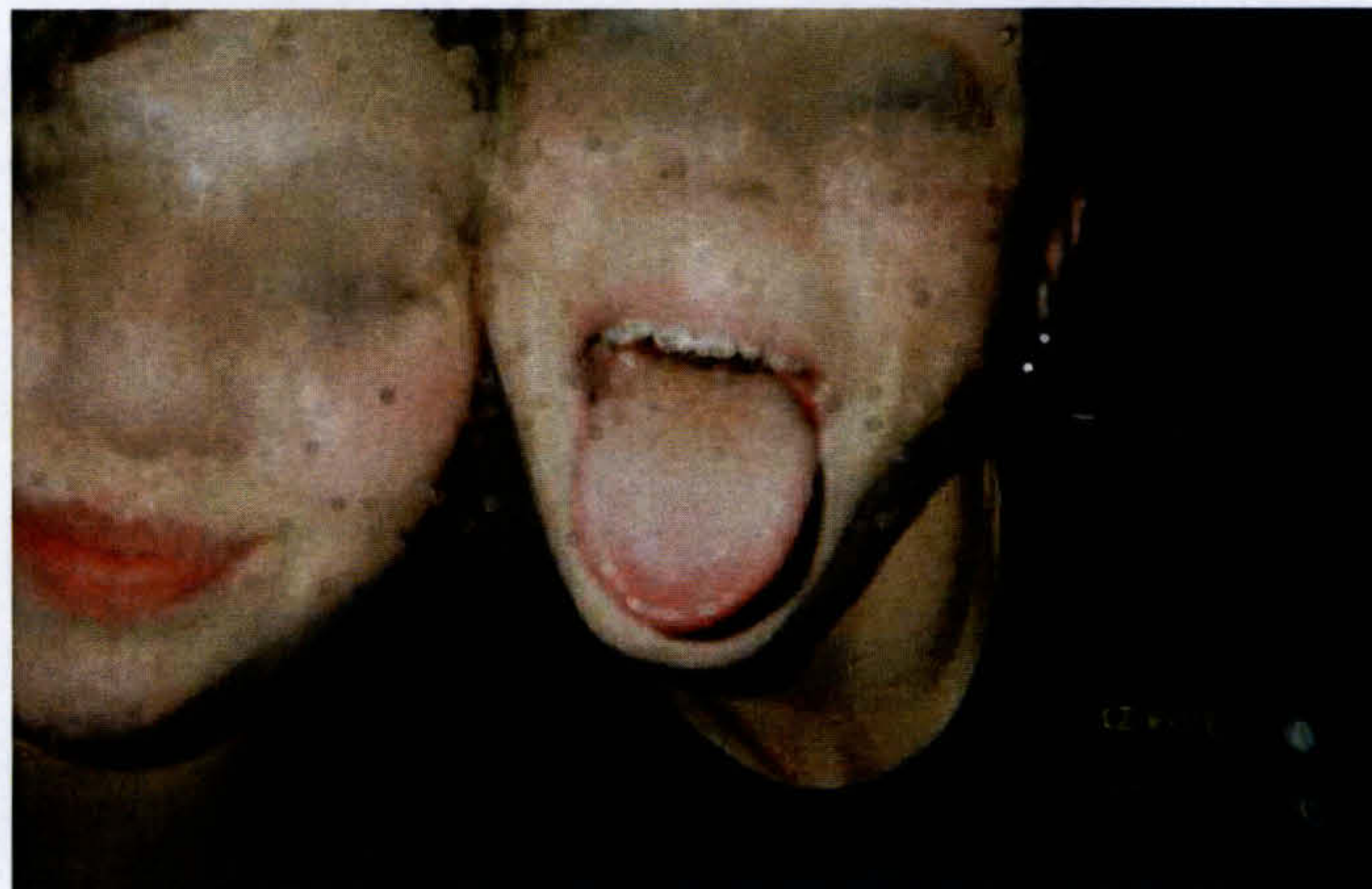


Fig xiv, Photograph by Betty (White British female, 14) youth centre. Setting Nightclub, Spring 2005)

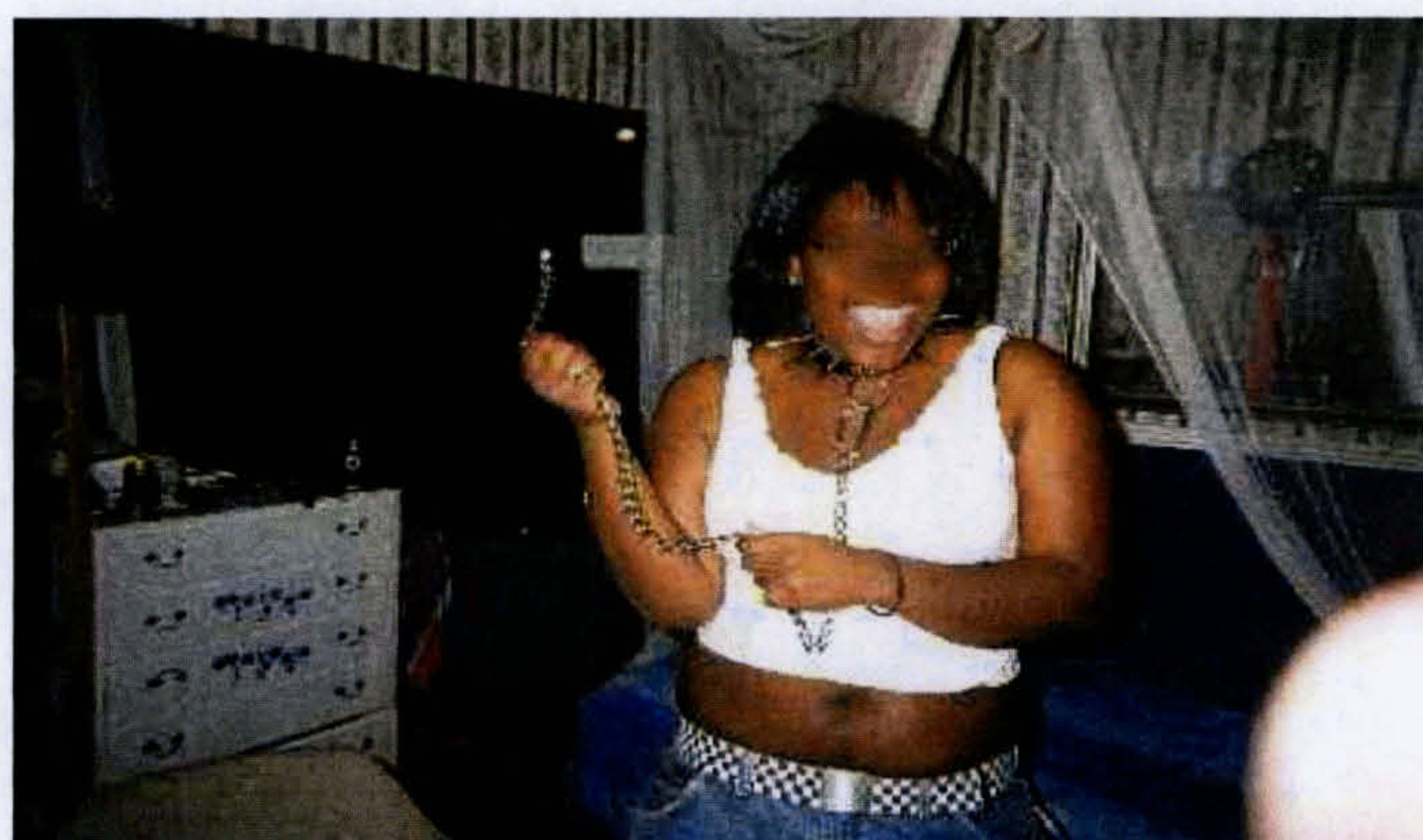


Fig xv, Becky self portrait (Black British female aged, 17) setting Houseparty, 2003

The majority of these snaps were group shots with young people's; heads pressed closely together into the frame with arms flung

round others to shows bonds of friendship and camaraderie (fig xvi and fig xvii).



Fig xvi Photograph by Betty (White British female, 14) youth centre. Setting City centre  
Spring 2004



.fig xvii Photograph by Emily(White British, 17)  
Setting House party, 2004

Such photographs become a history of a particular community of femininity and generational practice, and represents shared friendships and past activities, in addition to being potential devices to exclude and control members. The changing allegiances over time could thus be illustrated by the pictures which had prominence of place on bedroom walls, or were kept in wallets or on mobile phone screen savers. Several of the girls later spoke about how they felt happier being behind the lens than in front of it. As a result, many of the pictures returned featured young men posing for the female photographer, as the taking and consumption of pictures of good looking, desirable ('buff') boys became a

performance of the girls' powerful heterosexual gaze and a site of kudos in the later trade and exchange of such shots.

The flow of visual images created both topic and illustration of young women's discussions. The personal snapshots were a visual reminder of group solidarity, and an attempt to capture elements of this 'fleeting youth.' Several of the young women spoke about attempting to construct a narrative flow between the images, from trying to capture the excitement of a big night out, to another example, where one girl wanted to illustrate a narrative rendering of a 'trip' at a festival, complete with picture of the dried psychedelic fungi at the beginning of the reel.

These girls were adept at using visual and other media technologies. In the extract below, this familiarity with technology is apparent as the young person describes downloading photographs from mobile phones onto personal computers.

*"We've got so many (Pictures) at home on the pc thanks to all the drunken pics we took. Most were on \_\_\_\_\_'s phone so you can imagine all the pics of himself posing and standing drunk next to goths or other drunk girls." (College bulletin board posting, October, 2004)*

The development of photography and video recording on mobile phones enabled young people to take even more photographs, and I noted in my fieldwork diaries cases where young people illustrated their weekend stories with examples from snapshots on their phones. My fieldwork diary records the use of video mobile technology enabled one girl to show footage of her friend drunkenly dancing in a nightclub to a throng of delighted and curious centre users. This technological development enabled young people to carry happy times and visual jokes as moving and still images on their mobile phones. The images are generic and repeated infinitum, although the characters may change within the story

remains the same. *"I'm popular, I'm desired, I'm happy!"* The pictures where adult markers such as mobiles, bottles of alcohol, cigarettes and/or drugs appear, these are signifiers of adulthood and hedonism.

In earlier research into 'girlhood', Bloustien (2003) used visual technologies to gain an insight into the lives of their participants with the belief that such an approach allows participants to exert authorial control, and try on different 'selves' in front of the lens of the camera.

*"Photographic images are crucial to this struggle, for they underpin the ways in which we learn to understand our worlds and our places within them, enabling us to see ourselves as others see us. (Bloustien, 2003:4)*

The process of photography gives us insight into young peoples' 'life worlds', but also provides the space, as Bloustien argues for young people to 'play' and learn new identities. Bloustien suggests that the participant's use of camcorders that the young women *'perform their gender to the spectator, on a micro cultural level'* (Bloustien, 2003: 4). The young women's gendered, generational, classed and 'raced' identities are contextually intertwined, emerging in the video texts in Bloustien's study. Bloustien suggests that as they jostled for position using the camera as a mirror, reflectively allowed the young women to play and create their 'selves', in the framing, interpretation and representation of the images. These 'selves' were also apparent in this research. The photographs in this study are of girls and boys posing for the camera. Young men and women pout provocatively, brandishing cleavage with cigarettes, drink or mobile phone in hand, as signifiers of a 'cool' aspirational adulthood.

The visual texts in this study are still, rather than moving, images. For the young people in the fieldwork settings, these snapshots

formed part of a wider visual narrative, and as other commentators (Barthes, 1963; Kuhn, 2003; Wollen, 2003) have noted, such still photography could be seen as a narrative device, in and of itself. Such still images are open to interpretation, as a photograph only captures a given moment, and thus they cannot tell the observer what happened immediately before or after the moment that is frozen in time. I am not able to see the before and afters of each image, and in common with the photographic album, the snapshots shared, whether displayed via pin boards, email or personal web page, are the times that young people chose to remember. A series of photographs, depending on what order they are viewed, may give the observer a variety of differing interpretations of the same event. A single photograph can also be read in many ways, depending on the context, the subject matter and the interpretations of the viewer.

The girls' pictures in this study as staged performances also reflected notions of artificiality and play. They were not necessarily about capturing 'reality' or a 'naturalistic' scene. For example, Sarah, a 17 year old white British student, explained in an interview that the photographs she had taken *'didn't really capture the atmosphere of the night.'* Sarah had taken a series of photographs at a house party, celebrating a friend's birthday. During the evening there had been several arguments, with girls falling out with one another over a boy. Sarah stated that she chose to ignore the 'bad bits' in her pictures, choosing to take pictures of happy smiling faces and dancing, and ignoring the arguments and fights.

In doing so, Sarah did not attempt to capture the 'real', rather she attempted to 'airbrush' the difficulties of the evening and record a convivial atmosphere. These young women's public identities in a similar way reflects the family album that ignores and negates

divorces and bereavements, smoothing over the cracks of family structure and celebrates only the 'good times. These young women's bedroom montages of teen life, thus skip the messy emotional entanglements, the broken love affairs and the fall outs between friends, smoothing into a coherent narrative of *'I'm happy, I'm loved, I belong.'*

#### *The art of remembering – capturing youth*

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that snapshot photography is an age specific activity. Put simply, that the practice is used differently at different times in the life course. Hockey & James (2003) highlight the centrality of photography in mapping out the life course as individuals grow older, rather than younger, memory work becomes increasingly important in representing one's movement through the lifecourse.

*"It is only memory, rather than direct bodily experiences, which can provide some kind of access to time passing, although the surfaces of our bodies, through photographs especially, may serve to remind us that this time has past. "* (Hockey & James, 2003: 41)

The teenage wish to capture party nights with the adult signifiers of cigarettes and alcohol, may be replaced in later years with the family album of births and marriages. Indeed, if one considers the kinds of photographs in family albums in the UK, these pictures are of 'rites', from births, weddings, baptisms and holidays. These official family histories, kept in the hallowed family album, are events that are deemed important by parents. Similarly, the snapshots posted on netblogs<sup>18</sup> or tacked to bedroom walls or caught on mobile phone screens, are young people capturing and

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<sup>18</sup> Netblogs are a type of shared diary that is posted on the internet. One young woman, Maria, regularly posted visual images on her own website so her friends might share these images.

recording their history and the events that are important to their individual circle of friends.

The key events that are deemed sufficiently important to record and archive, may change over time, and in years to come the photographs of girls drinking cider in the park or at the latest music festival, may come to be replaced by wedding photographs. Indeed, it seemed within the social groups in these research settings, that girls operated as the social chroniclers via their production and archiving of snapshots. This, of course, reflects women role in the production of photographic albums within the family. The role of the woman behind the lens, also facilitates girls to uphold and enact localised power hierarchies within the social group in choosing what and how to record the group events.

Photographs as a powerful symbolic force were used to mark young women's own right of passage. There was also a good deal of memory work, with young people eager to 'capture' their youth through the freeze frame of the snapshot. Girls felt they were at once somehow able to cheat mortality against the ageing process and mark their passage into adulthood, by capturing *happy days* down by the river, or the hedonistic excess of the house party or club night. The teenage girls by visually chronicling youthful social gatherings are also attempting to preserve the youth for the future, as a kind of visual alchemy against the ageing process. Other critics have noted this phenomena, Sontag (1977) highlights how photography promotes nostalgia in the present. Sontag links with this "*nostalgia right now*" with youth, in essence an attempt to preserve youth as an "*inventory of immortality.*" (Sontag, 1977; 7). Such observations were apparent in the girls' observations about their own use of photography. For example, Tiggy, an 18 year old college student, spoke evocatively about her own emotional relationship with images. In the following extract, Tiggy echoes

Sontag's (1977) notion that to take a photo is to capture and appropriate an element of the world.

*Fin: ... I was just wondering when do you normally take photos?*

*Tiggy: I dunno, when something interesting is happening... or you're on holiday, yeh, like when you want to make it the best thing. It's not something that's permanent so you want to remember it by having pictures.*

*Fin: So it's about trying to remember things?*

*Tiggy: Yes definitely.*

*Fin: So when you have the camera in your hands, are you trying to capture what your eye sees, or*

*Tiggy: You're trying to capture the whole atmosphere which ultimately is very difficult. .. You're never gonna manage it to be honest.*

*Fin. Mmmh...*

*Tiggy: That's why old photographs, I dunno, there is something great about them. The thing is, the thing that happens is it's not so good..., I take some photographs that erm, are great looking and stuff, and people look at them and go 'wow', cos I did photography and stuff, but sometimes with photos you've got a really silly picture and no-one else understands it and the memories come flooding back and its lovely...*

*(Tiggy, White British female, 18, College)*

These attempts at visually capturing a sense of permanence are perhaps futile, as Barthes (1963) highlights, photographs are transient, as in time they fade away. Similarly, Barthes, also notes, that whilst a snapshot may be open for a public reading, its meaning is always private. For instance, in the heady swapping of photographs by the friends with snatched shots and cries of "hey let me see!", each individual will bring a subtly different reading to the image that goes beyond that of the public viewing.

*Fin: Would you ever throw away a photo?*

*Tiggy: No! erm. Well if they were bad, I would never throw away a photo that was... I was gonna say good, but I would never throw away a photo that meant something to me. If it was just a crap shot I'd throw it away.*

*Fin: What about a photo of an old partner or someone who was no longer your friend?*



*Tiggy: No. I wouldn't throw it away. I've got photos of my first serious boyfriend who I don't even speak to anymore. I've got them... I don't have them on my wall but I have got them. I've got them but they're in a box.*

*Fin: When they're in the box do you ever open that box?*

*Tiggy: yeh. . I have got two boxes. One box is memories old friends and things and the other box is, well I've got the old boyfriend box as well. And I look at it sometimes just to reflect. It's nice to reflect on the rest of your life rather than just forget about it...*

*(Interview with Tiggy, White British female, 18, College)*

For Tiggy, pictures were not simply about 'good' or 'bad' shots, but her personal interpretation of each photograph, and her wish to capture images for future nostalgic recollection. Indeed, many of the young women were highly aware of the ageing process, and there were often exclamations of hoping to '*die before they got old*' (Fieldnotes, April, 2004). However, there was a simultaneous recognition of the discourse of youth as a special time, and a perceived need to remember these carefree days in later times of adulthood and responsibility.

The display and archiving of such images was also an important part of young women's production of age specific, gendered identities and reclamation of space as their own. For instance, the naming of personal websites, such as '*my space*', with the sharing of photographs, music files and journal pages, indicates the centrality of new media for young people in carving out and displaying carefully crafted identities. As I argued earlier in chapter 4, girls' social geographies are an important space for gendered identity formation for girls. Much work has explored the importance of bedroom cultures for teenage girls in the creation and negotiation of various age specific, femininities (McRobbie & Garber, 1976; McRobbie, 1991; Lincoln, 2004; Baker, 2004). Photographs are part of the production of shared social geographies and histories, both in the places they feature, and where they are displayed. The bedroom as a semi autonomous youth space, is also

semi private. This is the space where young people most often do their socialising within the home (Lincoln, 2004). Indeed, within the family home, the teenager's bedrooms is often the only site of relative autonomy, in relation to the décor and the activities that take place there. For instance, in this study, girls would talk about sneakily smoking or drinking in their rooms, away from the domestic rules and space of their parents.

Many of those interviewed described their bedroom walls as being a mass of photographs of friends and social events. In previous work, Lincoln (2004) notes the use of photographs, flyers and posters on bedroom walls are attempts by young women to replicate their '*social life worlds*'. The display of such specially selected memorabilia provides a biographic reproduction on the surfaces of bedroom walls (Lincoln, 2004), and in Tiggy's case, in the shoeboxes in her closet. This study reflected Lincoln's observations, as young women described constructing friendship circles in pictorial forms on their bedroom walls. The photographs from this research also contributed to these circulations of images, of happy holidays, of drunken nights out and picnics. Even the walls of the college common room were covered in snaps recording such important events and people in the young people's lives. This highlighted how this '*biography of the self*' (Lincoln, 2004) had moved beyond the private into the public, with young people constructing social and personal histories on the walls of the common room, whilst simultaneously claiming it as *their space*.

There was a clear differentiation into the use of snaps to create public and private selves. For instance, although girls produced a public display of friendship, other pictures that departed from this 'public self' were stashed away from the social gaze of friends and family. Such pictures could include old friends and boyfriends,

images that evoked painful memories or shots of perceived sexual or social transgression.

In the earlier example, Tiggy's separation of old boyfriends in a box, from friends on her wall, is a separation of the public and private self. Images that were disruptive to this valorised identity must be removed from public view, and if not thrown away, then removed to the box, reflecting the changing context and narrative of each image. Other girls, Sarah, Maria and Becky described how they differentiated their photographic collections, and placed current friends and party photographs on the bedroom wall and pinboards. However, the girls separated out shots of ex boyfriends and former friends, from those depicting their present social circle, which would be kept in a separate box or album, away from their present social circle. Sarah, also spoke of keeping private photographs in a box under her bed. She said these images were mainly of *'you know nude shots or me kissing girls.'* Such images emerged from parties, but she felt she could not display them for fear of her mother's disapproval, as they were images that potentially disrupted her projection of a respectable normative heterosexual femininity. Instead, such images were boxed away, and stored where young men might be thought to keep their stash of pornographic magazines. Sarah's secret pictures were not used as erotic material to titillate; rather they were a portrayal of her secret *wild self*, one of which she wished to keep from her mother. The private snaps were important to Sarah, but disrupted the 'self' that she wished to portray, reflecting how much these young women realised they needed to manage their public images to their friends and family, a theme I examine further in the next section.

*"Hey look at me." Power, surveillance and social control*

So far I have looked at how photographs as a form of cultural production for the young women in the fieldsettings, created the

space for social cohesion within a girls' friendship groups and were used for the construction and portrayal of 'ideal' selves. However, as with many exclusionary devices, the camera can be seen as an instrument of social control. During the group viewings of snapshots, the cry of *'hey let me see'*, indicated the power relationship between the owner of the shots and those who wish to see them. Images would be snatched from hands, or occasionally, a benevolent photographer would offer snaps to the group. The photographs as reified objects cemented social relations within the group. When I gave snaps to the young women, I was acting within this powerful role, and in returning to the group after the interview, the clamour to see the shots would begin again. On one occasion, my fieldwork diary an incident in the college common room, where a young man, Maynard, and young women, Becky, tussled over a snap, that she had taken of him at a party. Maynard appreciated the shot so much that he snatched and ran off with the image. The photo depicted the young man intoxicated, with his top off and wearing a pair of angel wings. He wanted to keep and post the picture on his web site, as this shot fulfilled his aspirations and cool identity.

If those behind the camera exert more power than those in front of the lens, this provides an obvious mini panoptical gaze within girls' friendship groups (Foucault, 1991). As I stated earlier, in this chapter many of the images involved girls taking pictures of posing, prone, semi clad young men. There is obviously an interesting gendered and sexual dynamic being played out in such pictures. Indeed, some of the images potentially objectified young men, with displays of male flesh (figure xviii). Maria, the photographer, describes one of the images below:

*Maria: Christian likes to take his clothes off. He was doing a 'sex pose'.*

*Fin: Why's that?*

*Maria: Because that's the gay man pose. It's the gay man pose... He always does the gay man pose because he thinks it makes him look good. I think it makes him look good all right. He's got great lips! It was like look at me. That's his standard pose. He's just saying 'hey look at me'. I just can't explain it."(Maria, White British, 17 Common room)*

In this example, Maria described an occasion where her friend, Christian, 'played' with a range of gendered and sexual performances in front of the lens. Christian, in adopting a so-called 'gay male pose', purposefully mimicked the photographs in magazines for gay men such as the UK publication 'Boyz'



Fig xviii. Photograph by Maria  
(White British female, 18)

Christian's torso is exposed and he twists his body towards the lens. His head tipped to one side coquettishly as if in a high fashion shoot. In Christian's 'sex pose', he adopts the pose of, in Maria's words, the 'gay man', to make himself desirable to his female friends. Christian's adoption of such a feminised position in front of the lens, his masculinity is somewhat conversely enhanced. These images, taken by a young woman, invert Mulvey's (1986) configuration of the 'active' masculine gaze and 'passive' feminine object. The young man pouts and plays with gender and sexuality, free in the knowledge that the only other two people in the room are young women with whom he has had a sexual relationship. With such an accompanying back narrative, the young man may feel free to 'play' and perform different identities in such a context, with the knowledge that his 'true' (hetero)sexual orientation is determined by the company, rather than his momentary gay 'drag' for the camera lens

Whilst such images of young men were seen as acceptable and fun by many of the students who used the common room, I am not sure that such provocative images of young women posing for a male photographer would have been as easily accepted amongst the group. This was particularly as overt displays of sexuality by young women were censured by other girls in the group, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Indeed, arguably a young woman adopting such a sexualised performance would have been heavily castigated by her friends for being too confident, immodest and over sexual. The knowing 'sexual' woman thus remained an abject figure simultaneously of desire and distain

#### *Panoptical party snaps*

So although photographic images could be site of play and contestation of gendered and sexual norms, at other times, the

explicit use of mobile phone and digital photography rendered the panoptic power relations (Foucault, 1991) visible within these 'communities of femininity practice.' In Foucault's (1991) discussion of the panopticon prison in Discipline & Punish, the captive under scrutiny must show that they adopt the norms of wider society. This mutually regulatory gaze for the young people in this study becomes explicit through the use of photography by individuals to record and monitor the evening's events, and pass comment upon the images at a later date. These shots provide a simple record of the night's events, but also a visual narrative that can accompany the drinking stories, thus creating a visual record of boundary maintenance and 'inclusion' in the community of practice that underpins and supports the spoken narrative.

For instance, there was another kind of party snapshot apart from the posed smiling consensual photograph. This shot was about the subject being caught unaware. In these pictures a moment is frozen in time, the victim captured asleep, unconscious or unaware. These were often unflattering poses, caught not so much for their aesthetic qualities, but the look of startled shock on their victim's face. They could be a cruel joke, used for amusement later in the clamour when the wider group viewed the shots from a night out. Camera phones had developed this type of photography yet further, as the immediacy and availability of the camera and the image, meant that photographers could approach another, call their name for attention and instantly 'steal' their image. Such a form of photography highlights the power disparity between those behind or in front of the lens. The development of a phenomenon known as 'happy slapping', a practice of assaulting another in public whilst friends record the moment and the stranger's reaction, was an extension of this hit and run photography.

My initial readings of some of the images were often different than those from the young people. After all, I am not necessarily part of the same 'communities of femininity practice' or 'communities of meaning' that the young people participate. One is reminded by Derrida's (1978) work on *différance* in the young people's reading of these images. In Derrida's theory of difference, the notions of *to differ* and *to defer* are conflated. There is no essential 'true' meaning, as each concept may be both mutable and contested. Each storyline is made and remade through negotiation by different individuals within the 'communities of visual practice.' Although, clearly some readings are more 'privileged' than others, young people create their own 'truths' from the same image.

Whilst girls took pictures of boys actively posing for the camera, there were several snaps where young women had taken images of boys passed out and intoxicated. For example, amongst one reel, there are a series of photographs from a wild student party. These images include several of a young man slumped unconscious on the bathroom floor. I decided against the inclusion of that image in this thesis because the young man is unaware that his photograph is being taken, and the image has potentially humiliating undertones. Instead I will describe the image in some detail. In the picture, the linoleum is covered with mud, and just peeking into shot, are the boots from other partygoers. The young man's head is twisted and around his neck is a dog collar and chain, in which he had been posing in shots from earlier in the evening. A disembodied hand lurches into frame touching the young man's nipple. When I gave the developed shots back to the female photographer she showed them to the young man. The young people present, including the young man featured, seemingly took great delights in this picture of excess. However, the image can appear stark and shocking, as it had elements of control and humiliation, and at first glance, was potentially similar in tone



and composition to the pictures of the tortured Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib that dominated the UK and US media in 2004.

Within these social groups that there was little similar space for an equivalent photograph of a drunken girl. Such an image of a young woman would not be seen as a source of celebration, but rather as a distasteful depiction of excess, rather than a valorised version of hypermasculine hedonism. In one available reading of this text, the young man is passive and vulnerable, unconscious through drink, he is kicked and prodded by his peers. Yet, in a later discussion with the young man in the photograph, he constructed a different photographic reality, and projected himself as active, and as a 'hardcore' risk taker. Using the image, he constructed an accompanying narrative in an attempt to cement a tough 'laddish' masculinity in the company of others in the group.

This picture highlights the disparity between image and narrative. In the young man's creation of a narrative of hyper masculinity, and hardcore drinking prowess, he attempted to rescue his masculinity from this passive victim slumped on the bathroom floor. The boy constructed a narrative of bravado, to act as a veil over the image and his potential humiliation, as he needed to rescue himself from this fundamentally disempowered 'feminised' position recorded by his female photographer friend.

The meaning of such images here are situated, produced and negotiated within the community of practice, and thus as artefacts, these photographs' meanings are mutable and contextual and have no stable 'truth'. As an adult and welfare practitioner, it would be easy for me to read the prevailing discourse of 'youth at risk' (Griffin, 1993, 1997, Jeffs & Smith, 1999) into these visual texts. However, amongst the young people such images were viewed as commonplace and unproblematic. They were proof that the party

was exciting, and that the young men had a wild reputation. Such photographs make a useful gendered counterpoint to how young women's drinking and hedonism were read and constructed within these groups. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, young women's drinking stories, were rarely structured around the inebriated acts of bravado in the same way as their male peers. One might argue that there was an apprenticeship in terms the common reading of images, and it was a highly gendered practice, in learning to read the signifiers within the tale or visual clue of the function of the story and the construction of the groups' pecking order. My inability to 'read' either visual or oral stories in the correct manner led me to read and construct narratives around the images in a sometimes drastically different way to the young people. To become part of these 'communities of femininity practice' is thus to learn the shared narratives, and construct and perform aspirational gendered personas within these frameworks. One could attempt to ensure success and potential popularity within the group, by becoming adept at representing visual stories through the production and interpretation of the snapshot within particular communities of femininity practice.

### Conclusion

In earlier chapters I have sought to illuminate the various spatial, cultural and material practices involved in the gendering of tobacco and alcohol use for the young women in this study. This chapter examined the various power dynamics in play in the form, content and use of young women's party photographs. It appeared that girls' visual practices largely chronicled the power relations and history of their friendship groups. I have sought to explore young women's visual narratives using recent poststructuralist work in the ways young women may produce smoking and drinking femininities. Whilst the snapshot can allow elements of play in

order to try on new identities, at other times, the lens is used to curtail and control with girls producing identities from behind as much as in front of the lens.

These young women's visual cultures also contributed to a much wider as a self-management strategy, and created a canvas to perform and produce localised normative 'cool' femininities for the group. They allowed young women to pictorially represent their social network and their place within the group. Through the use of props such as cigarettes and alcohol, girls could thus produce 'adult' hedonistic, reckless selves, to be nostalgically drawn on in future years of sobriety and respectability. Party photographs were an important part of the creation and depiction of 'cool' teenage rebellion, and girls carefully selected which images could be publicly presented on bedroom walls or the pages of personal web pages. Other visual practices, such as taking pictures of other unaware, asleep or drunk was thus used as a controlling device to uphold the social conventions of the group, but were also to reclaim power by the photographer. By capturing party casualties slumped on the floor, girls exerted power and authorial control over others. The use of visual technologies gave rise to young women performing secret and wild selves away from the regulatory gaze of their parents.

These pictures celebrate youth and friendship. They attempt to preserve elements of the youthful present and stave off the creeping responsibility of adulthood, with a notion that the linear transitions can be postponed through such biographic narrative images. With the transience of this period of youth, there was a desire to rescue and capture this 'special time' for the years ahead whilst celebrating the 'now' of the youthful present, through the symbolic community narrative of the party photograph. In the previous empirical chapters, I attempted to explore the ways in which

tobacco and alcohol are symbolic signifiers of youthful rebellion and friendship amongst the young women's social network. I have explored how tobacco and alcohol are used by the girls as a transitory device towards a perceived imaginary clean living adulthood of normative, heterosexual femininities and motherhood. For these girls, the space to produce alternative and resistant femininities is seen to be short lived, within the few short years between childhood and adult femininities. At the same time, girls accommodated and resisted the various competing discourses of femininities within their localised communities of femininity practice.

In the next chapter I turn to draw some conclusions based on the theoretical and empirical work explored within this thesis and summarise the findings from the previous chapters. I will also highlight some of the implications of this work's findings, areas for further research, and the strategies I intend to use to disseminate this work to young people, youth practitioners and the academy.

## Chapter 8

### Control, conformity and 'troublesome' girls: Some

#### Conclusions

The aim of this work was to contribute to contemporary debates on 'girlhood' and the performance of teenage femininities. My argument throughout this thesis is that young women attempt to enact range of personas, through and by, their tobacco and alcohol use. Such personas are temporally and contextually situated, and thus various ways of 'doing' girl are mobilised at differing times, and in different places. Girls accommodate and resist various competing and contradictory discourses of adult womanhood through a range of cultural and material practices. Whilst the glass of wine and the cigarette could be seen as a gendered 'adult' hedonistic signifier of sophistication, the girls in this study, often considered 'real' adulthood as fraught with responsibility and concerns about health and mortality. I believe such an analysis is an important element of theorising and creating more meaningful drugs education for young women.

Since I began work on this research in 2003, the moral panic regarding young women's tobacco and alcohol consumption has continued. In October 2006, Patricia Hewitt, the British health secretary, was reported in the media called for levy on alcopops, as a way of discouraging the use of alcohol by UK teenagers. Yet, this work would suggest that such price increases would do little to diminish young people's appetite for alcohol or tobacco. Indeed, the young people in this study drank many of the same mainstream products such as wine, beer and spirits as older people. I would strongly argue that binge drinking in the UK, is not confined to women or the young, but a central part of a 'good night out' for many regardless of age. The illicit nature of alcohol and cigarette use for young teenagers remained part of the appeal. Youngsters were not 'pushed' into smoking or drinking, but the motivations for

the take up, maintenance or eventual quitting of tobacco and alcohol use were rooted in the social. The community of practice model remains a useful model for exploring ideas of peer preference and pleasure as teenagers adopt and negotiate group norms.

During the analysis stage in exploring the emerging themes in this study, it began to become clear that there was a need to explore intergenerational and age banded gendered tobacco and alcohol use, as well as going beyond these legal intoxicants to more fully explore women's use. Of course, this study only briefly touches on other salient issues, such as the classed, 'raced' and subcultural symbolic dimensions to particular substances. Beyond this, it is clear that such substance use is also strongly routed into geographical locales, and a study of patterns and practices of tobacco and alcohol use would differ significantly across the UK, from rural to urban, and from town to town.

My research began with a concern for how tobacco and alcohol use by young women is gendered. In my commitment to *praxis*, I wanted the findings to be relevant to practitioners within the field of drugs education within schools and youth work settings. I have drawn upon poststructuralist conceptual tools to examine how young women perform identities through such bodily practices. In the preceding chapters I charted young women's own views of their smoking and drinking practices, in order to understand the ways in which young women navigate and enact alternative and multiple femininities, and provide a snapshot in to the girls' lives. It transpired early in the fieldwork that such issues were inextricably linked to notions of agency, autonomy and the body. To return to the main research questions:

- *In what ways is young women's tobacco and alcohol use gendered?*

- *How are these genders culturally enacted and reproduced through young women's use of tobacco and alcohol?*

The subsequent chapters illuminated these questions by exploring the ways in the field settings that young women's social networks influenced tobacco and alcohol use, via the participants' patterns of usage and the subcultural, classed and gendered assumptions connecting differing brands. Beyond this, I have also explored the subtle gendering enacted, via the centrality of tobacco exchange in girls' friendship groups, which are used as an act of solidarity, kindness and a social guarantee of one's continued involvement in the trade network. Similarly, teenage drinking, as an appropriate pastime for girls, was socially cemented within the times and places where it was consumed such as the weekend 'cotches', in addition to the stories that teenagers shared about their own and other's drinking practices.

The young women mobilised various cultural, material and spatial resources in reproducing localised dominant forms of heterosexual femininities in producing their own and other's identities. Cigarettes, drinking stories and party snaps were traded as part of the wider social exchange networks, and each were thus the reified objects around which girls' community identities were formulated. The subtle gendering of such artefacts were important signifiers within the localised communities of femininity practice. The use of tobacco and alcohol as social and cultural signifiers were mobilised by girls, in order to assist in the production and portrayal of ideal selves, or to criticise others. Drinking and smoking enabled girls to index others' style choices and locate themselves within these complex social networks and subcultural style groups.

This final chapter presents the theoretical, practical and policy implications of this research. Although it is beyond the scope of

this research to make specific recommendations, I raise some of the pertinent issues raised within this research that could help in the shaping 21<sup>st</sup> century tobacco, alcohol and drug education in England and Wales. My claims for this study remain limited, but I believe that it raises certain salient points about the need and positioning of tobacco, drug and alcohol education in the school and youth work curriculum, after all, it is easy to push pastoral issues and health education to the periphery of the curriculum when faced with attempting to juggle the various competing demands of the outcome driven current UK educational climate.

This chapter does not intend to be prescriptive, but the central issue is this: If school and youth work based smoking and alcohol interventions are to be more meaningful, then they need to be founded on young people's own views about such activities. Furthermore, as commentators have noted, the contemporary, highly competitive, funding led sphere of academic and policy research within the UK often valorises policy over practice, and marginalises practitioner knowledge (Issitt & Spence, 2005). Indeed, for youth practitioners, one of the main priorities is the need to access change for people and services, rather than finding 'evidence' to shape policy. In this light, Issitt and Spence( 2005) call for a focus on process and practice, rather than outcomes in research to guide policy. Such a focus would be influenced by feminist research, which values a range of 'evidence' as 'truth', takes a collaborative approach, which moves towards the needs of practice, rather than of policy.

This chapter considers some of the implications of this project, and highlights some of the dissemination approaches taken to disseminate this work back into the fieldwork and wider settings. Although as I outlined in Chapter 3, I am concerned with the idea of *praxis* in shaping wider policy and practice debates, it is beyond



the scope of this thesis to make specific recommendations. Instead, I will outline some general areas that this research may provide useful insights. This chapter highlights how this work can help inform understandings of how young women 'learn' gender, and how tobacco and alcohol use was gendered in these settings. The second part of this chapter will identify areas for future research and possible developments of this work. I will now summarise the main findings and conclusions from the study, and I will explore how the emerging themes from my findings tie into wider debates about young women's drug use and bodily practices.

### Theoretical considerations

The far reaching influence of feminism within the industrialised West has led partly to the breaking of traditional ties in young women's lives, and created new opportunities and ways of 'doing' girl (McRobbie, 2000). However, the prevailing discourses of 'girl power', McRobbie (2000) argues in focusing on girls' clout as consumers, fails to represent the experiences of all young women, particularly those who are seen to be 'at risk', such as working class, Black and Minority Ethnic girls and teenage mothers, and questions where class appears in these new theorisations of 'girlhood'. There remain complex, competing demands on young women as neo liberal subjects. For example, girls must excel at school, but not appear to try to be too academic. They must strive to be thin, beautiful, fashionable, popular with other girls and desirable to boys, and be respectable and suitably hedonistic simultaneously. Such a list of competing demands seems exhausting and an area of potentially high emotional strain. Drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes is only part of a complex web of trying on an autonomous self within such constraints. It is about entering the world of adulthood through such practices, only to be able to return to the relative safety of childhood, if one becomes too drunk or needs the support of parents. However, it is

clearly the case that not all young women had relationships with parents in which they could confide.

In the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, I attempted to blend various theoretical positions in order to unpick and explore how young women perform femininities by smoking and drinking. I hoped to explore the subtleties and complexities of the girl's lives without resorting to essentialised and essentialising ideas of *young women in peril* or *reckless, feckless youth* that populate much popular discourse by adopting poststructuralist feminist approaches. Instead, I wanted to highlight young women's own interpretations of experience and explore how girls accommodate and resist competing discourses around contemporary young femininities by using recent feminist poststructuralist work influenced by a Foucaultian concept of discourse and discursive fields (Foucault, 1972).

As I have argued in chapter 2, in this thesis I attempt to utilise poststructuralist approaches whilst clinging onto 'woman' and 'girl' as a subject, and also endeavouring to maintain the political goals of feminism. Whilst I recognise the complexities of young women's gendered subjectivities, I feel it continues to be important to claim the feminist project in order not to become detached from activism and practice, and become submerged in the potentially theoretical posturing of academia. Similarly, I would equally stress that whilst an applied approach is often useful, it is also important not to lose the rigours of intellectual thought in forwarding the feminist project. My choice then, as a feminist activist and youth worker, of what might be seen as a highly theoretical approach might appear somewhat suspect. In common with Davies (1997), it may be that I want to theoretically have '*my cake and eat it too*', in adopting

concepts from poststructuralism and my continued commitment to activism and practice.

Of course, there are some limitations to the blending and appropriation of a variety of approaches. For instance, there may not be such an easy fit between particularly divergent frameworks or even a common parlance, with subtle differences emerging over the use of key terms and concepts such as *power*, *discourse* and *identity*. As I stated in Chapter 2, I have followed various feminist scholars' appropriation of the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. However, I am aware that these theorists wrote little specifically on issues of gender. Secondly, following poststructuralist work on problematising essentialised notions of 'femininity' and 'womanhood', potentially destabilises the political thrust of feminist endeavour, with the resulting loss of patriarchy as a tool to understand the subordination of women. However, attempting to unpick fully these theoretical quandaries is beyond the scope of this thesis, and whilst acknowledging and noting the conceptual limitations and tensions in this work, I continue with my initial endeavour to bring theory, policy and practice together to contribute to understandings of young women's lives

From the fieldwork examples presented in previous chapters, there emerged clear themes around young women's own feelings about their own and other girls' bodies, how this structures their relationships and performance of identity, and informs gendered notions of 'health'. The girls in this study spoke openly about their own and others' alcohol and tobacco use. They reflected on their own drinking and smoking careers, and observed they had used differing amounts at earlier points in their lives. This encompassed the idea that one moved from a period of youthful 'excess' to adult 'sobriety', by using the 'cool' signifiers of adult of tobacco and

alcohol. However, the long term physical effects of tobacco and alcohol may make this transition difficult for the girls to achieve. There remains much that is unexplored in this thesis, and many fruitful avenues that would benefit from further analysis. I will highlight some of these absences and gaps in the following sections.

Before I go onto summarise the main findings, it must be noted that this study represents a specific time, place and set of relationships. Since commencing this research in 2003, there have been various changes in the subcultural landscape of the town, and there are potentially future plans afoot by the present New Labour Government within the UK to ban the sale of cigarettes to under 18s, and outlaw smoking in bars and pubs in England and Wales. As I highlighted earlier in chapter 1, teenage life in the borough has moved on from the time of the research. Many of the girls who feature in this study are no longer users of youth services. They grew up and began using pubs, clubs and bars, rather than the local youth club. The *common room* users left their further education college to enter the world of work, or moved away to university.

If I commenced my fieldwork in the contemporary youth cultural landscape of the town, there would be clear differences in the branding and subcultural allegiances outlined in the empirical chapters. The subcultural landscape of the town has also shifted over the intervening years. The territory skirmishes between rival groups of *grungers* and *rudies* has been transformed into a new subcultural landscape, with self-proclaimed 'chavs', 'normals' and 'goths'. For example, groups of young people have begun to leave the hidden locations of parkland cotches described in Chapter 4, to congregate on the main street outside fast food restaurants to drink

alcohol and socialise with friends. This movement occurred partly as a safety precaution to avoid conflict, as the popularity of pre-existing cotch spaces had led to continuing intra-subcultural skirmishes between young men and women who had formerly used the parkland and riverside space. The changing youth geographies in the town, highlight how new generations of young people come to mark new territories as their own.

### Girlhood and 'growing up'

This section weaves some of the threads together in thinking through some of the consequences of these observations for exploring 'girlhood', social networks and girls' material and social cultures. Throughout the preceding chapters I argued that through the trade of cigarettes, stories or party photographs, girls mobilised power relations within their social networks and produced and regulated performances of particular kinds of femininities. The young women's communities of femininity practice, therefore did not have finite spatial boundaries, in relation to a school or youth club, but spilt out into cotch spaces and bedroom walls, mobile phones and personal websites.

The teenagers in this study may not be necessarily be representative of the girls in the town or country where they live, however, I think that their views raise important questions in the processes involved in producing gendered subjectivities within girls' friendship groups. This is not to say there was one type of ideal femininity, rather a range of contextual and relational femininities in action. The ideal norms were negotiated and reproduced within girls' friendship groups and communities of femininities which produced hierarchies and *in group/out-group* networks. Drinking, smoking and the adoption of the 'right' associated material and cultural practices could afford a girl considerable kudos and contextual cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992).

However, the value of such capital was temporally, spatially and relationally variable. The same practices that could be at times valorised, on other occasions, could be used to subordinate and control. Hence, the cultural capital of autonomous sexual agency, drinking and drug taking, had fairly limited value for girls in comparison to their brothers. If 'other girls' are perceived by these young women as too bitchy, giggly, vain, weak and manipulative, then it becomes difficult to imagine how young women can take on the position of 'girl' as a powerful and positive position. As girls grew older, competitive heterosexual femininity means that young women attempt to navigate fluffy *girly girl* femininities, and the other non-respectable positions of excess, 'the slag'.

The girls' drinking stories conveyed the various competing and counter discourses that influenced the construction of teenage drinking femininities, and provided an insight into the complex and shifting power dynamics within girls' friendship groups and peer networks. Indeed, it seemed that young women wanted 'other girls' to carry all the 'bad bits' of femininity, whilst claiming a contextually powerful feminine agency for themselves (Brown & Chesney-Hind, 2005). For example, whilst moral panics around alcohol use in the UK have focused around teenage consumption of so-called alcopops, the girls in this study had drunk a wide range of products and such cheap, sweet alcoholic drinks were often viewed with distain as a marker of immaturity and a lack of sophistication. As highlighted in chapter 5, younger, less socially powerful girls who drank *Lambrini* in parks, could thus be seen as *slags* who drank '*bitch piss*' by older girls who may have participated in the actions only months before. With such contradictory discourses in action around drinking femininities, girls found the pressure of pleasing all, too much to bear, and thus, the symbolic adult coping

strategy of cigarettes and alcohol became increasingly appealing as an escape from such pressures.

The discourses of femininities drawn upon by the young women were multiple and often complex, contradictory and shifting. Young women also did not largely perceive the adoption of drinking, smoking or drug taking as being a 'ladette', or the appropriation of 'male behaviour'. Rather such hedonism and hard living was seen as an age banded part of growing up as an active and autonomous girl, or conversely, as a marker of disrespectable, *othered* femininities. Whilst many of the participants drank for the pleasure of intoxication, this consumption was bounded, by gendered and generational norms, and there remained restraints not to drink on school nights, with the bulk of drinking reportedly taking place on weekends and holidays. The idea of a hedonistic, drinking and drug taking women within bounds, could thus be a valorised part of the localised normative versions of young femininities. However, the figure of the over-intoxicated female drinker and drug taker, out-of-place and out-of-time, also remained one of derision.

The findings in this thesis reflect Hey's (1997) findings in secondary schools and prior work on preteen girls' friendship groups (Reay, 2001; George, 2001; George 2003; Renold, 2005; Clark & Paechter, 2006). Such work has noted the highly hierarchical nature of girls' friendship groups and the internal power practices within these networks. It appeared that to be a successful teenage girl in these research settings was to disavow *girly girl* prissiness and display a knowing raunchiness, whilst still acknowledging the localised rules of normative femininities. Whilst some popular girls carried off such a complex balancing act with an air of acquired nonchalance, for other girls the complicated shifting social norms of their peer groups left them frozen out, or a victim of gossip and the intricate micro politics and power play of young women's friendship groups,

as vividly illustrated by the role of the *'bitching session'* in Chapter 5. Moreover, these findings would seem to support the work of Holland et al. (1998), that the *'male- in the head'* continues to structure and position the ways that girls think about their own and other young women's identities and actions.

Whether in 10 or 15 years time, the young women in reality choose to quit smoking and drinking and adopt a normative *'emphasised femininity'* (Connell, 1987), may be constrained by their experiences as older women. For example, prior work on female drinking in the UK, indicating that the prevalence of alcohol use amongst professional adult women predates and continues beyond motherhood (Waterson, 2000). By smoking and drinking, the young women are adopting the dominant discourse that their youth are the *best years of their life*, and that womanhood is staid in comparison, and curtailed with the responsibility of paid employment and the perceived future destination of potential motherhood. In the short term, the girls thus wished to produce a normative heterosexually desirable femininity, almost at any cost to their own long term personal health. The dichotomy of girls taking up drinking and smoking as markers of 'maturity', whilst perceiving 'true' adulthood as a period of sobriety warrants further investigation in order to explore the subtle ways such transitional generational femininities are experienced through the prisms of 'race', class and sexual orientation.

For some girls, concerns about physical and psychological health, remain secondary, to worries about being too fat or not looking good enough. Many of the young women mentioned that they would quit smoking and drinking, if and when, they ever became pregnant echoes the findings in McDermott, Dobson & Owen's (2006) study on female smoking and motivation. One participant in this study, Chloe, became pregnant after the completion of the



fieldwork, and has continued to smoke as before, despite her insistence in the interview that she would quit if she was to become a mother. It seemed that young women's fantasies and ideas about 'motherhood', and their own position as potential future mothers, were intricately entwined with their ideas of adult femininities and female drug taking. The drinking, drug-taking, party-loving mother was thus positioned as aberrant, highlighting how traditional essentialised views of adult femininities structure the girls' feelings about their selves. Indeed, the girls' view mirrors dominant media portrayals of celebrity 'bad' mothers, with regular contemporary exposes of figures such as Kate Moss, Kerry Katona and Britney Spears, allegedly drinking, smoking or taking cocaine in the pages of *Heat* and other celebrity magazines. Clearly, this calls for further research to explore ideas about motherhood, drinking and drug use with women across the life course.

This thesis aims to contribute towards an increased understanding of girls' smoking and drinking identities, and add to some of the debates on the purposes of drugs education. The girls' interpretation within this study of their own drug taking practices was a complex mixture of individual agency within wider group norms. Young women spoke of having choices, but these options were far from endless, with gendered and age-banded limits that constrained and contained personal choices. Each girl was eager to stress her own individuality, safe within her wider group of friends or subcultural clique. Over the course of the previous chapters I cited many examples where girls mobilised older traditional femininities to rebuke younger girls' excessive behaviour. The girls in this study were critically aware of these tensions and contradictions in attempting to portray a free spirited autonomy, whilst remaining largely under the controlling gaze of their parents and other friends.

### Some thoughts on tobacco and alcohol education

There are clear ramifications from these observations for potential drugs education initiatives. Much of the girls' learning about drugs and alcohol had been informal in nature, from parents, friends and experimentation. The assumed passivity of young people by drug education initiatives has been previously critiqued by Lancelott (2005), who argues strongly that the present harm minimisation and abstinence-based paradigms are too simplistic to equate to effective interventions within the classroom. I would suggest that if a health education intervention intends to be meaningful, then it must be relevant to their own understandings and meanings of drug use for its intended audience.

There needs to be further work exploring the interpretation and intent of modern drug, alcohol and tobacco education in UK classrooms and youth centres and young people's own cultural and material practices. Whilst in this thesis I have not focused on substances that are currently illegal within the UK, many girls described their own and others' use of drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy and psychedelic mushrooms. Indeed, girls used substances in combination with one another, and the categorisations between legal and illegal had apparently little bearing on whether girls would choose to use. Young women were often initiated into drinking, smoking and other substance use via their family. Such patterns of domestic substance use indicate that there is a need for further research on intergenerational female substance use within families.

There are clear implications from these observations for potential drugs education initiatives. As argued in Chapter 1, the growing amount of drugs education literature aimed at young women is based on normative heterosexual depictions of 'ideal' emphasised femininity. In the post feminist world of 'girl power', young women

in such depictions are informed they can go out clubbing and have a good time, but through drinking must expect to make themselves vulnerable to date rape, sexual assault by unlicensed mini cab drivers, and various longer term health effects to their bodies and reproductive capacity. I would argue strongly that it is necessary to avoid such unnecessary fear mongering and scapegoating of female partygoers in order to develop a gender sensitive approach to drug and alcohol education. Moreover, a girl-centred approach to drug education, needs to be sympathetic to the myriad of reasons why girls may choose to drink, smoke and take drugs, including the micro management of perceived emotionally and physically leaky bodies, the use of cigarettes and alcohol to relax, emotionally connect to their peers and bolster self confidence.

Current policy initiatives in England & Wales, such as the recent *Every Child Matters* (DFES, 2003) potentially create many new ways for interdisciplinary work across agencies, on many issues around young people's health. For such work to be effective, I would suggest that further local pieces of action and participatory research are needed to audit the existing services within local areas, and the potential needs of the local areas young people. Furthermore, purposeful drugs education is about an integrated process, which focuses on pastoral care and support of young people beyond the classroom. If drug education and smoking cessation initiatives are to be more meaningful within school and youth work settings, then a starting point must be based on young people's own understandings about the social complexities and meanings of the uptake, maintenance and cessation of substance use within their own networks. Indeed, as illustrated in Chapter 5, through the process of informally trading cigarettes, girls consolidated their social status and attempted to display autonomous 'in-control' femininities. This is far removed from the

assumptions underpinning many contemporary school based drugs education interventions construction of childhood and youth.

The complexities of young people's cigarette and alcohol use and trade networks necessitate further longitudinal research to trace young people's brand allegiance, and explore the interplay between gender, subculture, social exchange and friendship throughout the life course. For instance, further work following whether the young women who smoke and drink to excess in their early to mid teens continue to follow such drinking practices into adulthood. Further research could provide a more nuanced understanding of such processes, and inform the development of tobacco and alcohol education and smoking cessation initiatives within school and youth work settings. Similarly, a more detailed generalised exploration of the ways in which substance use is gendered, 'raced', classed and sexualised would provide a clearer insight into the localised meanings and assumptions behind differing patterns of consumption.

#### Potential areas for further exploration and development

In this section I outline some of my personal reflections on the research process, and identify some potential areas for future research. At the end of any project I am always filled with a mix of relief and regret. I am relieved that the long, and sometimes arduous slog of intellectual dead ends, seemingly endless revisions and corrections of my sloppy grammar and clunky sentences is finally at an end, but this is tempered with a mixture of regret at what could have been, and contemplation of '*what's next?*'

During the research process I learnt as much from the hurdles I overcame, as the successes. I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the task ahead and found myself down interesting, but potentially

irrelevant cul-de-sacs. Sometimes alone with my books and the fifth draft of a particularly tricky chapter, I despaired and thought that I wanted to go back to the relatively relaxing arena of the busy generic youth club. I am aware of the many ways that this thesis could be developed and improved further. Indeed, my supervisors would often remind me that I have the whole of my research life left to study all of the myriad of social phenomena that caught my researcher's eye.

In a paper aimed at new research students, Back (2002) describes the research process as a potential wrestling match, as one tussles with data, theoretical ideas and the solitude of PhD scholarship. Back argues that the answer to the thesis lies not in the library, in the elusive book or journal articles, but in the data itself. I have remained eager to return to the data, and at the same time have not wanted to read into the material notions that misrepresent or exploit the young women. Similarly, I wanted this work to be academically rigorous, relevant, and of use to my colleagues who continue to practice as youth workers and drug and alcohol educators. The labour involved in producing this thesis has served as my own apprenticeship into academia. I learnt how to present papers at conferences with the necessary gravitas of a *would be* academic. I learnt how to shape the writing of a paper, and how to develop my skills as a researcher in the gathering and analysis of data.

This study was small scale, and thus this limits any claims that I can make for the findings. Many of the key informants in this study were white and middle class. I am aware through the young women's ideas about particular brands being attributed to differing youth subcultures, that it would be a fruitful project to explore the relationship between brand affinity, alcohol and cigarette use and young people's ethnicity and social class. This work into various

ethnic groups' use of tobacco and alcohol could explore the subtle differences between groups' substance use in the creation and formation of new classed, 'raced' and gendered identities. Further work on girls' drug taking practices could explore the extent of any other cultural appropriation of cultural practices and the contexts and interpretations of the young people involved in this appropriation in creating new hybrid ethnicities in the production of differing ways of 'doing' girl.

Although this work provides a snapshot into these girls' lives at a particular time and place in their teenage years, it would be very useful to have a longitudinal study that followed girls drinking and drug taking habits from the playing fields and graveyards of their early teens into their adult life. Similarly, this study concerns itself with the experiences of young women. A parallel study on young men, masculinity and drinking and drug use would have provided an insight into how young men might do 'boy' through their use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.

I would argue that the complexities of young people's cigarette and alcohol use and trade networks, necessitate further longitudinal research to explore individual's embodied experience of the lifecourse, their use of substances and the interplay between gender, subculture, social class and social exchange. Further research could provide more nuanced understandings of such processes, and inform the development of tobacco education and smoking cessation initiatives within school and youth work settings. Other arising areas for potential research are around intergenerational family use of tobacco and alcohol in the shaping of young women's gendered expectations. There is also scope to explore young women's drinking and smoking geographies, and use of physical and virtual space. The girls in this study used parkland at night and roamed widely in order to socialise with

other young people their own age. Girls were choosing not to socialise within the family home, or existing youth work provision but in parks, riverbanks and graveyards. Such work indicates the potential need to explore young women's geographies in greater detail, beyond much of the prior work on girls and space which focuses on girls' bedroom cultures and places boys on the street.

As we saw in the preceding chapters, girls were adept at using new technologies, including camera phones, the Internet, MP3 players and messaging services. Since this time of the fieldwork, MSN messaging services and the *BeBo* and *myspace* blog pages have replaced the youth centre bulletin boards as spaces where girls exchange talk, gossip, advice and pictures. I would suggest that further research into how young women are adapting and appropriating new technologies, particularly how girls use visual technologies and mobile phones to their needs, and how this may be used to promote a higher take up of young women's involvement in ICT at school, college and higher education institutes. Such technologies would also provide useful dissemination tools in feedback to participants and other interested parties, for example, by creating a blog or research webpage on sites popular with the teenage participants.

I argued in Chapter 3 that the notion of *praxis* was integral to this study. Whilst I attempted to use participatory approaches in this research, I am minded that this could have been developed further. I would have preferred to undertake a piece of participatory action research with young women's tobacco and alcohol use. Such action based research could feed directly into 'what works' in relation to gendered intervention within drugs education in classroom, youth club and detached youth work settings.

### Dissemination strategies

This chapter concludes with a brief outline of some of the dissemination strategies I plan to use to develop and further this work. Some of the material presented here has been presented in other forms at seminars, workshops and conferences. I intend to shape the material further and publish articles within peer reviewed academic journals and continue to present sections of this work in forthcoming conferences and ESRC funded events.

However, as I highlighted in Chapter 3, I am keen to move beyond presenting this material within the academy, and wish to reach out to young women and practitioners to discuss some of the issues raised and receive feedback to the findings. There is a range of ways to disseminate this work further than the round of academic conferences and seminars. Indeed, I plan to create some group work materials for use within youth work settings from some of the issues raised particularly on issues such as young women's ideas about girls' spaces, adulthood and motherhood, stress and anxiety and photography. In collaboration with a local youth forum, I intend to establish a small workshop event to feedback some of the main findings and gain responses from young people and youth workers alike. It is also my intention to write a series of practice papers and present at practitioner events and in practice journals.

### Conclusions

This chapter has discussed some of the possible implications of the research findings. This work is far from the final word on teenage girls tobacco and alcohol use, but I hope it has gone some way in shedding light on young women's own interpretations in a particular setting. I believe there is also scope to continue to develop and theorise further work on tobacco education within schools and youth work settings, including improving initial



training and in-service development in drugs education for youth practitioners.

The drugs education curriculum within the formal and informal education sphere needs to reflect the complexity of young people's experiences. The trends and fashions in drugs education over the decades, from heroin scares in the 80s to ecstasy in the 90s, and binge drinking currently, and the use of shock scare tactics have been seen to be wanting, and led to a continued marginalisation and pathologisation of drug users. Within such discourses there remains a punitive culture that frames young women's drug use within a pathologised, criminal justice and deficit health model. At the same time, practitioners remain sidelined by policy makers, with trends in policy largely ignoring the complexities of contemporary recreational polydrug use in the lives of young people. Drugs education, in this climate, remains a strange animal, based more upon the norms of behaviour modification, rather than enlightenment and discovery.

This chapter has summarised some of the main findings from this small-scale study. Earlier, in Chapter 3, I stated that I would only make very limited claims for the data presented. However, in the light of earlier writings on girlhood and girls' social networks, I would hope to add to work chronicling girls' friendships structures and practices from the early years to adulthood. I also intend to provide further insights into the gendering of tobacco and alcohol use, and make a small contribution to the growing canon of work exploring young women's substance use as a way of informing and theorising classroom based drugs education initiatives. In this thesis I have argued that young women perceive their tobacco and alcohol use as a way of practicing autonomy and self control, as part of managing individual and group identities in the shifting power dynamics of teenage girls' social networks.

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APPENDIX A- TRANSCRIPTION  
CODE

...	pause by speaker
<>	Omitted
(laughing)	Vocalisation of speaker
[Pulls face]	Gesture of speaker
<b><i>in bold italic</i></b>	To show the speakers emphasis

## APPENDIX B- GLOSSARY

**Argileh** – another name for shisha. A pressed and scented tobacco from the middle east.

**Avirex** – a streetwear brand normally worn by rudies.

**Bicurious**- A term popular in many of the fashion magazines and small classified adverts within papers and the internet. The term was used to mean an individual who was eager to experiment sexually with those of the same sex. To be bicurious, was therefore contingent on circumstance and usually indicated that a bicurious individual did not conceive of themselves of having a long term same sex partner.

**Bitch piss** – a local term for Lambrini and other drinks associated with young women.

**Blog** – a space on the internet where individuals can keep a written or visual journal posting photographs or journal extracts.

**Bong** – a water pipe used for smoking cannabis.

**Buff** - attractive

**Bulletin board**- a space on the internet where individuals can post messages

**Cotch** – a space where young people congregate to sit and rest a while. Often used as a noun and a verb.

**Fags** – cigarettes

**Feds** – colloquial term for the police.

**Fosters**- a popular brand of lager

**Fubu** – “For us by us” -a streetwear brand favoured by young people into hip hop music, most notably worn by rudies.

Garage music

**GCSE**- General Certificate of secondary Education. An Examination taken usually at age 16 by pupils in England and Wales.

**Going twos** – see saves or ‘twos up’.

**Grungers** -The term ‘grunger’ was used pejoratively to describe young people who listened to rock music and wore dark clothes, particularly hooded sweatshirts and baggy jeans.

**Hookah** – a large water pipe for the smoking of shi sha

**Pikeys**- ‘Pikey’ is usually used within the research locality as a pejorative term used to describe Irish travellers. However, during the period of my fieldwork it was used often by White British young people to describe poor white young people who were seen as ‘white rudies’. The term then was both classed and ‘raced’ and came to be a shorthand description for anyone who was seen to be part of a ‘white underclass’. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the term ‘chav’ gained national prominence through the pages of newspapers and television. ‘Chavs’ then began to be used by the local young people interchangeably with ‘pikey’ as a pejorative ‘raced’ and

'classed' term. Although I note the term 'pikey' continued to be used against Irish travellers and fairground workers

**Ponce** – To ask for a cigarette off another person.

**Rude boy** – see Rudie

**Rude girl**- see Rudie

**Rudies**- The term 'rudie' was a shortened version of rude boy or rude girl. This term was used sometimes pejoratively to describe young people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who listened to urban music and dressed in an Black British cultural style, including streetwear labels like Nike, Avirex and Fubu.

**Saves** – to request for another young person to leave a small amount of cigarette to share. This would normally mean that a young person would call out 'saves' when a friend was smoking. Saves is used in a similar way to 'Two's up', although sometimes meant that a peer would leave less than half a cigarette for the individual making the request.

**Shi sha**- a pressed scented tobacco smoked in a hookah.

**Shaggable** - a colloquial word meaning sexually desirable and describes someone with whom you could have sexual intercourse

**Spliff** – a cannabis reefer also referred to as a *joint* or *zoot*.

townies

**Twos up** – see 'saves'

**Youth clubs**- within England and Wales, individual local authorities provide youth work provision through education or leisure service departments. These youth services provide a range of interventions in the form of detached and outreach provisions, for example, a special bus that would park where groups of youths gather to provide diversionary activities or youth workers who would go out into spaces where young people gather to befriend and guide young people into services. The Youth club, are often based in specialised youth centre, sometimes on school sites. In addition to the work of government run youth provision are voluntary youth clubs provided by local churches and community groups. Within some educational setting such as schools and colleges, youth workers are employed to provide informal education and life skill opportunities as well as running youth spaces such as the 'common room' within this thesis.

Appendix C –Table 1

<b>Youth Centre Young person</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age<sup>[1]</sup></b>	<b>Social class<sup>19</sup></b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Chloe	female	19	uwc/lmc	White Uk
Jodie	female	14	wc	White UK
Lisa	female	15	wc	White UK
Betty	female	14	mc	White UK
Noel	male	14	mc	White Uk/Irish
Sam	female	14	wc	White Uk White UK
Danni	female	14	wc	
Chelsea	female	14	wc	White UK
Amy	female	14	mc	White UK
Milly	female	13	mc	White UK
Rachel	female	14	wc	White UK
Ali	female	15	mc	White UK
Sally	female	15	wc	White UK
Janine	Female	14	Wc	White UK
Liam	male	16	wc	White Irish
<b><u>Common room</u></b>				
Becky	female	17	lmc/uwc?	Black British
Samantha	female	16	Unknown	
Maynard	male	17	mc	Lebanese/White British
Sade	female	16	wc	Black African
Tiggy	female	18	mc	White British
Emily	female	17	mc	White British
Sarah	female	16	lmc	White British
Ella	female	16	mc	Asian/ White Japanese/White European
Mindy	female	17	mc	
Maria	female	17	mc	White British
Sylvia	female	17	wc	Black African
Dick	male	16	mc	White British
Karen	female	17	uwc/lmc?	White British
Tara	female	18	wc	White Irish
Salma	female	16	unknown	Hispanic
Mark	male	18	uwc	White/Black British
Amin	male	17	mc	British Indian
Moira	female	18	wc	White/Black British
Helen	female	17	mc	White British
Louise	female	17	mc	White British

1. Age at beginning of fieldwork.

## **APPENDIX D: Consent Form**

### Background

My name is Fin Cullen and I am currently doing a study into young people and their views on drinking and smoking. I am based at the Education Studies Dept at Goldsmiths College. I am looking for people to be involved in this study, which will take place for 6 months. This study will include me taking part in everyday activities at your youth project and interviewing young people either on your own or in groups.

If you would like to be involved please read the information below.

- i) It is your choice whether to be involved in this research. If at any point, you would like more information about what is involved then feel free to ask.
- ii) If once you have decided to get involved you no longer wish to participate in this study for any reason then you are free to withdraw.
- iii) The researcher will offer you confidentiality within the youth project's framework. This means that the only time confidence will be broken is if you tell the researcher that yourself or someone else is at risk of demonstrable harm.
- iv) In the research your name and where you were interviewed will be changed to protect your anonymity.
- v) The researcher will check back with you at certain times to check that she is not misrepresenting you. She will provide feedback to you on her findings
- vi) If you have any worries about any issues raised, feel free to ask the researcher for info about further sources of help and advice.

If you need any extra info about this study then please contact Fin on [fincullen@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:fincullen@yahoo.co.uk)

***I agree to be involved in this study. I understand the purpose of the research and I understand I can choose not to continue being involved at any point.***

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Researcher) Date \_\_\_\_\_