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**'Is That an Action Man in  
There?': Masculinity as an  
Imaginative Act of Self-  
making in an English Primary  
School Classroom**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
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# Abstract

This thesis argues that masculinity does not exist as the empirical property of biological males. Instead, masculinity is viewed as being produced in its objective sense through a social imaginary that invokes masculinity as already ontologically present; as having ontological continuity; as being necessarily coherent; and as being embodied in real boys/men. Masculinity is therefore seen as an iterative exercise, or a narrative of self, whereby the boys in this study are seen as being involved in producing themselves as coherent males in each classroom interaction. The masculine social imaginary is made real through these subjective moments of self-making.

This research focuses on the strategies engaged in by boys, in an English primary school classroom, in their accomplishment of masculine identities; how they are secured in relation to both girls and other boys; and how particular masculine forms achieve and maintain hegemony. The research looks at the relationship between objective and subjective senses of identity; the cultural resources available to boys in their identity work; the ways different cultural resources (capital) accrue value in the context of the school; how these differently valued resources contribute to the production of masculine hierarchies; and pedagogic structures and practices interact with the boys' identity work to construct different relationships with the official curriculum.

Working through a concept of reflexive relativity, this thesis regards the data collected through observation and elicitation exercises, as narrative productions. The research text itself is a narrative production - a rendering of a theory of masculine behaviour; and as constituting a series of dialogues between the research and different research subjectivities.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

# Starting Points

## *The Staffroom*

One lunch time, as I sat in the staffroom of the junior school I was teaching in, in 1994, one of my colleagues recounted a conversation that she had been having with her husband the night before. It concerned their son. She told us that they had been watching their son play and had realised how ‘masculine’ his style of play was. By this she meant that his play was based on fantasy re-enactment's of violent cartoons. Holding two pieces of Lego, he engaged them in ‘battle’ until one had won. Winning entailed ‘killing’ the opponent. She went on to say that they had not brought him up to be like this. In fact, both she and her husband had self-consciously attempted to bring their son up without aggression or competition being normalised in their household. They controlled his television viewing, actively discouraged fighting and had been careful to ensure that their son’s school followed these ideals. She also informed us that her husband did not behave in such a way as to reinforce ‘traditional’ notions of masculinity. Despite all of this, he was, she said, a ‘normal, aggressive boy’. She appeared resigned to this conclusion and to the fact that his ‘nature’ as a boy would eventually prevail. I remember commenting that although we, as adults, may try to control the environment in which children lived, particular ideas of masculinity and femininity were all pervasive. Children saw these images of men and women in newspapers, children’s t.v., playground behaviour and other adults. Other colleagues contributed their own anecdotes about boys’ behaviours in terms that attributed them to their ‘genes’ or the way they were brought up. One

commented upon the 'fact' that boys and girls possessed different hormonal make-ups, in particular, the presence of testosterone in boys predisposed them to aggression. Another colleague believed that children's homes, especially the parents had 'a lot to answer for'. She went on to say that in some homes parents let their children watch 'all sorts of rubbish' on the television; that many children's programmes were 'packed full' of violence; and 'how can we expect the children to respect school if their parents didn't'.

The discussion contains a number of features that illuminate the various discourses on gender that were available to my colleagues and myself. My colleague's story can be divided into two sections. The first part, that concerning the way both her husband and herself had attempted to bring up their son, rests upon an idea of social identity formation as primarily environmental. By controlling the social environment within which a child grows, particular kinds of identity can be constructed. Within this there is reference to 'role models' - the father, the school, and cultural stimuli - television, cartoons. My own response rested heavily upon this version of identity formation, coming as it did from my socialist and pro-feminist politics. Yet, the categories male and female, and masculine and feminine were retained. Somehow, despite identities being socially formed, and therefore open to reformation, they could not escape their biological fixing points. The second part of the story relates to her disillusion with this social constructionist model and her acceptance, however reluctantly, of ideas of inescapable human 'nature'. This model is less developed in the story than

the social constructionist one. It was as if the social model was elaborated upon in order to deconstruct it, whereas the 'natural' model was, well, natural, and therefore needed no explanation. Some of the other comments made by colleagues in the accompanying discussion contributed to both models of identity formation.

I was not happy with my own contribution. It felt weak in face of the normalising drive of the 'natural' model of human identity. This thesis, then, is an attempt to both explore the explanatory theories alluded to in the above account and to suggest a way of looking beyond them. Why? Because I believe that the 'obviousness' of gender that underpins both the social and biological models deployed in the above staffroom discussion, traps us into an acceptance or assumption of gender *as difference*. I wanted, then, to explore the possibility of looking beyond gender *as difference*; to unpick, or deconstruct, the theoretical models that were embedded in the 'commonsense' views expressed in the staffroom; and to suggest what the components of a different conceptualisation of gender might be.

### ***Reasons To Be Concerned***

*It could be that the key educational issue of the 1990s will be how to handle underachieving working class boys in society which has suffered structural unemployment for two decades*  
(TES 8.10.93)

The sentiment expressed in this editorial, written in response to a revived interest in single sex schooling at the time, reflects the strongly held belief by many teachers, as expressed in the above staffroom discussion, that boys' behaviours are problematic and pose increasingly serious discipline problems. The nature of these problematic behaviours have been detailed by David Jackson and Jonathan Salisbury (1996: 103-15), neatly outlining a number of reasons why teachers should take boys' behaviours seriously:

- teacher time and resources are taken up with disruptive boys;
- bullying and sexual harassment of girls and other boys is predominantly enacted by boys;
- an overwhelming majority of short-term and permanent exclusions are of boys;
- the majority of truants are boys .

In case this list were not enough, we can add the seeming death-wish that pervades the lives of many young men:

- $\frac{3}{4}$  of suicides in 1992 were male;
- most victims of violence tend to be males in the 16-29 age range;
- self-abuse by alcohol or drugs also features highly amongst males (over  $\frac{1}{4}$  of men admit to drinking to excess, while  $\frac{3}{4}$  of those seeking help with drug problems for the first time were male) (Government Statistical Office 1996)

Contemporary concern over boys' apparent educational underachievement has become a national issue, with the present government expressing its desire to address this urgently (TES 1998). This follows a growth in public concern expressed through the media dating from the early 1990s (e.g. TES 1993, BBC 1994; Wilkinson 1994). These detailed a growing alienation of boys and young men in a world that seemed increasingly feminised. These public concerns are partly produced and supported by the Government's own statistics that have drawn attention to the issue (e.g. OFSTED 1993, EOC & OFSTED 1996). However, there is some doubt as to whether the statistics used can be relied upon, raising questions about whether boys are in fact underachieving in relation to their historical performance, or whether the concern is about their performance relative to that of girls (see Epstein et. al. 1999). Achievement levels are not spread uniformly across all boys, with some groups, particularly white working class boys, performing significantly lower than the national average. The issue is perhaps not so much that of boys underachievement but the interaction of gender and schooling and the opportunities to learn that this produces.

Government statements (TES 1998) have sought to establish a causal relationship between male anti-school cultures and academic underachievement. This linking of masculine identities and school performance is important. However, it is unclear at which boys the statement is aimed or what the role of the school might be in relation to these anti-

school cultures. Government statements have focused on the desire to provide boys with positive role models in the form of more male primary school teachers. As I will argue in Chapter 1, this reliance on sex-role theory as an underlying theoretical base is problematic. I argue that it fails to grasp the complexities of masculine identities, the importance of context, the historical dimension of emergent male identities and the relationships between primary education, sexuality and teacher identities. Furthermore, these statements render schools neutral as influences on the development of gender identities.

In the recent research on gender and education, schools are seen as playing a significant part in the production of gendered, and other, identities, attempting to impose a normalising gaze upon students, constituting certain subjectivities as legitimate through the mechanisms of the curriculum and discipline. In this paradigm students actively resist and accommodate to these school processes, producing a range of masculine identities (Connell 1989; Sewall 1997; Warren 1997; Connolly 1998). Masculine identities are seen then to be constituted not only in relation to femininity and dominant or subordinate masculinities, but also in relation to schooling processes. It is therefore important to look at schooling processes in primary education as they constitute possible ways of being male.

Until recently, research into the ways masculine identities are constituted within primary school contexts has been relatively undeveloped. Research has

been conducted in Australia (Davies & Banks 1992) and the USA (Thorne 1993), that investigates the gender work engaged in by children in primary and elementary schools. Recent research in Britain has sought to render complex the masculine identities constituted in primary schools (Skelton 1996; Connolly 1998; Francis 1998). They all describe the discursive and material practices through which complex gendered identities are produced, and assert that gender identities are always cut across with relations of class, 'race', ethnicity and sexuality. However, most research into gender and education has been carried out in Secondary schools. Similarly, most gender work in schools has also been developed in Secondary schools and has been aimed primarily at girls (see Skelton 1989). This thesis aims to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the construction of masculine identities; how they are constituted in the context of primary classrooms; and how school processes work to produce particular ways of being male.

## **And Some Background Information**

As I sat in the staffroom listening to and joining in the discussion recounted above, my perception was informed by a series of pre-conceptions. My mother's Roman Catholic faith was largely organised around social concern and an ethic of service. While she inserted herself into an overarching morality, this never led her into any easy moralism. Instead, the main thing she took from her religion was the Catholic doctrine of 'good works'. It was not enough to be pious and attend Mass (which was an irregular occurrence for my mother), salvation was to be found in how you lived your life, how



you lived in communion with others and the care and charity you displayed. My father's active trade unionism and strong socialist beliefs brought into the house a similar discourse of social action. For my father none of us were ever singular; we were always in relation to others, especially relations of dominance, subordination and solidarity. For both of them, these commitments to collective care, a social model of the world and social action were, I believe, further fostered by their upbringing in Ireland. The Irish Catholic culture I grew up in instilled in me the idea that the individual was always a collective noun, was always in relation with others - family, community, religion.

When I moved from a Catholic to a Church of England school at the age of 10, when we moved house, although my school friends invoked the same categories - family, community and sometimes religion, the inflections they gave these terms were different. It was as if we lived in different worlds, experienced different realities. I could not make sense of their particularly individualist outlook on life, the individual as singular. Also, I could not perceive a politics in their lives. There was no discussion of 'liberation theology', the growing 'troubles' in the north of Ireland, or the debates within the Trades Union Congress or the Labour Party, as there was in my house. There were certain dispositions in my way of moving in the world that I could not find in my new friends and neighbours. The idea that identity was not fixed or certain, or that one had to define oneself (and therefore others) *in difference* was established early for me

At about the same time as my change of home and school, my increasingly troubled relationship with my father represented an early prescience of what was to become my problematising of masculinity. I looked at my parent's lives, at the lives of my cousins, aunts and uncles, at my friends' families and I saw so much pain and anger, unhappy people living out lives that ill-suited them. It is not that I then decided that all relationships were doomed to this fate, I have never stopped being a romantic, but it made me reflect on the condition of masculinity and femininity. This was especially so in my relationship with my mother. Her courage, strength and optimism in light of the harshness of her working life and the emptiness of her relationship with my father made me realise that the ways of being male that I saw around me were not ones I wished to follow. It also made me realise that the assumptions of naturalness invoked by terms such as 'family', 'wife' and 'husband' were fallacious. Far from being settled I wondered whether, perhaps, they were far from settled and that they had to be constantly worked at to impose their logic. For me, personally, this questioning found some form of resolution in my contact with socialist feminism. However, it was a resolution founded on negation rather than creation, it seemed more to do with how not to be male more than how to be something else. If I wasn't to be male, what could I be?

It is not surprising, then, that when I found myself teaching in Sunderland and in need of further intellectual stimulation, I should 'find myself' focusing

on issues of gender. Doing the M Ed. (which was later translated into an M.Phil. which was itself then turned into this Ph.D.) was always a 'personal' affair, which, when you look above, was inevitably also political. It is only right, therefore, that I should be present in this text - as I argue in Chapter 2.

Boys and schooling did not have the same salience in 1993 (when I began this study) as it subsequently acquired. But it was particularly salient for me. This was not only because of my biography (as problematic a term as that is) but because of the matrix of meaning-making practices within which my professional identity was situated. In my first teaching post in Sunderland I was one of two newly qualified men appointed - both in the infants. We were painfully aware of the issues this brought forth - to what extent would we be seen as natural allies to the male head teacher; how could we, as men, possibly have the skills to work with infants; was our preference for infants simply a cynical element in the production of portfolios that would see us fast-track our way to management positions; were we 'lesser' men for wanting to work with young children? Negotiating these questions was a daily practice for the two of us. Moving back to the Midlands meant being the only male teacher in my new school - Park View Junior. Similar questions arose, except that it was assumed that I would play a more disciplinarian role in the school - 'bring them into line', and that I would take on responsibility for Physical Education and the football team. Both, eventually, were too difficult to withstand. By insisting on a 'different' way of being a male teacher, for instance eschewing career competitiveness, as with the doubts about my maleness raised by my working with younger children, my masculinity was

brought into question. When my first child was born, these doubts seemed to disappear - after all, I had proved my heterosexual potency

In coming to study the construction of masculine identities in the classroom, I enter with certain dispositions, certain questioning approaches. Certain essential categories were already problematised - the individual; maleness; and the fixity of identity. These were themselves framed by a moral, personal and political commitment to issues of social justice. These questioning approaches have predisposed me to certain theories and authors. I locate myself within a critical poststructuralism. It is a place I feel 'at home' in, both intellectually and politically. Yet, it is not an easy place to be. It does not offer ready answers, problematising as it does, the very process of categorising the social in the first place. It therefore questions the whole sociological project. This has not caused me to abandon this project. In Chapter 2 I outline my own accommodation with both the modernist sociological project and the questioning approach of poststructuralism. However, I am not predisposed to any author within the poststructuralist orbit. My political habitus (a term I will define in Chapter 1) orients me towards feminist, pro-feminist and socialist authors. These are authors who share, in some sense, a common commitment to both issues of social justice and a questioning of the assumptions underlying this commitment. Therefore the feminist poststructuralist Bronwyn Davies features significantly, as does Máirtín Mac an Ghaill. In reading their work, I feel a resonance with my own intuitions, and have learned much from them. Another significant author is

Cornelius Castoriadis, who has provided me with the concept of the 'social imaginary', so central to my thesis.

This discussion is part of the reflexive approach to research that I outline in Chapter 2. But, it is more than the addition of a potted biography. It is aimed at foregrounding some of the discursive elements that work to produce me as a certain kind of researcher. At this point it is important to underline these elements. I come to the social practice of research marked by a **commitment to social justice**; of being intellectually and politically **aligned to feminist epistemologies**; of being involved in a **personal project of problematising masculinity**; and of **locating myself in a poststructuralist framework**.

### ***Placing The Stories***

I have presented the reader with a number of stories, and the concept of story, of narrative is central to the structure of this thesis. First of all I need to place the narrative process in a temporal location. The empirical work at the heart of this thesis took place between 1994 - 1996 in Park View Junior School in a major city in the English Midlands. Park View is a two form entry school (approximately 240 children) situated on the northern rim of the city. The school's catchment area covers two quite distinct neighbourhoods. One was a large 1930s working class housing estate comprised mainly of medium sized semi-detached council houses. The housing reforms introduced by the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s meant

that a number of tenants had taken the opportunity to buy their houses. Until the 1990s, the population of this estate had remained fairly static and white, with many well established families. Although both the Parliamentary constituency and the local Council ward are solidly Labour, the estate has historically been a site of organised fascist and racist activity. It remains one of the few organised sites of such activity in the region.

The other part of the catchment area covers the southern end of an affluent middle class area. This 'suburb' was only incorporated into the city in the mid-70s, before which it was a 'Royal Borough'. The feeling that the area should not be part of the metropolitan city is still very strong and is partly represented in the strength of the Conservative Party. In fact, the Parliamentary constituency covering this 'Royal Borough' is the only one held by a Conservative candidate in this part of the Midlands. Housing tenure in the area is overwhelmingly that of owner occupation, with wider streets and larger, usually detached houses. However, this part of the catchment area was cut off from the main body of the 'Royal Borough' by a major trunk road. Consequently, this middle class enclave backed onto the working class estate and looked out onto the large woodland area at the heart of the 'borough'.

The school is located in a particular policy framework. I will give a more theoretical reading of this framework in Chapter 3. For the moment it is only important to sketch this policy framework. The educational landscape was characterised by degrees of centralisation and devolvement. The 1988

Education Reform Act (DES 1988) instituted a centralisation of the curriculum in the form of the National Curriculum and a national system of assessment at ages 7, 11 and 14 with the Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs). Later, a centralised system of school inspection was instituted in the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (DfE 1992). The Education Reform Act also allowed for the devolvement of governance to newly instituted Governing Bodies with the responsibility for handling devolved budgets (Local Management of Schools). These reforms were partly designed to make schools more accountable to the public at large and more responsive to parents' wishes locally. This was further underlined, formally at least, by the introduction of the right of parents to choose the school they wanted their children to go to.

During my time at Park View Junior the school was in preparation for an inspection by OFSTED. One of the responses to this was to introduce 'targeted grouping'. This involved the use of ability grouping in Mathematics and English. Additionally, in Mathematics, grouping was organised horizontally across each year group. Diagnostic and formative assessment was also formalised. At the beginning and end of each year, all children were assessed on their computation and comprehension skills. The data accumulated from these assessments were used to track each child's progress in these key skill areas. Also, teachers were encouraged to carry out similar benchmark assessments at the beginning and end of topic or project work across the curriculum. These details are important for the analysis of the

normative context of classroom interactions covered in Chapter 3.

## **The Structure of the Thesis**

Above, I have presented a series of stories, a range of personal, political and intellectual travels that have coalesced in this thesis, yet also continue on their endless forays. This thesis, then, is not an end-point, nor even a stopping off place. I go to some lengths to convey to the reader that this is an *artifice*, a constructed piece of work, a fabrication as much as the process of making oneself male is. The thesis clearly has a structure, a way of leading the reader in a particular direction, an architecture. It can be divided into three relatively distinct sections.

### ***Ways In***

Following on from the description of a staffroom discussion offered at the beginning of this introduction, in Chapter 1 I explore the various discourses of gender contained in our 'commonsense' world views - biological, psychological and social constructionist. As well as outlining the different theoretical frameworks, I attempt to draw out the common epistemological foundations of these frameworks, as well as grounding my discussion in their application to the problematic faced by my colleagues and myself. The critique I offer of the various approaches discussed, is not aimed at supplanting them with a 'better' totalising theory. I attempt to offer a different reading, working from within a poststructuralist gaze. This reading does not



dismiss the possibility of a strong biological dimension to gender, but does not accord it a determining function. Instead I suggest the notion of 'leaning on', of our biology acting as a resource in the construction of gender identities, as potentiating particular ways of being male and of our bodies entering into relations of power. Nor does it deny a psychological perspective, the possibility of feeling that there is an 'inner' or 'real' self, that such a discourse may provide us with the ability to imagine an inner life. The reading I offer also attempts to allow for the effects of socialisation processes, and certainly avows to the power of social and political structures to overdetermine social identities.

My basic critique of dominant discourses of gender is that by and large they conceptualise gender *as difference*. I offer four thematic approaches as a way of looking beyond gender *as difference* - masculinity as **agentic**, **embodied**, **socio-historical** and **imagined**. Through the concept of the 'masculine social imaginary' I suggest that masculinity does not already exist as an ontological reality; that the 'masculine social imaginary' constitutes masculinity as a signifier of *difference* in a patriarchal ordering of society. I argue that the masculine social imaginary works to constitute masculinity as an objective reality through which the boys can imaginatively negotiate relations with a *world* of men. I also argue that this cannot be achieved at a symbolic level, but must be constantly instituted in and through the boys' subjective moments of self-making.

I continue this critique of 'realism' in Chapter 2. This critique is applied to my original methodological approach to the research. I problematise the concepts of participant-observation, symmetry, situatedness and 'bounded cultures'. I put forward the case for a move towards a post-realist research, one based on both an epistemological and ontological plurality. I offer the concept of **reflexive relativity** as a way of not only foregrounding the situatedness of the researcher and the research process, but of articulating how particular interpretative frameworks constitute the boundaries of 'legitimate' research and constitute different research subjectivities.

### ***Enumerated Realities***

Chapter 3 (the *Weft*) deals with an analysis of the boys' conceptions of gender and the gendered character of their friendship networks, while Chapter 4 (the *Warp*) deals with the observation of their classroom interactions. Framed by the understanding of analysis as a form of narrative production, these chapters do not attempt to depict the *reality* of the boys' gendered world as 'represented' by their statements about the nature of gender, the construction of segregated social networks or the highly gendered orientation of the boys' interactions. Instead I regard these practices as constituting elements within the boys' narratives of self. The analysis tries to work constructively with data that constitutes the world as an 'enumerated reality', that the world can be captured in frequency tables and paradigmatic analysis. Accepting the constraints of this epistemological view, these two chapters construct the enumerated data as narratives of gender, reading them as representing the

way the boys speak to an objective sense of masculinity and as examples of their subjective moments of self-making.

The analysis can be seen to depict the normative context of masculine enactment - the *Weft*, and the practices that work to constitute masculinity as an objective reality - the *Warp*.

## **Bringing It All Together**

The third section, chapters 5 and 6, bring the various strands of analysis together into a discussion of a sample group of boys. Chapter 5 forms a bridge between the depiction of an enumerated reality and the more detailed ethnographic account of the sample group boys. It examines the similarities and differences in the pattern of interactions found in the general and sample group observations. Chapter 6 provides the substantive analysis of this thesis, exploring these boys' subjective moments of self-making in detail.

Chapter 6, in bringing together the different strands of analysis, attempts to render a theory of masculine construction, the four thematic approaches outlined in my theoretical framework in Chapter 1 providing the narrative structure. I suggest that the modernist conception of identity provides the boys with the possibility of agency. As such, they are engaged in the production of narratives of self. They draw on narrative resources available to them in the culture to produce stories of coherence and unity. This agency is iterative, since masculinity does not already exist as an ontological given. It

has to be brought into life through each interactive moment. I argue that while the boys are agentic in producing themselves as male, they are also constrained in this process, in that to conceive of masculinity at all is to conceive it as a signifier *of difference*. That is, their self-making constantly refers back to the masculine social imaginary. I discuss how the contemporary context provides the boys with new cultural resources that both potentiate new ways of being male but also work to differentiate between boys, becoming constitutive elements in a masculine hierarchy. I discuss football as providing the exemplary context for constituting social spaces of masculine exclusion, and how this continues in the classroom interactions. Part of this contemporary context involves the particular pedagogic structures of the classroom and how they are positioned in relation to the overall political and policy framework of the National Curriculum and the assessment regime.

I conclude by arguing that the theoretical framework I use, in decentering masculinity as already ontologically present, opens up new scope for both boys and teachers to engage in critical masculinity work; produces a 'sociology of the mundane' that focuses on the lived experiences of boys, and counteracts political discourses of gender that work to re-inscribe the patriarchal system.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**TOWARDS AN IMAGINED**

**SELF**

# Introduction

## *A Moment in Time*

This chapter traces some of the dominant theories of masculine construction that have been influential within popular and educational discourse. It is not a history of those ideas nor a genealogical detailing of their socio-political emergence. The ideas explored are related to and produced by specific social forces in particular times and places. While the ideas presented can be seen as the theoretical touchstones of their times, as they relate to gender, this is not to suggest a linear progression from simplistic (biological) to sophisticated (poststructuralist) conceptions. Traces of earlier dominant ideas are found throughout later developments. This is why they are dealt with thematically. There is, however, a chronological feel to the way I have set them out. I begin with a consideration of biological perspectives, proceeding through psychoanalytic, social learning theories and poststructuralist paradigms. Rather than seeing them as a series of ideas that develop one from the other, the latest superseding the last, they should instead be conceived as ideas that are constantly in contest with each other for hegemony.

Let me elucidate this notion of the contestation of ideas with a few examples related to the text below. Freud's Psychoanalysis emerged at the turn of the century just when Europe was recovering from the claustrophobic cultures of the Victorian era. The imperial nations of Europe were assertive, yet domestically sexual identities constructed around the imperialist project

seemed unstable. In North America, social learning theories were used to help grasp the changing social patterns of post-war USA. Sociobiology emerged in the 1970s in Harvard during the emergence of an economic crisis in the West trumpeting a crisis in Social Democracy, an assertive women's movement throughout the metropolitan areas of the West, and the rise of the New Right. Whether it was the intention of its authors or not, such social Darwinism soon found political backing from the growing conservative forces that clustered around Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. After the initial impetus of second wave feminism had flexed its political muscles, a contestation between different epistemological bases for grounding the emancipatory project heightened. Different discourses were deployed, focusing around different combinations of social learning theory, reassessments of Freud and the grounding of a women's politic in biological difference. Through the 1970s, 80s and especially the 90s, a growing scepticism towards the foundational truths that had guided modern thought from the eighteenth century, flourished. The combined assault of French poststructuralism and the marginalised voices of post-colonialism had forced a radical reconsideration of the basic understandings of identity, power and structure. As with the revolutionary ideas of Freud, and the cultural explosions of that particular *fin de siècle*, so, as the (Western) Christian millennium approaches, European thought finds itself facing both ways - inwards towards a re-examination of its foundations, and outwards towards new horizons.

The times and places that have produced these ideas are of some import. They are mostly situated in the historico-geographic settings of the prestige Universities of Western Europe and North America, or as part of the imperial networks that have emanated from these centres. As such, they are intimately connected with the histories and politics of colonialism, capitalism and 'race'. The authors of these paradigms have usually been white, male, privileged and immersed in Judeo-Christian culture. The critical voices that are presented in these pages, while also often speaking from the privileged places of academia, can be seen as voices of the 'Other' - feminist, black, gay, lesbian, pro-feminist men, Marxist, post-Marxist, etc.

It is from the poststructural moment that I find myself writing within. I also speak from the privileged, though precarious, setting of academia in the 90s, a moment where identity and notions of truth are contested, ambiguous and in flux. While these considerations have global consideration and consequences, they are essentially a crisis of Western thought. While it is important to outline the different perspectives, it is the array of understandings encompassed under the label poststructuralism that frames my reflexive engagement with the process of researching masculine construction in the primary school.



# **The Biological Self**

## ***It's All in Their Genes - The Biological Basis of Gender***

*Sugar and spice  
And all things nice  
That's what little girls  
Are made of.*

*Slugs and snails  
And puppy dog tails  
That's what little boys  
Are made of.*

The above nursery rhyme claims a number of things about the constituting of gender identities. Firstly, it suggests that gender is divided into two distinct categories: girl and boy, female and male. Secondly, these distinctions are based on fundamental elements that delineate what comes within each category. Thirdly, the distinction is based on immutable differences, and, fourthly, each category is ascribed with social meanings that are the product of the elemental differences. The nursery rhyme can be said to resemble the biological paradigm which attempts to give explanatory power to definitions of gender on the basis of the differential distribution of genes and hormones (Golombok & Firth 1994). Put simply, men and women are different because

they are born different. In the account of my colleague's resignation to her son's 'natural' masculinity, it was this primary dichotomy, based in biological difference, that was invoked.

### ***Naive, Cautious and Complex Biologism***

Different biological theories agree that complex organisms, and in particular humans, are divided into two distinct sexes - male and female, and that this distinction is based on the differential distribution of genes, hormones and genitalia. This distinction is quite important and relates to the basic argument of evolutionary biology: human evolution is seen as being the history of our genes maximising their survival through natural selection (Dawkins 1989; Dennett 1995). Evolutionary theory argues that natural selection has favoured the production of sperms and eggs as the most efficient means by which genes can replicate in humans. The penis and vagina are therefore the tools for sperms and eggs to meet, and it is these fundamental distinctions that form the basis of human sexuality (Dawkins 1989: 161). While this might provide an explanation for the distinction between two biological sexes, arguments between biological theories often focus on the degree to which these biological facts form the basis for social distinctions

### **Naïve biologism**

*Naïve* biologism, such as that propounded by Robert Wright (Wright 1994) and Edward Wilson (Wilson 1975), based on empirical and laboratory studies of insects and animals, suggests that the social reproduction of human

behaviour plays a limited and minor role in comparison to the influence of our biological evolution. Far reaching claims are made for this sociobiology. Human behaviours and social organisation are claimed to be comparable to those of insects, birds and other animals. Hence, sex differences in aggression, whether individual or at the level of wars (Barash 1979); social class (Wilson 1975); male sexual promiscuity (Buss 1996); male superiority (Tiger 1970); and rape (Symon 1979), can all be seen as 'natural' products of our biology. Male humans are seen to be naturally more assertive/aggressive, public oriented, competitive, physical and to possess greater spatial awareness. Female humans, on the other hand, are 'family' oriented, nurturant and less physical.

## Complex biologism

A more *complex* biologism, and one I associate particularly with the zoologist Richard Dawkins, offers a more compelling, if paradoxical scenario. The paradox of Dawkins' theory, which can be found in chapter 11 of his *Selfish Gene* (Dawkins 1989), is that although the human organism is the vehicle, or gene machine, that hosts the genes; and is fashioned by natural selection; the uniqueness of humans is the relative degree of autonomy that we have as individuals and as a species in determining our actions, by virtue of the development of *culture*. There is not enough room in this thesis to expand on the function of the brain in enabling this autonomy, nor the relationship between biological evolution and culture. Dawkins does not resolve the nature/culture problem by positing a radical distinction between

the two or by totally collapsing one into the other. He suggests that once the brain had developed to the extent that it had the *effect* of consciousness, then ideas and belief took hold of human social development, in the same way that genes took hold of biological evolution. In a similar fashion, Dawkins suggests that culture resembles the human organism as the host, or vehicle for the replication of ideas and beliefs. Culture has evolved to such an extent that it can work against the interests of genetic replication, and Dawkins discusses the emergence of religious celibacy as an example of this.

## **Cautious biologism**

Modern Darwinism is differentiated largely as to the basic unit of analysis. Some argue that it should be the group (species) (Ardrey 1970). However, an emerging orthodoxy, at least at the level of public discourse, claims that the basic unit of analysis is the individual organism, or increasingly, the gene (Dawkins 1989). The point at which selection takes place is not then that of the species - humans selected over other species, or 'race', or 'gender'. A *cautious* biologism might suggest that there is a clear separation between nature and culture; that the genetic structures that give us our hair and eye colouring are not replicated in social structures and relations (see Rose, Kamin and Lewontin, 1984). While genes are seen to produce the protein sequences that have the effect of green eyes or curly hair; that gives some bodies vaginas and wombs, and others penises and testicles; genetic science cannot explain or form the basis of gender divisions in society. My use of the term 'cautious' in this context refers to the concerns of the different authors I

have mentioned to be modest about the social claims of biological science. They do not refute, in total, evolutionary biology. They adopt much of its claims, but they are conscious that science is a cultural activity, and provides only one set of interpretations about life. In that sense it is a complex set of arguments. While they hold that there is no easy connection between biology and society, they do postulate the idea of homeodynamics (Rose 1997: 157-8). Instead of viewing organisms as empty vessels for the replication of genes, they regard living organisms as located in time and space and having what Steven Rose calls 'lifelines' - developments, changes and oscillations. The life lines of all living organisms, whether they be single cell or human, are affected by economic, ecological and political pressures. The relationship between biology and society are therefore inherently dynamic. I don't want to extend this argument at this point but will return to it a little later when considering the propositions of both Richard Dawkins and Steven Rose. The point I want to stress is that for *cautious* biologism socially responsible science is a cautious science.

### ***Naive Biologism Disputed***

*Naive* biologism closely resembles the 'commonsense' notions articulated by my colleagues in the staffroom discussion. The boys' behaviours were regarded as basic expressions of a biological destiny. *Naive* biologism throws up an interesting paradox of its own, here. If boys' behaviours are little more than social expressions of their biology, how can we come to regard some behaviours as 'problematic' if they are 'natural', and if these

behaviours are, therefore, 'natural', why should we want to change them anyway? Or is it that our attempts (as teachers) to control or socialise these 'problematic' behaviours are themselves expressions of our biology? Related to this is the notion that this concern over boys' behaviours might be connected to biological sex. The suggestion seems to be that this concern is a property of female sex because nurturance and care are 'natural' properties of females. If this is the case, why don't all women share this concern in the same way, and why are some men concerned about boys' behaviours? In other words, reversion to 'natural' or biological explanations raise more questions than answers for teachers. The biological paradigm has to constantly make reference to biological sex as cultural and social phenomena - as gender. How else can it explain why boys' behaviours are so often considered as 'problematic'. Decisions have to be made as to what are 'problematic' behaviours, and what behaviours are preferred. These are social issues, cultural questions. It is also interesting to note that these Darwinian social commentators constantly refer to some 'other' as the location of troubling, but 'natural' behaviours, whether that be the criminal or the underachieving boy. Such a discourse always accords the speaker a superiority in relation to this 'other'. As Steven Rose (1997) has argued, in privileging the gene as the unit of analysis, apart from radical medical intervention, there is little that anyone else can do to intervene in 'problematic' behaviours.

I cannot help feeling that beneath the scientific garb of *naïve* biologism lies

a deep rooted political conservatism. Both Evelyn Reed (1978) and Anne Fausto-Sterling (1992) have pointed to the coincidence of the rise of second wave feminism, especially feminism's focus on sexuality and rape, and the emergence of scientific theses arguing for the 'naturalness' of immutable differences between men and women. The conservative men's movement, particularly in the USA for instance, invokes a necessary connection between gender (sex-roles), biological difference and 'natural' balance (Farrell 1993).

### ***Complex Biologism Again***

Richard Dawkins' postulation of ideas playing the same role as genes in cultural replication is, as I have said, a compelling one. It appears to give credence to the belief that humans stand apart from other living organisms by virtue of our development of language, and therefore symbolic representation. In applying an evolutionary structure to human culture, Richard Dawkins allows himself the luxury of viewing human society (and therefore all social behaviour) as 'extended phenotypes' (Dawkins 1982). This theory not only regards behaviours such as aggression as human phenotypes - surface characteristics of human biology but extends this into arguing that social institutions may be phenotypes as well. Not only are violent and sexual behaviours claimed to be characteristics of human biology but so too are forms of governance and social regulation. The line of causality is unidirectional. For all its suggestion of human agency, this immediately collapses all social behaviours and structures into a biological reductionism

In opposition to this reductive biology Steven Rose offers an 'it depends' biology. He critiques reductionism on the postpositivist grounds that sociobiology imposes just one way of knowing the world, a unity of epistemology and ontology. Instead, he argues that much evolutionary biology provides compelling and legitimate theories about living organisms. But, and this is the kernel of the postpositivist argument, these are not the only valid stories about life. As will be picked up later in my reflections on methodology, Steven Rose argues that the kinds of stories that biologists tell depend on the kind of questions they ask. Related to this, he also accuses sociobiology of illegitimately privileging one level of analysis - the gene, above all others. It is this that turns their theories into ideologies. Because of this privileging of the gene as the unit of analysis sociobiology ascribes to the gene effects that cannot reasonably be deduced from available evidence. In particular, they ignore the structural or material limitations on adaptation. Steven Rose (1997: 241-245) uses competing explanations for the honeycomb to illustrate this. Reductive biologists might claim that the geometric regularity of the honeycomb is a result of a long chain of evolutionary adaptations that discarded less efficient forms for the present one. An alternative explanation, and one I find convincing and will adapt later, stresses the structural impact of the bee's form. Basically, any cylindrical object, whether a pea or a bee, attempts to fill any given space. The result of the consequent pressures caused by peas boiling in a pan of water or bees in a honeycomb is the production of hexagonal shapes. Adaptive mechanisms play no part in this process.



Reductive biology, then, overplays the influence of the gene. Steven Rose goes on to point out that evolutionary adaptation at one level of analysis does not necessarily affect all other levels and the line of causality is not unidirectional. While there is a restricted range of adaptive possibilities, the relation between the different levels of analysis is not determinant. There is far more drift in the development of living organisms than reductive biology allows for.

### ***[Un]reasonable Science***

The biological paradigm has problems, though, in the very limits it sets itself. On the surface, it appears to simply, and neutrally, *describe* biological sex. In an effort to establish this definitional regime it attempts to distribute natural properties - hormones, genes, genitalia to only two biological sexes. We have to be female *or* male. Yet, the scientific knowledge upon which this process of identification is founded is far from conclusive.

It is the presence or absence of a penis that initially sexes a new born. This genital marker becomes the visible sign of the body's genetic make-up. Critics argue that this is too simplistic a reduction (Fausto-Sterling 1992; Oakley 1981). As well as the xx/xy chromosome distinction, other combinations produce a variety of genetic make-ups that disrupt this polarisation. These variations produce bodies that may present 'male' or 'female' genitalia, but without the appropriately sexed hormones. The

categorisation of testosterone and oestrogen as ‘male’ and ‘female’ hormones also fail to stand up to scrutiny, since both men and women produce both hormones (Davies 1989; Golombok & Firth 1994). The questioning of the deterministic power of hormones goes further, with evidence emerging that strongly suggests that far from testosterone producing aggressive behaviour in males, it may well be that it is the aggressive behaviour that produces the hormone, and that the saturation of the body by this hormone then makes aggression more likely to occur (Davies 1989). Far from biological sex being fixed and immutable, medical science itself has opened up the possibilities for human intervention to play around with gender definitions through surgery and hormone treatment (Butler 1990a).

The ‘science’ of biological arguments about sex differences, and the importance of those differences compared to their similarities, is questioned by these critiques. The robustness of the empirical evidence used has been challenged. They have been questioned in terms of the basic ideas and methodologies adopted. Despite the assurance that the term ‘gene’ implies, there is in fact a lack of clarity in defining it. This lack of clarity revolves around its definition as either a physical entity or a programme. It is partly such lack of definitional clarity that allows *naïve* biologism to make the social claims it does.

The scientific grounding of biological theories of sex difference are further questioned when considering their methodological practices. Biological

theories of human behaviour have predominantly emerged from the fields of *ethology* (the study of animals in the wild), *zoology* (the study and classification of animals) and *ecology* (the study of the relationship between organisms and their environments). This has largely entailed the study of animals, insects, birds, fish and bacteria. The mistake that biological theories in general make is, firstly, to ascribe to the micro-level of the gene effects apparently observed at the level of the organism and sometimes the species or group. Secondly, and more crucially, despite humans being recognised as distinct from most of the animal world by virtue of our development of complex cultural systems and the possession of self-reflexive consciousness (which enables the development of science itself), the interpretations of studies of animals, insects and fish are mapped onto human behaviours in an unreflexive manner, disregarding the influence of culture on both human behaviour and scientific inquiry (Fausto-Sterling 1992).

### ***Cultural Slips Of The Tongue***

As neutral as biological distinctions at first appear, one cannot escape the degree to which discussions of the 'natural' properties that define female and male sex, slip readily into discussion of social gender. Biological males can be described as those who possess a penis and testicles, and so able to produce sperm. This very quickly slips into ascribing the sperm with a particular agency. Sperm are seen to act upon the (female) egg - to fertilise it. The (female) egg is described then in terms of its passivity. Notions of the active male and passive female are evoked. But why should we necessarily conceive

of genetic replication as occurring through the interaction of differently 'sexed' gametes; why make the primary distinction between two (and only two) sexes; why not argue that there is one polymorphous sex with a variable distribution of gametes that allocate some organisms with sperm and others with eggs? Also, why should we consider that it is the sperm that is the active agent in this process of replication? The relationship between the egg and the sperm can be conceptualised differently. The egg can be described as actively reaching out to an equally active sperm, in the same way that the vagina can be understood as actively enveloping an actively erect penis. Far from being neutral *descriptions*, biological arguments are as much cultural readings as sociology is. This theme will be picked up again in Chapter 2.

### ***Biology Concluded***

The rhetorical power of biological perspectives lies in its assertion of the naturalness of sex differences and its necessary connection with the social categories femininity and masculinity. In fact, the terms have become interchangeable. Not only that, but masculinity and femininity, while viewed as 'social' constructs by both *cautious* and *complex* biological theories, are seen to be the properties of particular biological sexes (Oakley 1981; Spender 1984; Connell 1987, 1995; Dinnerstein 1987; Pleck 1987). Despite the historicism evoked by biological paradigms, the emergence of the concept gender, and its connection with biological sex, is a product of modernity and the Enlightenment (Shilling 1994, MacInnes 1998)

None of my colleagues asserted that the boys, and by implication all of us, were nothing more than our genes, hormones and genitalia. There was, though, a sense in which biology, imagined as natural gender, largely determined who we were. Within much of the biological paradigm, at worst we are no more than our biology; at best, the more negative aspects of our biology can be policed or temporarily socialised. This latter reading appears to be the one closest to that of my colleagues. While they expressed a feeling that the boys' behaviours were rooted in their biological make-up, boys could be socialised into more acceptable behaviours, at least within the context of the school. The degree to which I, as a teacher, can intervene in the boys' behaviours is limited by this paradigm. If the behaviour of boys was deemed problematic, the logical conclusion of *naïve* or *complex* biologism leads to resigned acceptance of these behaviours. The *cautious* biologism of Stephen Rose et. al. appears to suggest a social identity absent of biology, since the two are radically separated. To what extent then can boys' 'problematic' behaviours be better understood in terms of socialisation, and what does this offer in the way of practical steps that can be taken by teachers?

## **A Brief Comment On The Internality/Externality Of Identity**

*Like other dualities such as day and night, good and bad, happy and sad, male and female is perceived within the Western intellectual tradition as an inevitable and natural duality, each opposite to its other and each relying on the*

The biological paradigm, discussed above, works with a distinction between the 'internal' domain of the organism or the gene, and the 'external' environment. Two of the most powerful structuring ideas of modern thought have been that of the framework of binary oppositions, and the distinction between gender and sex.

Part of the hegemonic power of Enlightenment rationalism has been the deployment of an organising logic based on a set of binary oppositions (Guterman 1994; Rattansi 1996). These dichotomous terms privilege the first statement while subordinating the second. The starting point can be said to be the Cartesian distinction between mind and body, where the mind is the location of rational thought, of logic, that which makes 'man' (*sic*) superior to animals- the *logos*. The task of the new 'man' (*sic*) of the Enlightenment was to overcome nature, to conquer it. Flowing, almost naturally, from this primary distinction are a set of further binaries: rationality/irrationality; reason/emotion; civilised/uncivilised; subject/object; culture/nature; public/private; natural/unnatural; male/female.

It is not hard to see how these distinctions have come to justify and underpin a gender order that subordinates women and marginalised masculinities (Diamond & Quinby 1988; Seidler 1991). The biological paradigm can be seen as a product of this ontological view as much as its

science can be understood to represent its epistemological partner. While biological theories, to a greater or lesser extent, attempt to locate all human behaviour within a natural domain, they also work within the modernist logic of binary opposites which act to constitute 'male' and 'female' differently (Flax 1990). While the female seems symbolised by an association with the natural and social through the practices of nurturing, mothering, taking care of others, etc.; males are related to the abstract, autonomous world of the mind and mastery over nature. These gender differences are projected as natural, as normative, and furthermore, as hierarchically ordered. As Jane Flax explains, this gender order, or system of gender relations, forces you into either/or decisions '[O]ne can only be one gender, never the other or both' (p. 45).

## **The Social Self (I) - The Inner Self**

While reference to the 'naturalness' of masculine identities was a common feature of staffroom discussions, mapped onto this was the idea that 'problematic' behaviours were the result of dysfunctional socialisation. Poor parenting or the adverse influence of the wider consumer culture were regularly cited as culprits. It was this understanding that masculinity and femininity were socially constructed, that formed the kernel of Sigmund Freud's revolutionary theories on infant sexuality. For Freud, while biology provided us with the components for constructing gender identities, it was the cultures within which we live that formed the particularities of gender

identities (Connell 1995; MacInnes 1998) This suggestive relation between the biological and the social is one very much at the heart of my colleague's comments. It is also a relation very much at the centre of much debate in social theory as to the extent of human agency.

### ***The Oedipal Self***

What Freud's work, and psychoanalysis in general, attempts, as Judith Butler (1990b:326) explains, is 'to identify the developmental moments in which gendered [and other cognitive, moral and emotional] identity is acquired'. Embedded in my colleague's arguments and descriptions of boys' behaviours was an assumption of a fixed or static identity which, nevertheless, diverged along a number of paths, so accounting for boys who did not display the 'problematic' behaviours averred to. Freud's theories of infantile sexuality and the emergence of gender identities turns this assumption on its head. Instead, Freud posits the idea of 'normality' (the fixed essence of identity) as a phenomenon that was only precariously established, and dependent upon various cultural contingencies (Mitchell 1990). Freud did not project a fixed normality, then. Rather, what might be regarded as normal was always relative to cultural norms and assumptions. Normality and deviance were part of the same continuum. In fact, at the heart of psychoanalysis is the view that normality is best understood by a study of psychosis. For Freud, sexuality was not an instinct, in that it was already pre-adapted to reality, as a biological paradigm would suggest. Sexuality was understood as consisting of psycho-dynamic drives that represented themselves in physical practices



Furthermore, it was this tension between the mental and the physical that constituted the 'problematic' of gender identity, a problematic resolved, by Freud, in the Oedipus Complex.

This framework helped Freud to develop a theory of the psycho-sexual development of children, how boys become male and girls become female. The 'Oedipus complex' became the key moment in this development (Connell 1995:9), one revolved around the move of the infant's object of desire and pleasure from the self (auto-eroticism/narcissism) to others; first in the form of a primary attachment with the mother (primary carer); and later with a critical rupture in this primary identification and a re-identification with the mother (girls) and the father (boys) (Freud 1977 in Weiner & Arnott 1987:19; Edley & Wetherell 1996:99). This is a description of the emergence of normative gender identities. Freud, following the general thesis that normality and deviance are both part of the same continuum, also outlines the development of two other modes of identification - homosexuality and lesbianism (Mitchell 1990).

This is a rather schematic reading of a much more developed and complex theory and does not go into detail about the particular processes by which these differentiated identifications are made. What is important for my argument is that while biology might provide both females and males with the same components - differentiated reproductive capacities, gender identities are constituent elements of human culture, and it is culture or social

processes that are determinant.

### ***Marking a Difference***

This psychological model depicts a very different idea of the emergence, not only of gender identities (as distinct from biological sex), but also of the emergence of distinct genders - femininity and masculinity. Freud struggled with these terms and I will return to this later in the discussion. The various case studies and analytical situations that make up the empirical basis for Freud's theories (and later psychoanalysts) can be seen as examples of neurosis caused by a culture that demanded that the polymorphous sexuality (the psychological androgyny) of the human infant be socialised into two normative sexualities. Far from establishing a stable gender identity, the construction of masculinity around guilty incestuous feelings for the mother, of the rejection of the feminine through the rejection of the mother, and fear of the father, constitutes masculine identities as highly insecure. Various authors depict an apparently inherent instability in masculine identities (Seidler 1991; Connell 1995; Frank 1997; Davies 1989), mirroring that postulated by Freud.

My colleague's commentaries, while not making Classical allusions (to Oedipus), did speak of gender as being distinct but also relational. The biological paradigm designated femaleness and maleness as distinct categories. Freudian psychoanalysis asserts that the differences manifested in the socially distinct categories femininity and masculinity are relational

Social/psychological masculinity is achieved through a psychological break with the mother, that is, a rejection of the feminine. This inserts into the core of masculinity a negativity (Seidler 1990), an identity constituted in relation to and rejection of femininity, which is itself constituted in relation to masculinity. While gender is a social accomplishment, it is not a conscious practice in essence. Rather, gender identity is at the nexus of those habits of thought and practice that is *normality*.

This *normality* is only partially empirical (in a positivist sense). The difference between feminine and masculine behaviours is not *necessarily* coterminous with female and male biological sex. Freud struggled with three different understandings of feminine and masculine: the biological (genital/reproductive difference); sociological (observation of empirical feminine and masculine individuals); and psychological (Mitchell 1990; MacInnes 1998). This struggle points to what Freud regarded as an inescapable ‘fact’, the physiological difference between female and male bodies (though I have described above the limits of this ‘obvious’ empiricism); however, Freud distanced himself from biological determinism (Mitchell 1990). He postulated that femininity and masculinity were to be found in both feminine and masculine individuals (the sociological understanding); that gender identity was a psychological construct, an imagined self made manifest, but that femininity and masculinity were usually associated with biological females and males.

## ***Object Others***

I will come on to look at criticisms of Freudian theories of sexuality, but first I want to briefly explore some of the ways his notion of identity as being relational and emerging out of the Oedipal complex, has informed feminist thinking. This is because I feel that any exploration of gender whose aim is the construction of ways of thinking and acting that counter the prevailing gender order, must be informed by feminist praxis. As important as some of the insights provided by Freud and psychoanalysis are, they remain, for me, inadequate without the kinds of critique that feminism can offer.

The concepts of the unconscious, the Oedipal complex as the key moment of gender socialisation and of gender as a fundamentally cultural category, offered feminism a way of locating patriarchy as much 'inside' as 'outside', operating in the psychic as well as the material domain (Lown 1995). More particularly, many feminists reworked the central concepts of psychoanalysis. Despite the fact that most of Freud's case studies comprised women rather than men, he constructed a model of female sexuality as produced as the 'Other' of masculinity, of femininity as defined by a lack of a penis (Lown 1995: 111). Instead of the dominance of the father, and the threat of castration because of his incestuous feelings for the mother propelling the boy into an identification with the father, Object Relations feminists suggested the central role of the mother in the pre-Oedipal stage of development. Transition from a primary identification with the mother, an identification shared with girls, to the father, was variously seen to occur because the

mother's own investment in gender difference forces her to reject her son, propelling him into the world of men (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982 & 1995), relating to him on the basis of difference and separateness (Sayers 1987); of a boys' fear of the pre-Oedipal mother and an association between male heterosexuality and violence that forms the basis of generalised male violence against women (Dinnerstein 1977); and of an 'abstract' masculinity constructed as a result of the sexual division of labour (Hartsock 1990).

### ***Freud (and others) Undone***

I want to claim that the invoking of the *unconscious* dimension of gender identity is of fundamental importance in understanding how masculinity emerges as a distinct gender category, held within a hierarchical gender order. However, this is not to accept the whole of Freudian or other psychoanalytical thinking. Although it is claimed that the particularity of Freud's empirical base (bourgeois patriarchal families) offers a unique access into the workings of patriarchy (Mitchell 1990), others point to the bias in Freud's own thinking on male/female social relations, in particular his own belief in the superiority of men, and the association of women with irrationality and weakness (Edley and Wetherell 1996:99), and his ethnocentrism (Kessler and McKenna 1978). The masculinist inflections of Freud's work has to be accounted for, but, as feminist appropriations of his work demonstrate, it is possible to re-articulate these theories

These feminist expropriations of psychoanalysis have themselves been

heavily critiqued. As with Freud, Object Relations theory has been viewed as problematic in the way it presents mothering as providing the essential, universal identity of all women, in all cultures, at all times (Fraser and Nicholson 1990), so replicating the ethnocentrism of Freud (Bordo 1990a; Yeatman 1990:291). Despite the assertion that much psychoanalysis is based upon - that gender identity is a cultural phenomena largely located in the psychic domain, Freud, and others continually smuggle in a subtle biological determinism - his struggle with the three understandings of femininity and masculinity; the circularity of the chain of logic he develops that links genital awareness with the emergence of a gendered psyche: genital awareness leads to fantasy - leads to identification - leads to gender roles - feeds back into genital awareness as a marker of social difference (Kessler and McKenna 1978); and the necessity of constructing two gender categories that mirror biological sex (MacInnes 1998).

### ***Where Now?***

Object Relations theory appears to address the concern raised by some of my colleagues that boys' 'problematic' behaviours arise from dysfunctional socialisation, and that the family and particularly the mother, are the root cause for these problem masculinities. However, as with classical Freudian Psychoanalysis, Object Relations theory does not seem to offer much in the way of practical means of responding to these 'problematic' behaviours. Freudian psychoanalysis might offer teachers a therapeutic framework, a role of working with boys in order to help them reorganise their relationship with

their unconscious. This has been articulated as a need for boys men to rediscover their feminine side (Seidler 1991). While this seems a daunting task, and one that appears both practically and politically unlikely in the present organisation of schooling, it is also a possible avenue of development since it is something individual teachers could endeavour to do with individual boys.

Object Relations seems to work less on the level of Freud's psychological dimension as on the sociological. As well as centering the role of the pre-Oedipal mother in the constitution of masculine identities, Object Relations theory foregrounds the determining role of the social in this process of identity formation, and situates this process within the specific context of the family structured by a gender division of labour. As teachers, what are we to do? Some of my colleagues were concerned that the dysfunctional dynamics of the boys' families (and possibly the relation with the mother as the primary carer) lay behind the behaviours that they perceived to be problematic. While this located the 'problem' outside the realm of direct responsibility of teachers, it also diminished the role of the teacher in affecting those behaviours. As with the biological paradigm, as teachers, we are left either powerless to influence the boys or, at best, we could only police them

## **The Socialised Self (II) - The Dramatic and Constructed Self**

### ***Polarised Gender***

Reflecting on the comments made by my colleagues, it seemed that gender identities, whether considered biologically or culturally determined, were considered to be pre-defined roles of behaviour and practice into which individuals were expected to fit. For the biological paradigm it was the requirement for genetic replication that formed the underlying structure for behaviour (even when human culture was seen to have the power to work against 'nature'). While biology provided the basic material for human development, for psychoanalytical theories culture, and in particular patriarchy, set out the expected roles that females and males were expected to fit. What each of them have insisted, or presumed, is that gender identity is aligned along a continuum, with femininity and masculinity representing the alternate polarities. Practically this means that women can not be men and men can not be women, anything else would have to be deviations from the normative polarities. However, psychoanalysis, in its critique of 'normality', attempts to account for the polymorphous tendencies of human sexuality through notions of feminine men and masculine women.

This view that gender is aligned along such a polarised continuum has been



quite a powerful one in social thought. A number of ‘scientific’ theories have been developed on the overlapping zones of psychology and more social models of development. Such theories, whose assertions closely resemble the ‘commonsense’ notions of my colleagues, have suggested that gender identity begins with recognition of genital difference, and that this develops along defined stages until a psychologically ‘healthy’ child gains an understanding of gender constancy; that male and female are differentiated categories rooted in biological difference; that once ‘appropriately’ labeled, one will remain male or female. The more children are able to label behaviours as gender specific, the more they are able to adopt these behaviours, especially if they are reinforced by parents, peers and teachers (Kohlberg 1966; Bem 1989).

This cognitive socialisation maintains a strong relationship with the biological paradigm. It also draws on psychology, particularly the developmental psychology of Piaget. As such, sex [gender] difference is presumed, not explained. This presumption appears to be based in biology, since genital difference is necessarily connected to gender constancy. As the biology of difference is regarded as given, so too the social environment within which these differences are given expression. As much as it purports to be a theory of *social* learning, its presumptions suggest that our biological self (*sex*) is the core of identity over which is laid a panoply of social conventions and expectations (our *gendered* self) (Connell 1995: 22).

## ***Learning Roles***

This idea of gender as a bipolar dimension ran through most comments in the staffroom. But some also placed more stress on the influence of different socialising agents such as parents, school, peers and popular culture. There is a sense, here, in which gender is learned in a similar way as other behaviours (Mischel 1966); that children observe the world around them and model themselves, initially on their parents/carers; and increasingly the behaviours of girls and boys are differentially rewarded by parents/carers, teachers and peers (Kessler and McKenna 1978); these behaviours, or roles become internalised as children begin to anticipate the consequences of particular behaviours (Bandura 1977). In this paradigm 'role models' take on a critical function in the socialisation process.

It is this differential reinforcement that is seen to produce distinct gender categories. The distinction between 'rule keeping' girls and 'rule breaking' boys, as found in my colleagues' comments, can be read as one produced by such differential reinforcement. Much feminist research in the 1980s investigated the school as a socialising agent, looking at the ways that teacher behaviours, the curriculum and classroom management act to reinforce social norms about male and female behaviour. The focus of this work is admittedly on the socialisation of girls into subordinate positions, the socialisation of boys into dominant positions being implied. Schools were considered to utilise a number of processes by which such socialisation occurred: the

organisation of the school along gendered lines: teacher strategies for controlling and motivating pupils, the organisation and content of lessons; informal interactions between teachers and pupils, and a failure to challenge pupil's stereotypical attitudes and activities (Spender 1984; Stanworth 1988; Delamont 1990).

### ***Children as Active Agents***

While the above research tended to focus on the differential effects of school processes and the aberrant behaviour of teachers, others began to conclude that children themselves were active in producing these subjectivities. In this sense, then, the 'quiet schoolgirl' appropriates a conservative femininity as a means of achieving particular goals - academic success - within the constraints of gendered expectations of female behaviour (Anyon 1983; French & French 1993; Stanley 1993). The 'disruptive boy' can also be regarded as a deliberate strategy used to attract teacher attention or command authority within the classroom (Croll & Moses 1991), or to use 'rule breaking' as part of a symbolic resistance to schools. Such male resistance is also articulated with social class (Willis 1977) and 'race' (Sewell 1997).

These studies are important because they argue that socialisation is not something that only occurs in the early years of infancy and is thus internalised once and for all. Rather the codes of appropriate 'sexed' behaviour continue to be learned throughout life (Davies 1984). They also invoke a cognitively active subject who interprets situations and acts in

accordance with the anticipated consequences (Bandura 1977). Therefore socialising agents are not unidirectional transmitters of social norms, of which children are the passive receivers. All actors, both the parent and the child, the teacher and the pupil, are simultaneously conditioned by and conditioners of others.

### ***Constructing the Difference***

Some socialisation theories suggest a much greater determinacy for environmental factors, especially social structures of dominance. These theorisations also place an emphasis on the collective rather than individual character of gender identities. The concept of patriarchy, while a highly disputed term within contemporary feminism (Gottfreid 1998), avers to the formation of gender identities as social categories. These theories have tended to be grouped under the generic title of ‘social constructionism’.

Within this vein, some socialist feminists have drawn on Marxism to give an historical materialist reading of patriarchy (Hartman 1981; Hartsock 1987); while pro-feminist men have turned to the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1987, 1995) (developing the work of the Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci’s use of hegemony), or ‘normative gender’ (Weeks 1985) to suggest a similarly collective understanding of masculinity. Indeed, the concept ‘masculinity’ has been seen by John MacInnes (1998) as a means by which patriarchy can sustain its hegemony.

## ***Taking on the Challenge***

The passing of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the provision of funding aimed at improving educational attainment, opened up spaces for feminist research and praxis in schools in the 1980s. Feminist activists, teachers and academics felt legitimised and authorised in their attempts to detail the ways girls were disadvantaged by a patriarchal schooling system (Whyte et al. 1985:3). The focus for research was to describe the ways schools discriminated against girls while practitioners developed what came to be termed 'girl friendly' practices. These tended to emphasise inequalities in staffing patterns; stereotypes contained in textbooks and reading schemes; gender differentiation in school uniform; preferential treatment of boys by teachers; differential organisation in registration and lining up; and sex-typing in play activities (Weiner 1989; 1990). The influence of sex-role theory here can be easily detected. This work brought into being a number of significant research projects such as the Gender Action Project (GAP) in Waltham Forest (Frith & Mahony 1994) and work in Norfolk First and Middle schools aimed at raising awareness of sex-stereotyping (May & Rudduck in Weiner 1994). In most of these, positive 'role models', such as women engineers, politicians and scientists, were given great importance (see also Arnott, et al 1996).

A different spin has been given to the terms of the gender debate in education of late, with popular concern focusing on an apparent underachievement of boys (see OFSTED 1993 and EOC 1996). Feminists

have rightly raised concerns about the emergence of this 'official' concern at a time when the performance of some girls has continued to improve. However, for the purposes of this discussion, what is important is the continued centrality of 'role models' as a necessary pedagogic tool in the armoury of teachers. Official calls for more male teachers in primary schools (TES 1998) are premised upon the notion that this male presence, as opposed to a female presence, will provide models of masculinity that will disengage boys from anti-school sub-cultures. This approach to the omnipotent potential of male role models in schools ignores the doubts raised about the extraction of role model theory drawn from feminist practice with girls, and applied to the (still) dominant sex (Connell 1996; Jackson and Salisbury 1996); and ignores the constructions of male authority or doubtful sexuality placed upon male primary school teachers by parents and female colleagues (Skelton 1994 ).

### ***The Limitations of Roles***

I would agree that the social sphere contains roles, or socially sanctioned expectations that work to determine gender as a bipolar dimension; and that parents, schools, peers and wider culture play their part in constructing gender in a particular fashion. Role theory has been very productive, at least in terms of feminist and pro-feminist concerns in education. It has offered teachers practical means by which to engage with colleagues, children and policy.

However, some of the research conducted using role theory raised issues that problematised this theorisation. Some of the research conducted in primary schools suggested that teachers tended to emphasise 'management' rather than 'curriculum' issues (Smith 1994). This meant that concern was mainly expressed in terms of inappropriate behaviours - disruption and aggression shown by boys, and lack of assertiveness by girls, rather than what was taught, how it was taught and the materials used. Such was the concentration of the comments made in the staffroom conversation framing this discussion. This research raised questions about the strategies adopted by teachers in attempting to create more space for girls. The lack of any explicit anti-sexist work (curriculum emphasis) might shield girls from boys behaviours but did not challenge them. It also questioned the concentration on positive career models for girls as a way of avoiding dealing with the complexities of daily interactions in the classroom. The research also suggested that attention needed to be paid to the way certain curriculum subjects were gendered. Girls in a secondary school study also complained that they felt as if *they* were the 'problem' because they didn't show enough assertiveness or interest in technological subjects (Frith and Mahony cited in Weiner 1994). The boys attitudes towards more 'domestic' subjects, such as the natural sciences or foreign languages were not problematised in the same way

These critiques from 'within' point to more fundamental questions about the limitations of role theory and socialisation theories in general. Most

crucially is its tendency towards the construction of abstract genders (Carrigan et. al. 1985; Thorne 1993). Its application within educational research has resulted in a lack of attention and importance given to the particular context of the school, reducing the 'multiple realities' of school life and its complex interactions to some 'generalised description of the 'interaction' between home and school' (Davies 1983: 162). At other times the gender structuring of schools is seen to be reduced to the aberrant behaviour of individual teachers (Mac An Ghaill 1994: 46). Gender identities become unitary and homogenous, leaving most socialisation theories ill-equipped to explain the variations and conflicts within gender roles (Carrigan et. al. 1985: 79). Socialisation theory is seen then, in most part, to detail social expectations of male and female behaviours as if they were homogenous categories disconnected from any historical or cultural location. It takes the specific characteristics of dominant male behaviours in Western Europe and North America, and translates these into universals that cross historical and cultural boundaries (Connell 1987, 1995)

## **A Brief Comment on How Far I have Travelled and Where I Might Go**

In the introduction to this chapter I explained that I hoped its structure did not imply a sequential development from simple (biological) to complex (poststructuralist) thinking about gender and masculinity. My intention is not to set up different theories in order to prove their inadequacy and, therefore, the superiority of a different theory. I hope that I have demonstrated that



embedded within the commonsense ideas about gender that my colleagues and myself deployed in the staffroom discussion outlined above, were a number of theories available to us in the culture. I am using the idea of culture developed by Scheurich (1998). Culture can be conceptualised as a framework where intersections, or nodules represent key organising concepts for a society - freedom, democracy, individuality, etc., which are connected by inter-linking meanings. Within this framework some concepts, such as gender, are more primary than others, such as meat eating (though there will be collectivities of individuals for whom issues surrounding meat eating are viewed as more foundational than gender). I will extend this idea further in the following discussions, but for the moment, what is important is the understanding that certain ways of thinking about gender were available to my colleagues and myself; that these ways of thinking were not necessarily conscious - in the sense of being rationally worked through; but that they provided us with the means by which the behaviours of boys in our classrooms could be conceived of as 'problematic' and explained in terms of biology and/or socialisation.

While each of the paradigms critiqued above are distinct, and their key concepts cannot be collapsed into each other, my argument is that they represent different ways of dealing with the same problematic - how can social, political and economic differences between women and men be explained within the modern intellectual tradition? In other words, how can modernism provide an explanation for these differences in an age of

universalism, of a formal commitment to the equality of all human beings and a belief in rationality as the foundation of human thought and progress, without recourse to patriarchal feudalism (MacInnes 1998)?

Although the biological paradigm might appear to reach back to a pre-modern claim of 'natural' difference, it does so on the basis of science. Sex differences are to be found in the 'dimorphic facts of human biology' (Hood-Williams 1996: 3) even though human culture may work against these natural givens (Dawkins 1989). These 'facts' are 'discovered' by objective scientific inquiry. Genetics is a very modernist kind of exploration, grounded in the very rationality that gave birth to the Enlightenment. Psychoanalysis, and its off-shoots, psychology and psychotherapy, similarly attempt to resolve this modernist dilemma. Here, a 'natural' sexual polymorphism interacts with human culture, through the medium of the unconscious, and produces social gender. Gender itself is almost regarded as a form of neurosis. As with gender labeling theories, the social is given a greater determinacy, though the biological is not cut loose. This notion that gender is a construct of culture, and therefore changeable, has formed the basis of feminist and pro-feminist political projects, including those in education. Central to this more political understanding of gender is the 'sex' and 'gender' distinction. Beneath the positive assertion that social, political and economic differences between women and men are cultural, lies the relative fixity of biological sex as dimorphic and of a necessary distinction between biology and culture (Butler 1990a & 1994; Hood-Williams 1996; Yuval-Davies 1998). Biology is as

much a cultural product of modernity as is socialisation.

Each of the paradigms, therefore, can be seen to place greater emphasis on one or the other pole of the sex/gender distinction without radically disrupting this primary distinction. Also, in maintaining this distinction they assume that which they set out to explain - biological paradigms presume sexual dimorphism as much as socialisation theories presume a 'cultural' gender.

Despite, or rather, because of my critique of these paradigms, I want to suggest that it is possible to re-read them, to reconfigure some of the elements of each paradigm and make new meaningful linkages. The biological paradigm may be too reductionist a set of theories, but they do attest to the embodiment of gender; that gender identity involves particular kinds of corporeality; that our bodies, their physical dimensions and parts and the body's functions both potentiate and place limits upon what sorts of gender identity can be constructed. This is the point I think Steven Rose was making in his arguments about the structural limitations to evolutionary adaptation. Psychoanalysis speaks to the power of our imaginative relations with ourselves and the world, our feeling responses that escape containment within overly cognitive explanations of social practice. And socialisation theories, particularly feminist and social constructionist, draw our attention to identity formation occurring within socio-historical contexts, in the midst of extra-personal relations that both give rise to particular forms of social agency and constrain them.

## Looking Beyond the Divide

Embodied, imaginative, agentic and socio-historical identity These are the themes that I argue can help me look beyond gender as difference, to go beyond asking what gender or masculinity is and begin asking how and why gender becomes difference.

### *Language and Culture*

In asking the *how* and *why* questions in relation to gender and masculinity I am making a particular ontological claim. The explanatory concepts utilised by my colleagues and myself in our staffroom discussion about boys' behaviours, and the culturally available theories that were embedded in these concepts (the meaning linkages), spoke of a reality that was defined in particular ways. Firstly, reality consisted of an observable world. We could *describe* boys' behaviours from what we observed of them. The descriptions of femininity/masculinity offered by the different theoretical paradigms are remarkably similar, and lend weight to the argument that masculinity is what men *do*. Masculinity, then, is an ontological fact. Secondly, human rationality can be applied to this reality. Through rational, scientific inquiry the human intellect can reflect upon its own being in the world and can understand both the genesis and dimensions of human existence (as well as that of nature - of which we are both part of and separate from). Biologists can observe the natural world, identify patterns and uncover the rules that

appear to govern the natural order. Sociologists engage in a similar practice, but directed towards the social world (remember the distinction between biology and culture cited above), including the detailing of the effects of power relations. Psychoanalysts don't necessarily work with the same kind of entity, since they do not meet the unconscious directly. But, they do work with its manifestations - neurosis and psychosis. Though the 'science' of psychoanalysis has been disputed (see Mitchell 1990), it can still be understood as applying an analytical rationality to the manifestations of the unconscious and postulating the unconscious as an ontological fact. However, psychoanalysis also interrupts this process through the invoking of the imagination, something I will attend to shortly.

The third dimension of reality implicitly defined by these theoretical paradigms is that we can represent this reality, to a greater or lesser extent, through language; that language can stand apart from the reality it seeks to represent; and it is through the representational properties of language that we can engage in rational discourse - formulate different theories based on the same reality and argue as to how 'truthful' or valid a description of reality they offer. Some biologists will argue that their genetic theories provide a more valid description and explanation of human behaviour, including sexual difference. Alternatively, sociologists, particularly feminist and socialist sociologists would claim that their descriptions/explanations speak of the 'truth' of power relations as structuring social reality, including the role of patriarchy in constructing a gender order of masculine dominance

What if language was not primarily representational, but was itself more agentic in constituting the reality it describes

*The division of people into males and females is so fundamental to our talk as usual and to our understandings of identity, that it is generally understood as a natural fact of the real world rather than something we have learned to see as natural (Davies 1993: 7).*

As Bronwyn Davies says, it is almost unimaginable to think of the world without this dichotomy. The language that infused the cultural context of my colleagues, myself and the children in our classrooms, even when being used to describe and give explanation for differentiated gender behaviours, already presupposed that which it sought to explain. Gender *as difference* is already inherent in the actual terms we are required to use to speak of gender. It is not that the language we use represents something else - scientific 'fact', research claims, philosophical discourse, that speaks of gender difference, but it is such that we can only speak of gender *as difference*. The terms available to us, such as sex/gender, male/female, masculinity/femininity presume their own relational, dichotomous definitions. Within the logic of gender, masculinity, for instance, is related to (articulated with) its attributes - assertiveness, physicality, aggression, dominance in public spheres, power. But the attributes themselves define (articulate) masculinity. I want to argue

that the logic of gender presupposes the 'existence' of masculinity and femininity as distinct and dichotomous categories, but as distinct and dichotomous categories within the logic of gender. Briefly, then, gender presupposes and refers to masculinity and femininity as distinct and definite categories which, when considered (or assembled) together constitute gender as a meta-category, which is itself definable in terms of masculinity and femininity. The semantic logic of gender that infuses our language, and structures our understanding of the 'reality' of gender, involves a double articulation that establishes its logic through a semantic circularity.

### ***Speaking A Reality Into Existence***

The staffroom discussion that is a prelude to this chapter can be looked at in a different way. Instead of a group of individuals *describing* the already existing reality of masculinity (and by inference, its relational other, femininity), we were involved in *linguaging* the world. We were speaking the reality of gender *as difference* into being. The very linguistic terms and concepts available to us to speak of gender actively set out an ontological terrain that determined that masculine and feminine genders are distinct categories and that children had to be one or the other, regardless of whether we articulated this dichotomy through biological or sociological paradigms.

As well as being a tool that enables children (and their teachers) to operate in the social world, language also provides the materials by which that social world is constituted and maintained (Davies 1989). Language has a material

power by providing the possibilities of different ways of being, and sets out a commonsense about the social world. Part of this commonsense, or ‘what is obvious and known to everybody’ is that people must be either male or female, and that these are opposite and distinct categories. In this sense, gender is a product of modernist thinking (MacInnes 1998).

### ***The Discursive Formation Of Masculinity***

This constitutive power of language is what I mean by **discourse**. I will refer to masculinity as a discursive formation, an ensemble of articulated positions (Mouffe 1992), or social places - strength, power, rationality, etc., that, articulated with each other, and in relation to its relational other femininity, which itself is an ensemble of articulated positions - weakness, nurturance, domesticity, constitute masculinity as a distinct and definite gender. This gives masculinity its objective sense of being, its sense of regularity across different locations. The staffroom discussion constantly referred to masculinity as a plural noun and one not specific to our school, as something associated with all boys and men. I will extend this sense of regularity in the discussion on the imaginative character of masculinity.

Discourses have the power to act upon us, to constitute reality in certain ways, to define what is imaginable and possible because discourses are always articulated through, and articulated with specific regimes of power. Discourse is always instituted in social relations of power (Mc Nay 1994, Foucault 1991). My discussion of three major paradigms of gender -



biological, psychoanalytical and social, demonstrated the ways each of them attempt to set in place particular ways of knowing gender, establishing conceptual boundaries that allow us to speak of gender, but also confines this languaging within particular semantic logics. My discussion of these paradigms also points to the way these discursive productions of gender are interconnected with various political projects, that is instituted in particular social relations. Conservative discourses on gender, for instance, when articulated with political formations, as we saw with the Thatcher and Reagan governments, can reconfigure social relations in highly patriarchal and atavistic ways. Alternatively, feminist, and queer discourse has allowed gender to be thought of in radically new ways, bringing into existence new forms of social organisation and social relation.

### ***Subjected Gender - Narratives Of Self***

Embedded in the staffroom discussion, and the ontological terrain it invoked, was a notion of ourselves as authors of our own lives. I can speak, not only of others (the boys in my class), but of myself. The 'I' is a given, an already existing entity. This 'I' is born of modernity and Enlightenment rationality. As such, I (or the 'I') is bestowed with a self-reflecting consciousness, the ability to reflect upon what I do, discern why I do things in the ways I do, and to hold out the possibility of authoring my own life. Yet, the notion of discourse I have outlined above appears to render this potential authorship absent. If I am in fact authored by impersonal discourses - the objective moments of masculinity, then in what sense can I imagine my own

authorship? I find myself then, and therefore how I conceptualise the behaviours of boys in my class, in a paradox. In a sense, I don't want to resolve this paradox. Indeed, it is my view that it is not resolvable. I want to argue that rather than possessing identities, of our actions emanating from coherent and unitary selves, our ideas of ourselves as male or female, and the properties of strength or weakness, aggression or meakness that are attributed to these identities, are positions (social spaces) into which we are placed or place ourselves. So far this resembles the process of socialisation discussed above. What is different is that as well as being made subject to (socialised into) gender identities, we are also the subjects of gender. In that sense we are both authored and authors. The modernist Western intellectual tradition rests upon the dual ideas of agency and autonomy, that our agency is a product of our rational consciousness (Davies 1993). Indeed, the intellectual discourses of the Enlightenment have enabled the very critiques of Enlightenment thought that I am engaged in - a case of the gamekeeper turned poacher.

This taking up of gender discourses as if they were our own, this authorship can be referred to as **narratives of self**. By this I mean that our identities are made meaningful to the extent that they are placed in various storylines or narratives (Davies 1993; Francis 1998). Framed by dominant gender discourses, most narratives of self necessarily involve presenting oneself as either male or female, of identity as unitary (Di Steffano 1990). The construction of narratives of self around a unitary subjectivity necessarily

involves the editing out, or repudiation of other possible selves. and the promulgation of identity as built around an 'essential' core. This essentialisation of identity is seen to fix different social subjectivities - women, women of colour, lesbians and gays within subordinate relations of power and present white, male, heterosexuality as coterminous with power and authority (hooks 1981, 1991; Flax 1990; Brah 1992; Anthias & Yuval-Davies 1993; Butler 1994; Gutterman 1994; Aziz 1995).

### ***Taking Up The Offer Of Gender - The Habitus Of Gender***

So far, the discussion of gender as discursively produced and working through narratives of self still speaks to the objective moment of masculinity. The term 'narrative' suggests that the boys identities are authored by discourse. However, I am also arguing that they are involved in authoring themselves, of placing themselves within particular storylines and making those discourses their own (Davies 1993). These resources become the 'stuff of self making' with which a subjective sense of self is recognised and articulated (Bourdieu 1987, 1995). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of **Capital** becomes the next theoretical idea important in my emerging thesis. In this regard my work looks also to that of Paul Connolly (1998) and Diane Reay (1998). Pierre Bourdieu (1987: 3-4) defined four types of capital: *economic* - which refers not only to the amount of financial resources possessed by an individual family, but their position in relation to the dominant mode of production, *cultural* - the valued knowledges and practices within particular social settings, *social* - the networks of relations and connections that

individuals are inserted into, and which may confer upon that individual status; and *symbolic* - the general notion of status acquired by an individual by virtue of the different types and quantities of capital they possess. Applied to the emergence of gender identity, boys, as a sub-category of males in a patriarchal society, can be seen as possessing a particularly valued form of symbolic capital. We can see, then, how the concept of capital enables me to begin working out the connections and relations between the objective and subjective moments of identity, the structural and the personal, the deterministic and the agentic. The question remains though, do all boys, by virtue of being male, possess the same amounts of symbolic (or other forms of) capital; and what forms of capital become available to the boys in my classes in their narratives of self, in their attempts to author their own identities?

I have already mentioned above that the ways we 'do' our genders on a day to day basis and from one moment to the next are largely sub or even unconscious. These ways of being appear so obvious and natural that it becomes almost unimaginable to 'be' any other way. This habitual sense of our identities is what Pierre Bourdieu (1995) refers to as **Habitus**: that is the dispositions of thought, feeling, gesture, posture and action by which '[t]he opposition between male and female is realized' (Bourdieu 1995: 70). These habitual ways of being are not 'images', they do not imply a falseness, but the material means by which we both apprehend the world - understand others as gendered individuals, and make possible certain kinds of social agency - ways

of being gendered individuals in the world. In Bourdieu's schema, and it is this that makes it an important concept in my own thesis, habitus is always related to, though not subservient to, the prevailing structures of power. This I have already alluded to in my explanation of the concept of capital, above. Although not elaborated by Bourdieu himself, I assert that habitus is also related to subordinate structures of power, or 'subjugated knowledges', such as feminism, queer theory, anti-racism and socialism. Habitus, then, provides the network of dispositions that gives our identities their particular orientations (ways of seeing/being). This notion of gender being a network of dispositions that act as if they were a set of principles by which we performed our gender, circumvents the tendency within Bourdieu's work to conceptualise self-making in a utilitarian fashion, viewing the different forms of capital as mere 'weapons' in an instrumental power struggle (Joppke 1986).

### ***Embodied Males***

The discussion of habitus brings me back to the consideration of the corporeality of gender embodiment. In critiquing the sex/gender dichotomy I questioned the separation of the biological and the cultural. This separation can be seen in the representation of both the unsocialised body of biologism and the oversocialised body of social constructionism (Shilling 1994). The research into gender and education cited above all make constant references to the social practices of boys and girls as they are gendered. The interiority of the children's differentiated psychic relations to themselves and others, and

the exteriority of the childrens' placing by and in social structures are all brought within the frame. Yet the social practices through which and by which the childrens' gender identities are defined are described largely in terms of what they do with/to their bodies. The masculine practices of boys are found in their gestures and postures as much as in their words and thoughts. The description of a school assembly in a girls secondary school by Richard Johnson makes pertinent reference to the wearing of school uniform and makeup, to the bodily presentations and representations that the girls were engaged in (Epstein and Johnson 1998). Similarly, Paul Connolly (1998) describes the sexualised language of boys in a primary school, their referencing of sexuality as coterminous with particular bodily practices. The body is present, though relatively silent in all of these depiction's. Habitus, however, forces us to consider the body as part of the authoring of gender, as more than the inscription of gender on, and the circulation of power through docile bodies (Foucault 1991).

In looking beyond the sexual division of gender I want to bring the body back into the frame and reconsider the possible relationship between the biological and the cultural, of considering how I might understand the corporeal body as both potentiating and limiting social action, and of the body as agentic in the production of gender identities (Shilling 1994). To do this I want to examine the concept of 'leaning on' as developed by Cornelius Castoriadis (1997). What Cornelius Castoriadis suggests is the need to consider in what ways our biological or corporeal beingness potentiates and

limits the social significations [of gender] as [it] is instituted in society. This requires that we accept that the body is not wholly socialised. As John MacInnes (1998) says, the fact that women carry babies is not a product of socialisation. So, bearing children, lactation, menstruation, the differential distribution of body fat and muscle amongst biological males and females provide 'supports' to or 'stimuli' for potential social practices, but by themselves do not provide the necessary conditions for the production of particular social formations. Rather, the social institution of gender 'leans on' what Cornelius Castoriadis calls the 'natural stratum'. The tendency for biological males to possess greater muscle mass than biological females (though we cannot be sure whether the difference has occurred because of the historical gender division of labour) becomes articulated with ideas of power and authority to produce hegemonic masculinity. Yet, there is no necessary logical reason - outside that of the logic of gender - why greater muscle mass (compared to body/fat ratio needed in gestation) should translate into social power. Similarly, the possession of a penis and a vagina (or an anus or mouth) might potentiate the emergence of a sexuality structured around intercourse (or fellatio), but of themselves these physical properties do not necessitate the rendering of intercourse as the symbolic dominance of masculinity over women. As I have already argued above it is just as 'logical' to re-imagine the vagina (or the anus) actively enveloping the penis (or some other erect object). The fact of sexual reproduction in the species might demand a minimum of heterosexual desire, but this says nothing about the 'unending alchemy of desire' that is observed in history (Castoriadis 1997

230). The social institution of gender and the corporeal body 'lean on' each other in a non-deterministic relationship - as imbrication.

It might be fruitful, then, to consider that our genetic makeup produces bodies with certain qualities; that these qualities can potentiate particular kinds of practice; that the social formation of gender requires that these properties be articulated with other properties in special ways, so giving the social practice of gender its orientations.

### ***The Social Imaginary Of Masculinity***

So far I have talked about gender and masculinity as if they existed in reality. Yet, I have also argued for the importance of the concept discourse and the bringing of reality into existence through discourse. Discussion of the relationship between the corporeal body and culture speaks of there being a reality beyond the social institution of gender (or the discursive production of gender), at least in the sense of there being a body, for instance, that already brings with it a certain array of properties. But it goes beyond that and asserts that 'reality' might better be understood as the 'leaning on' of corporeality and culture. In this sense I want to argue that gender and masculinity have a reality. The question is, though, what is the nature of this reality?

Masculinity is referred to in the literature as if it was a really existing entity (although hegemonic masculinity is referred to variously as an 'idea' (Davies



1993), or an ideology (MacInnes 1998)). Masculinity is defined as involving a separation from relationship (with the feminine) and a projection into the external and the public (Gilligan 1982; Seidler 1991) or of a dominant masculinity characterised by 'heterosexuality, power, authority, aggression and technical competence' (Mac an Ghaill 1994: 12). These definitions are posited at the same time that it is argued that there are multiple forms of masculinity. In fact, as I have argued above, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has been developed to account for this. What, then, does masculinity or hegemonic masculinity refer to? Critics have argued that despite the similarity in the descriptions of masculinity, these do not seem to relate to empirically existing men, not in any substantive form, leading them to reject the terms as useful (MacInnes 1998; Kerfoot & Whitehead 1998).

These critiques of the use of the terms masculinity and hegemonic masculinity point not only to the need for clarity in the use of concepts, but also for the need to go beyond the *what* questions and to ask the *how* and *why* questions. But I want to argue that masculinity remains a useful concept. I agree that masculinity is not an *a priori* ontological fact, and in that respect does not exist as the empirical property of real men. But it does exist as a *social imaginary*, and it is this masculine social imaginary, as it is instituted in social relations that provides masculinity with its objective sense of identity and its appearance as a recurring pattern in the social realm. I am influenced by Cornelius Castoriadis (1997) in developing this concept of the social imaginary

In discussing social class, Pierr Bourdieu (1987) warned against conflating different levels of analysis, of mistaking social class as a heuristic concept with the subjective sense of individuals being positioned within social class locations or their own class-making. The same goes for gender and masculinity. The masculine social imaginary refers firstly to an objective sense of identity. Rather like Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'Imagined Communities', the masculine social imaginary allows the individual boy or man to imagine themselves in relation to a wider community of boys and men. The social imaginary does more than make connections with the present. It also allows the individual to negotiate a relationship with the past, albeit it an imagined past. So the individual boy can connect himself with all of the boys and men that have come before him, firstly, perhaps, through his father(s), uncles and grandfather(s) and on to the imagined communities of men in the past. It is in these ways that nationhood and heroism work. And, it can also be seen to work forwards in time, to negotiate a relationship with possible futures. The 'lads' in Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour* can be seen to be engaging in such a negotiation with the present, past and possible futures, some of which were materially tangible (there were actual factories where they might work), and others that can best be understood as 'imaginary' - men, masculinity, manhood.

This is not to suggest an idealist philosophy. Masculinity is not just an *idea*, imagined or otherwise. The masculine social imaginary is powerful only

in so far as it is able to articulate itself with particular social formations. In this case, as John MacInnes (1998) rightly points out, masculinity is articulated with patriarchy and its instituting practices. However, and this is where I diverge from John MacInnes' thesis, masculinity is not simply an ideological tool to keep patriarchy in place. The two do sit in a deterministic relation with each other. My argument is that patriarchy provides the masculine social imaginary with a particular semantic logic - dimorphous sex, physical presence ,etc., and in that sense is determinant. But, patriarchy cannot provide for the content of the contextually specific moments of self-making. Patriarchy may set the semantic limits for imagining masculinity, but masculinity is, ultimately, a set of material practices. As such, they are always open to contestation and to the possibility of being articulated differently.

The ontological assumption of the staff room discussion contained three elements - the assumption of an observable world that can be defined and categorised; the assumption of a self-reflective *cogito* that can also reflect on the world; and the assumption of a world that can be represented symbolically. These assumptions can be seen as processes of 'world making' and capture the essential characteristics of what I call the social imaginary - the world imagined in terms of these assumptions. In turn, this imaginative institution of society imposes a particular kind of order upon the world. This order is achieved through conferring meaning upon objects, inserting them into meaningful relations, that is articulating different discursive elements together, and relating the emergence of particular social formations with the

emergence of life and society (Castoriadis 1997: 319-20). The masculine social imaginary, as a key signification within modernity, imagines masculinity as gender and gender as identity. Masculinity is not an appendix, but is inherent in any sense of coherence and unity, and this coherence is established through the relations that can be negotiated (imagined) with the nostalgia and anticipation of masculinity. The imagined memory of masculinity seems to impel the narratives of self to produce stories of linearity and boundedness. Masculinity is imagined as real and intact through time, rather than as changing, contingent and fragile. Masculinity is never, then, fully accomplished. It has to continually re-establish itself, re-insert objects into meaningful relations, confer meaning and re-negotiate relations with the past and future.

## **Conclusion - What Is This All About?**

Through the concepts I have outlined above I am positioning myself within a post-structuralist approach. In doing this, I am inverting the ontological assumptions embedded in the staffroom discussion by foregrounding the constitutive nature of language. As a consequence, I view masculinity more as a verb than a noun, as an emergent social formation. I have not attempted a new synthesis of biological, psychological and sociological paradigms, but I have attempted to construct a theoretical framework that takes account of both the objective and subject senses of identity, of masculinity's seeming regularity, and masculinity as a process of self-making. I have also argued that both the objective and subjective sense of masculine identity exist in a non-determinant relation with the corporeal body, a 'leaning on' of both

corporeality and culture. And, importantly, I am making the claim that masculinity, as a discursive formation, is not to be found in some 'obvious' empiricism, but works through the *social imaginary*, yet, which is always instituted in and through social relations and relations of power.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**MAKING IT REAL -**

**REFLECTIONS ON**

**METHODOLOGY**

# Introduction

I approach(ed) this research in Denzin's 'fifth moment' and on the cusp of the 'sixth' moment (Denzin 1997:3-7). Despite the partial certainties with which I began my methodological journey in 1993, as will be detailed below, I was already becoming aware, intuitively and cognitively, that considerations about the relationship between research acts and their representations, and the ways in which research texts could be classified as valid or not, were problematic. My beginnings, then, might best be read as part of a more generalised response to these methodological disruptions. I found myself in the best and worst worlds for educational research. The best, because new possibilities for thinking research were becoming increasingly legitimised, the worst because the culturally absorbed assumptions about what characterised research that I held, were thrown into uncertainty. It is this best/worst that forms a creative tension in the methodological descriptions and analysis that follows.

When I began this investigation into the construction of masculine identities in a primary school context, I was heavily influenced by two pieces of research, the Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation project (ORACLE) (Galton. et. al 1980), a large-scale observational study of primary classrooms, and the symbolic interactionist work of Andrew Pollard's (1987) *The Social World of the Primary Classroom*. I was interested in whether the kind of pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interactions witnessed in the ORACLE study would be found in my own classroom. While the ORACLE study did not focus specifically upon the gender

dimensions of classroom interactions, I felt that a comparison between its findings and the interactions of boys in my own classroom could indicate whether what was happening in this location was typical of more general behaviours found in other classrooms. As will be discussed below, this drew me, in part, to thinking of masculinity as something that existed in a real empirical sense. Therefore it became something that I could describe, that I could define it and map its movements. Andrew Pollard's micro-analysis of classroom interactions, on the other hand, focused on the ways these interactions produced particular negotiated orders, and how these were open to change and transformation. His concepts of the 'working consensus' and 'interest-at-hand' provided powerful tools for the descriptive analysis of the boys' gendered practices. But this symbolic interactionist approach pulled me away from any easy assumption of masculinity having an empirical fixity

These two citations, Maurice Galton and Andrew Pollard, represent the tension that lies at the heart of this study. And, like the other post positivist responses to the methodological crises of representation and legitimation that characterise this 'fifth moment', my research contained the hope of resolving this tension. The ORACLE research offers a metaphor of 'maps', of identifying features in a social landscape, fixing their locations and formulating symbolic representations. Reality then becomes available in the form of a symbolic offering whose validity resides in its correspondence with the observable features of the landscape. But unlike a map of the Brecon Beacons, the marks and symbols on the ORACLE map are not drawn in such



a way as to allow the visitor to walk through a particular school. The post positivist concern with generating formal theory and the generalisability of research findings to other settings (Hammersley 1992) creates a rather abstract representation, where the characterisation of teacher and pupil types can only relate to particular teachers and pupils through acts of inference and best fit.

As a fledgling teacher I remember reading the ORACLE study reports. In the whirl of learning 22 new names, locating myself in relation to colleagues who had been teaching for decades, working out the unwritten codes and practices of the school, and coping with what felt like an insurmountable body of work, the ORACLE findings represented something quite concrete. The relationships between teaching style and pupil response suggested in the ORACLE study offered me apparently practical ways into this curious job of teaching. And why not? These findings were drawn from a longitudinal study which had a 'scientific' feel to it. When I came to consider carrying out a research project for my MEd, this metaphor of mapping, of picturing the social landscape of the classroom and the boys' interactions came to be a particularly potent one. I was drawn to the study that had already informed my day to day practice as a teacher. Hence, the desire to map out the boys' interactions.

Andrew Pollard's study, though, appeared to work with quite a different metaphor, that of dance. I call it dance because his descriptions of processes

of negotiation and performance appeared akin to that of dancers. The children were placed within an arena wherein they had to take account of others in order to have any sense of self, rather like two bodies on a dance floor intuitively coordinating their movements in relation to the other, but with there being no obvious leading partner since the movement of one was imbricated already with that of the other. This kind of interactionism intrigued me and seemed to offer some hope of capturing the complexity of boys' behaviours. Unlike the rather abstract map of Galton's work, interactionism offered a kind of particularism, a flavour of this school, of these boys at this time.

By the time I came to analyse this 'data' and begin writing this thesis I was already gripped by Denzin's 'fifth moment' and moving headlong into the 'sixth'. I was no longer able to hold onto either metaphor. A new one was needed. I have decided, then, to construct this chapter around the process of moving from the temporary security provided by the fixity of mapping and the interactionism of dance to uncertainty. To achieve this, I have organised the chapter around a series of 'problematics' - *the problematic of participant observation* and *the problematic of bounded systems*. Within each of these problematics I deconstruct the assumptions embedded within the research practice I was engaging in. By deconstruction I refer to the process of identifying the gaps between what a text (in this case my research) claims to be trying to say and what meanings it actually conveys (see Derrida 1978). Through deconstruction I move from predominantly asking 'what' questions -

attempts to fix definitions of research methods and reality, to 'how' questions - how do particular research approaches define reality and produce the researcher and research subjects in particular ways. These four problematics take one research activity which involved the participation of the children in the research process. The deconstructive process I employ foregrounds the epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded in my research approach and problematises the concepts of 'participant-observation' and 'observable cultures'.

This takes account of my reading of my research and the approach I take to analysis and representation of the 'data'. For analytical ease I prefix the discussion of the problematics with a more descriptive section outlining my original research questions; methods of data collection; and a discussion of my use of participant-observation. This section will also provide the reader with definitions of the categories used in my observation schedule, definitions that will be necessary to refer back to when reading the analysis chapter.

## **Mapping and Meaning - A Creative Tension**

I was intent on mapping the patterns of interaction engaged in by the boys in my class. I was concerned, though, not just to record the boys' behaviours but to describe and explain them, to gain insights into the meanings behind their actions in the particular setting of their primary classroom. This can be seen in my original research questions

### *Research Questions*

- What behaviours do boys display in different group contexts and to what extent do these differ according to task and group composition?
- What connections might there be between these behaviours and learning performance - attending to task; co-operating with others; learning outcomes, and the connections between these and group/task composition?
- What skills can be identified that encourage boys to engage in positive group work?

This entailed both the mapping of the boys' behaviours and an investigation into these behaviours as 'meaning-making practices'. I set out a number of means by which such data could be collected:

### *Methods of Data Collection*

- Observation of the boys' behaviours in different group combinations (mixed and single sex groups), group type and task setting;
- Definition of behaviour categories on basis of observations in relation to group combination, group type and task setting;
- Selection of a sample group of boys to be observed in different group and task settings;
- Design of intervention strategies to ascertain the boys' perceptions of group roles and processes; for the promotion of co-operative and collaborative group work; and the development of a reflexive approach to their work behaviours;

## ***Mapping The Field***

I had planned to keep a detailed research diary of my daily observations. This, in combination with the interviews, would allow me to marry description and analysis in order to ground theory construction in the voices of those who are the subjects of the study (Shostak 1986:155). The hurly-burly of daily classroom life meant that my notes were highly partial and fragmented. I needed something much more structured that would allow me to integrate both teaching and researching.

### **General observation**

ORACLE observed teachers and pupils separately in order to detail different teacher and pupil typologies, and to suggest relationships between them. In order to compose a picture of the kind of interactions the boys were involved in I needed to gather data in three different areas: pupil-pupil interactions, pupil-task interactions; and pupil-teacher interactions. I adapted the categories used in the ORACLE Teacher Record and Pupil Record to produce a 'Pupil Observation Record' (POR). This record comprised both a checklist of different types of interaction and, where possible, a commentary on those interactions (Appendix 1). Alongside these 'Observational Notes', I also maintained complementary 'Theoretical' and 'Methodological Notes' which related my observations to theoretical considerations of gender identity and group work, offered opportunities for ongoing analysis, reflected on my methodological approach and suggested different avenues for data collection (see Hughes 1994). This allowed me to develop a reflective ethnographic

approach to my fieldwork.

### ***group categories***

Group categories were drawn from the analytic framework developed by Maurice Galton and John Williamson (1992). Group types were categorised on the basis of the purposes and outcomes of the grouping, producing four group types: seating; working; collaborative; and co-operative groups:

#### *Group Types*

- ***Seating*** groups - pupils organised around separate and individual tasks;
- ***Working*** groups - pupils involved in individual tasks, all pupils engaged on the same task and aiming at similar outcomes;
- ***Co-operative*** and ***Collaborative*** groups are both co-operative but differ to the degree of co-operation required for the outcome:
- ***Co-operative*** groups - pupils assigned different tasks which contribute towards a common outcome (e.g. Tasks, such as drawing objects, producing a key and labelling shared in the production of a map);
- ***Collaborative*** groups - pupils organised around problem solving activities in which pupils share both tasks and outcome.

### ***group composition***

Following Neville Bennet's (Bennet & Cass 1989) suggestion that the gender composition of classroom groups had an effect on the nature of interactions within them, indeed, arguing that there was a strong sex effect, I

also wanted to explore any possible correlation between boys' behaviours and group composition. The POR therefore included the categories,

- (MS) - Mixed Sex
- (SS) - Single Sex

### ***tasks***

As well as wanting to identify possible correlation between boys' behaviours, grouping strategy and group composition, I was interested in possible connections with task engagement and achievement. In that regard I introduced to the POR a category for tasks. This idea was easier in abstract than in practice, for I had to answer the question as to what activities constituted a task. I decided that labelling tasks as 'English' or 'Science' failed to grasp the complexity of activities contained in each subject area. 'Subjects', after all, refer to bodies of knowledge and their organisation in curricula, not the actual activities that children may be engaged in. Also, using categories based on cognitive processes, such as 'assimilation', caused some uncertainty in me. How could I be sure that the external behaviours I would be able to observe were expressive of particular internal processes. The categories had to represent activities that I could reasonably identify. I therefore adapted the idea of *generic activities* drawn from Robin Alexander's 'Leeds Report' (Alexander, et. al. 1989). *Generic activities* focus the attention of the observer on the kinds of task the child is engaged in. For instance, Writing comprises a generic activity engaged upon in most subject areas. Writing occurs not just in English, but is the main generic activity in Mathematics. In

any one subject area a boy may be involved in a number of generic activities - Writing, Reading and Looking and Listening being possibly the three most common. Since I was not planning to conduct a highly systematic observation, rather recording behaviours over the period of at least one 50 minute lesson each time, the issue for me as an observer was then to identify the dominant activity as the one I would record.

I set out seven Tasks to record the boys' activities against:

- **(R) - *Reading***
- **(W) - *Writing***
- **(LL) - *Looking & Listening***
- **(Coll) - *Collaborative* (activities primarily oriented towards co-operation)**
- **(Con) - *Construction***
- **(D/P) - *Drawing & Painting***
- **(PH) - *Physical***

### ***the three dimensions of interaction***

The POR aimed to record data on three dimensions of interaction - pupil-pupil interactions, that is interactions between boys and between boys and girls; pupil-teacher interactions, looking at the way boys interacted with me as teacher; and pupil-task relation, the ways boys interacted with the curriculum tasks. Each dimension was structured around a series of generic interactions representing the areas I was interested in observing, such as whether a boy



was on or off-task, whether they were working co-operatively with others or if a boy was avoiding interactions with me as teacher. The interactional categories for each dimension of interaction are listed below. My intention was that over the two academic years 1994/5 and 1995/6, I would observe two cohorts of Year 5 (9/10 year old) boys. Using the Pupil Observation Record, I would be able to map out a range of interactions in different group contexts and pupil combinations, the purpose of the general observation of the boys in each cohort was to produce patterns of behaviour that would allow me to interpret these in relation to emergent theoretical models,

### ***Pupil-Pupil Interaction***

*Co-opTskCntc* - Co-operates on task physically

*Co-opTskVerb* - Co-operates on task verbally

*Verb* - Verbal Interaction

*Cntc* - Physical Interaction

*Nint* - No interaction

*InitInt* - Target pupil initiates interaction

*IntfSS* - Interferes with same sex (interrupts boys' activities)

*IntfOS* - Interferes with opposite sex (interrupts girls' activities)

*IntfSev* - Interferes mixed sex (interrupts girls' and boys' activities)

*IntfMal* - Interferes maliciously (hitting, swearing, name calling, stealing)

*IntfPl* - Interferes playfully (joking, laughing, chatting)

### ***Pupil-Teacher Interaction***

*Wait Tch* - Waits for teacher

*Init Tch* - Target pupil initiates contact with teacher

*Tch Init* - Teacher initiates contact with pupil

*Av Int* - Target pupil avoids contact with teacher

*Dis Tch* - Target pupil dismisses teacher's presence

*Int Tch Own/Grp* - Target pupil interacts with teacher on own/as part of a group

### ***Pupil-Task Relationship***

*Tsk Own/Sev/SS* - Target pupil works on-task alone/with others (m/s)/with own sex

*Dstr Own/Sev/SS* - Target pupil significantly distracted from task on own/with others (m/s)/with own sex (extended periods of playful or malicious interference with others leads to distraction from own work)

### ***sample group***

Having made these initial observations, I would select a sample group of **six** boys from each cohort (**12** boys in total), for further detailed observation. The sample group would be chosen on the basis of producing three general groupings relating to 'high', 'medium' and 'low' performance levels. Each boy in the sample group would be traced for the equivalent of a week, attempting to ensure that they were recorded in as full a range of group task,

type and composition. The criteria for selection was based upon the boys' performance across several National Curriculum subjects and Statements of Attainment. Observational studies in the 1980s tended to use criteria based on performance in only mathematics and language (see Bennett & Cass 1989; Galton. et. al. 1989). I wished to extend this so that performance indicators covered not only the logico-deductive knowledges of mathematics and science but also the intuitive knowledges of the arts and problem solving, drawing from a wide range of symbolic modes of knowing. The observation of the sample groups was to record in some detail the face-to-face interactions engaged in, so as to produce a micro-analysis of classroom life.

### ***The Meanings They Make***

Without direct access to the boys' voices, and the difficulties of sustaining a full-time job and doctoral research, I sought to integrate as much of the research as possible into the curricular practices of the class. Research strategies were to be embedded in the termly planning across as many subject areas as possible. I aimed to elicit from the children their perceptions of the gendered character of classroom interactions. However, at the beginning of the project I was unsure how to draw out this information. Instead, the decision about other means of data collection was to be left until the general observation had been conducted. This suggested the adoption of progressive focusing, of my ideas becoming reformed or refined in such a way as to require new kinds of data being collected using different methods

## ***Becoming Clearer***

This process of increasingly clarifying the focus of my research describes well what actually happened. The process of observation clarified my understanding of the categories used in the POR. This meant that I had to reconfigure the data from the observations of the first cohort of boys in light of this development, so that a much fairer comparison could be made between cohorts one and two. The methodological notes that accompanied the POR provided a space for such reflection on practice. The theoretical notes became a space for considering the research in relation to an emerging theoretical framework. This led me to consider other areas of the boys' gendered worlds. Opportunities for these explorations often occurred in the context of the curriculum. An exploration of genre in the children's reading books led to discussions about the gendered nature of characterisation and plot. This in turn led to an attempt to produce 'liberatory stories' (see Davies 1989 for the use of this critical literacy) where traditional male and female characterisations were reversed or story lines disrupted. With gender being a regular topic of consideration in the classroom, because of my research, and sharing my research with the children, discussions arose which led to exploring the gendered character of different aspects of their lives. This often took the form of using the survey format with which they were familiar, since it was a regular element of their mathematical work, whether that was actually in Mathematics, or Geography. The children looked at the frequency of female artists played on breakfast time radio. These activities, while related to my research, in the sense that the research became part of the daily

life of the classroom, did not produce what I regarded as substantive data. I viewed them as providing enriching information, or supportive data. The discussions that surrounded these activities, such as surveys, were as important as the actual data that was collected.

However, reflection on the research did suggest two areas for further substantive data collection. My initial analysis of the data gathered from the first cohort of boys provoked me to ask whether their friendship patterns were as heavily marked by gender as their classroom interactions. My original intention was to observe the boys in the playground. My concern was that this would take up quite a lot of time, bearing in mind that I was a full-time classroom teacher. My interest in the boy's friendship patterns was given new impetus by an activity that was suggested to me by the school's educational psychologist. I was provided with a deceptively simple tool for analysing the degree of social isolation experienced by some of the boys on the Special Needs register. The activity involved the placing of names of friends on a seven branched tree. I immediately identified the possible use of this tool in mapping the boys' friendship patterns.

Although I had originally wanted to interview boys, my testing of interviewing quickly led me to adopt other methods. The boys' responses to my questions about why they disliked sitting next to or working with girls, for instance, provoked very guarded responses, as if the boys were trying to determine what kind of answer they thought I wanted, or were concerned that

a truthful answer would result in a reprimand. My position as their class teacher placed me in a relation of power that I could see no escape from. The boys' responses said more about their relation to me as teacher than about their perceptions of classroom life. And again, time was a factor working against my use of interviews. Reading the work of Bruce Carrington and Geoff Short (1992) on exploring issues of 'race' in predominantly white schools, I came across an activity that they had used to elicit children's perceptions of 'race'. I adapted this idea for my own research, the details of which will be discussed below. For the moment, what is important about the activity is that it allowed me to gather information of the boys' (and girls') perceptions on gender without having to undertake lengthy interviews.

I have outlined above the ways that progressive focusing allowed for the reformulation of my research in light of the data that was collected. But, this process of reflection and the development of an emergent theoretical framework also produced a paradigmatic shift in both the research approach and my research focus. It is this that I want to focus on now.

## **Moving Targets - The Case of Epistemological Drift**

In the following sections I will be focusing on the attempt to involve the children in my class more directly in the research process. Their involvement

was a response, by them, to one of the more substantive pieces of data, that of the elicitation of their perceptions of the gendered world of the classroom. The children's response to me sharing aspects of this data and my initial analysis of it, was to suggest the carrying out of a further survey of gendered attitudes amongst the wider school population. As will be described below such an activity was carried out. My reason for focusing on this, rather than other examples of the research, is that my reflections on the 'problems' encountered during this activity raised fundamental questions about the nature of research. This refers back to Denzin's 'fifth moment' described above. This reflection also occurs amidst the cultural shifts in the academe and wider culture associated with poststructuralism and therefore situates my reflections in Denzin's 'sixth moment' turning reflection into reflexivity. Importantly, though, the process of data collection and that of analysis are situated in different moments, the first in the postpositivist (though, as I will argue below, realist) 'fifth moment', and the second in the (postrealist) 'sixth' moment.

### ***Preamble***

I wanted to find out what the children's ideas were of what constituted 'maleness' and 'femaleness'. Utilising the approach taken by Bruce Carrington and Geoff Short (1992), mentioned earlier, in their work on 'race' in predominantly white schools, the children in my class were set a task within a normal lesson where they were asked to respond to two open questions

*What is good about being a girl?*

*What is good about being a boy?*

Girls and boys were required to answer both questions, the idea being that this would provide some insights into how girls saw themselves and boys, and how boys saw themselves and girls. By familiarising myself with their texts, I was able to draw out a series of conceptualisations based upon the attributes the children had assigned to the different genders and their accompanying descriptors (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis and discussion). Let me briefly illustrate this by looking at some of the attributes and descriptors based on an analysis of the boys' responses to 'What is good about being a girl'. The most common attribute for femaleness produced by the boys was that of 'Fashion'. The accompanying descriptors included the following statements - 'can wear more jewellery'; 'can do more with their hair'; 'can have long hair'; 'can wear better clothes'; 'can wear boys clothes as well'. 'Leisure' was another key attribute associated with femaleness by the boys, which included statements such as - 'can go to Brownies'; 'can go to Girl Guides'; 'can have Barbies'; 'can have dolls'.

The social world of the children appeared to be deeply inscribed with difference. I wanted to explore the children's differentiated understandings of femaleness and maleness. I produced a table of the children's own descriptors organised in four sections, 'What Girls Think of Boys', 'What Girls think of Girls', 'What Boys Think of Boys', 'What Boys Think of Girls', in order to



present it to the class as a focus for discussion and reflection. I chose not to introduce my conceptual attributes at this stage, wishing the children to see and respond to their own words. The discussion did indeed show up the diversity of understandings held, even as certain patterns emerged. And it was these patterns, rather than the individual differences, that the children gradually began to focus upon, raising questions about how these might be produced. Suggestions included the socialisation of children into these ways of thinking, with parents playing the major socialising role.

Within this melee, somebody, I think a boy, asked if it was possible to undertake the same exercise with other children in the school. This was immediately seized upon by the other children and produced a debate about the feasibility of such a suggestion. Through posing questions about the practical nature of the various solutions presented, the idea of a survey, similar to those the children were used to conducting in their curriculum work, established itself as the way forward. I had not planned for this. Should I take this idea from the children, and bring it back as a properly planned exercise, or go along with the energy and enthusiasm? I chose the latter. This seemed an opportunity to go beyond the passive participation of the children in data collection attempted so far, activities not dissimilar to 'schoolwork', and to invite the children to take the role of 'researcher', to design research tools, collect data and analyse it. I knew that the enthusiasm could easily be dissipated by the afternoon, so the survey would have to be ready for use by lunch-time. Because of various time tabling reasons we

would not meet together again as a class until lunch-time. I quickly appointed a small group of children to design a survey sheet, which the class would look at before going off for lunch.

It was decided that the children would work in pairs, a more able reader with a less able one. They could only question four children each, and they should not question anyone more than once. They would read out one descriptor at a time and ask the respondent to say whether they thought the statement referred to boys or girls. The answer would be recorded on the survey sheet. Once completed, the survey should have been able to tell us to what extent the understandings of maleness and femaleness demonstrated by this class, were shared by children across the school.

### ***A Problem In The Making?***

It may already seem clear to anyone reading this description, what the 'problem' was. With the survey response sheets returned to me, I set some time aside at the end of the school day to see what the range of responses were. What struck me, almost immediately, was not the tendency for these responses to fall into predictable patterns, but the seeming impossibility of reading the response sheets in any meaningful fashion. Despite my belief that the structure of the sheet was obvious, and that its style was similar to the many surveys carried out by the children in the school, there was no consistency in the recording of the data. I could not work out if there was any correspondence between the number of ticks recorded on the survey

sheet and the actual number of children asked questions. On many of the returned sheets there were no responses recorded against the questions. On others it was difficult to see whether the responses were from girls or boys. Some returned sheets did not include all of the agreed questions. I had expected that a number of the children might re-question some of those already approached. This was not of any great concern to me. This was not meant to produce any hard and fast quantitative information, simply to indicate similarities or differences in patterns of gendered perceptions between the children in my class and the wider school population.

My initial feeling was one of frustration directed at the children for not following what I regarded as simple instructions. The frustration was then relocated onto myself. I had not allowed enough time to consider the suggestion of a survey of all the children in the school. The basic idea was a good one, and I was pleased that this had been generated by one of the children. It seemed obvious that in order to involve the children in the research in any meaningful sense, time should have been dedicated to 'training' them in the techniques of survey collection. This would have provided for a consistency in the way data was collected and recorded. It also occurred to me that I had provided few, if any, safeguards against the reactive effects of certain pupil-pupil interactions: the effect on younger children of those older, and taller than them asking them questions; how some girls might react to some of the more aggressive boys; and whether girls would tend to ask only girls, and boys ask only boys. As it was, the 'data'

appeared to be of no use to me. I filed it away with the intention of coming back to it at a later date. However, before such an occasion arose, I left that school, and was unable to 'train' the children or conduct the survey again.

The 'problem', then, was framed in terms of threats to the validity of the survey. My assertion was that if the children had been 'trained' in the use of data gathering techniques, and safeguards were established against the threat of reactivity in the collection of data, then the data produced would have been valid. The use of a survey method, itself, was not under question. I believed that there were problems in having too strict a distinction between supposedly quantitative and qualitative techniques (Finch 1986) and that the distinction was one more of degrees of generalisability and artificiality than substance (Hammersley 1992). Similarly, along with Alan Bryman (1984), I was beginning to feel that there was no necessary correspondence between particular techniques and epistemological views. In a very limited sense, the survey was attempting to establish what patterns of gendered perceptions existed across the school, and whether there were any correlation between certain kinds of attribute and gender labelling by the children. This would allow for whether findings from my own class could be generalised across the school. This was in a similar fashion to my use of semi-structured observations based on the ORACLE project, so that I could claim whether my class was typical, or atypical of classrooms found in other research. By using the survey, I could have checked the validity of my analysis of classroom observations, therefore becoming an element within an

observation, survey and theoretical triangulation.

### ***Looking For Objectivity***

In taking a broadly ethnographic approach, and especially the use of participant-observation, I was giving recognition to the fact that I would have an influence on the research setting. I had already made choices about the location and focus of study, methods and what to record. I was conscious that my values guided my decisions. In this sense, I did not perceive myself as being 'neutral' but as situated within a particular historical, social and cultural location. While I did not think that it was possible for me to totally bracket these pre-understandings, there was a lack of clarity about the relationship between my value positions and the truth claims of my research. There was a recognition that these claims would not be 'disinterested' in the sense that they would not be perspectival. At the same time I was concerned to safeguard the validity of my claims, to secure some sense of objectivity. While I could not guarantee any external validity, I hoped to provide more assurance for the internal validity of the research.

This tension was exemplified by my referencing of the ORACLE project and the symbolic interactionism of Andrew Pollard's study. Looking back on my attempts to deal with this tension, I was struggling with Gadamer's (1975) *fusion of horizons*. My horizon refers to my situatedness, my perspectival position, from which I connect with other perspectives or horizons. Objectivity is then achieved through a dialogue between these different

perspectives, between my self as a researcher and the subject matter of my research. Triangulation, therefore, becomes a central feature of this dialogue. Within this approach, objectivity is given new meaning and disengaged from positivism. However, the subject of my study and the methods for accessing that reality were still separated; the known and the means of knowing located in different domains.

## **Validating the Real**

In framing the ‘problem’ in the way I did, I made a number of assumptions about the relationship between the researcher, research methods and research subjects; between the research methods, data, and conceptions of culture; and between ‘reality’ and methodological paradigms. I will now explore these relationships through a consideration of three problematics, those of

- *Complicity and the Man - the problematic of participant-observation 1;*
- *Distance, objectivity and masculine detachment - the problematic of participant-observation 2;*
- *Collectable Culture - the problematic of ‘bounded systems’;*

# ***Complicity And The Man - The Problematic Of Participant-Observation 1.***

## **Symmetry and the researcher**

Participant-observation provided me with the means by which rich contextual detail, ‘thick description’, could be built up, largely in the form of the accompanying notes to the recorded observations. This role of participant-observation has come to be a central feature of ethnographic work, allowing the researcher to gain access to the world of the researched (Finch 1986; O’Connell-Davidson & Layder 1994). Unlike an academic researcher, as the class teacher I believed I was able to gain a unique insight into the reality of the boys’ worlds. My belief was that my daily interactions with them gave me a contextual understanding that would enrich the explicit knowledge gained from observation. Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (1994 173), in his study of schooling, sexuality and masculinity, also found participant-observation to be particularly useful in examining the ‘mediated social reality’ of Parnell School,

*I also found this approach of inferring meanings by understanding the context, through participation in the life of the students and teachers, was very productive. More particularly, participant observation enabled me to explore the specific dynamics of the cultural production of different versions of masculinity.*

There were limitations, however, of being both researcher and teacher. As with Andrew Pollard's (1985) experience, time became a major constraint, especially once my daughter was born. But it was the power relations between teacher and pupil, and researcher and research participant that had a direct impact on my choice of method. Andrew Pollard (1985), reflecting on his own study, places great importance upon the role of the participant-observer. As the class teacher, he saw himself as fully participating in the experiences of the classroom, of being 'immersed', of 'doing' the social organising that was the object of his study. He distinguishes between his role as a teacher, with all the inherent problems of authority over the children, and that of 'a natural, non-threatening, trustworthy researcher' (p. 227). He invokes differential power relations as being necessarily corresponding with these roles. He discusses how he attempted to negotiate these roles within the daily demands of his job as class teacher. He identified spaces in the regulated day of school life - dinner-times, where there appeared to be more open-ended expectations of the teacher role. It was in these 'ambiguous spaces' that he felt able to engage with the children more as a researcher than as a teacher. He argues that he was able to bring to his role as a researcher, the 'tacit' knowledge acquired as a teacher - the biographical details that can be built up through long term interaction in the situation under scrutiny. The claim was that this 'insider' knowledge enabled him to be seen by the children as one who had 'experienced-the-same-experiences' (p. 226). Yet, he makes a distinction between how he and the children are able to experience the



interactional situations of the classroom, since being a 'teacher-as-participant' does not allow him to be a participant in terms of 'identification' with the children, but in terms of 'interaction'.

I discuss Andrew Pollard's work because his reflections on the difficulty of being a teacher-researcher resonate so clearly with my own work. Like him, I struggled with the demands of balancing both field work and teaching. In order to maintain my field notes, lesson planning suffered, and vice versa. The integration of research activities into curriculum work certainly helped. I may have been conscious of my constant movement between different states, but to what extent were the children? This is why Andrew Pollard's distinction between participation as 'identification' or 'interaction' interests me. He does not offer a full definition of the categories 'teacher' or 'researcher'. Therefore, I have to deduce this from what he does say. The distinction seems to rest on the relations of power between these two roles and the children. As a teacher, this relation of power is said to be structured around his institutional authority over the children, in other words, an essentially a-symmetrical relation of power between teacher and pupil. The definition of what a teacher is, does and means appears to be given *a priori* to the specific context of the school and the classroom. This asymmetry is deemed to impinge negatively upon the research process. On the other hand, the hoped for relation between 'researcher' and children is one of greater symmetry, structured around the 'naturalness' and 'trustworthiness' of the interactions.

The importance of symmetry in the researcher/research participant relationship perhaps saw its classic expression in Ann Oakley's seminal paper on feminist research (Oakley 1981). The basic argument is that women researchers and respondents are capable of building a closer rapport based on an assumption of shared experience as women in a patriarchal society. Similar arguments have been applied to 'race'-related research (see Brah 1992). Gender and ethnic matching appears, then, to offer non-exploitative research relationships, though the authors do not argue that it guarantees non-exploitation (Stanley 1990). Issues of symmetry and asymmetry arose as a key area of consideration in my own research. My initial research design had called for the use of interviews as the main means by which to gather the boys' own perceptions of their classroom interactions. I share Paul Connolly's (1998) view that primary school children are socially competent and able to give expression to complex experiences and concerns, that they should be heard as well as seen. But relationships between researchers and research participants are always influenced by contextual variables, such as 'race', gender, age, etc. This is why the issue of symmetry was raised by feminist researchers in the first place. Age was particularly pertinent in this instance and acted to constrain my actions. Age, though, was given a particular inflection through adult discourses where the boys insisted on positioning me as 'teacher'. Consequently, when I attempted to conduct interviews, it became impossible to determine whether the boys were producing answers they thought I wanted, or were cautious about revealing

their true intentions lest this result in disciplinary measures being taken.

Asymmetry appeared inherent in the role of teacher.

## **The complicity of men**

The integration of teaching and research posed its own problems in relation to maintaining some distinction between my role as teacher and that of researcher. Andrew Pollard (1985) also faced this need to define the two roles differently. On a number of occasions I observed boys engaged in behaviours that would normally be sanctioned. To ignore them was potentially to be complicit in these behaviours, while responding would be to lose valuable observation data, and create an atmosphere in which more 'natural' occurrences would diminish in frequency. Chris Norris (1993) faced similar, though more acute ethical dilemmas. He was witness to criminal acts carried out during his observation of the police. His silence in the face of such acts could be seen as condoning such behaviour. Chris Norris argues that if all researchers, whether they be academics or journalists, were to always break the tacit confidentiality of the research relationship, then ethnographic accounts would not reveal the reality of social situations. However ambivalent these authors felt about the 'criminal' actions they witnessed being carried out by the research participants, the 'neutral' relationship they invoke can be read as a form of male bonding. This was an ethical issue in my relationship with the boys in my class. As well as my own presumption of a certain correspondence of understanding between myself as a male teacher/researcher and the boys I was studying, the boys themselves

could well assume degrees of correspondence and loyalty. By not acting upon particular events, not only might I be lending support to these behaviours as a teacher, but also confirming the power and legitimacy of certain male norms within the class.

Bruce Carrington and Geoff Short (1992) have argued that 'neutral' approaches to dealing with contentious issues can lead to normative assumptions being left unchallenged. They suggest that a more interventionist approach be taken, one that challenges perceptions, demands explanations, and provokes defences. Such challenges can be problematic if it is the teacher who engages in such a confrontational form of dialogue, resulting in children going silent or hardening their attitudes. However, by signalling some support for marginalised 'others', the researcher can encourage these 'others' to feel strengthened in opposing dominant views (see Denscombe 1995). The question was how to use the implicit male knowledges of schooling (Mac an Ghaill 1994: 174), shared by the boys and myself, in such ways that problematised processes of masculine construction.

## **The situated researcher**

It might appear, at first, that Andrew Pollard is suggesting that he was able to experience the children's world of the classroom as they did, especially in his invocation of 'tacit' knowledge born of direct experience in the situation. That would be participation as 'identification'. However, in talking of participation as 'interaction' he is making it clear that he does not experience

the same situations as the children do. Although he makes a distinction between the ways a situation can be experienced, he maintains the idea that the situation is common to both the children and himself. This is something similar to the idea of symmetry, where women, for instance, can be assumed to share the experience of patriarchy. It is also the same assumption underlying the phrase 'tacit knowledge'. In what sense then is the teacher and researcher situated in this unified situation?

It is my reading of Andrew Pollard's discussion that he seems to conflate the situated teacher and the situated researcher into the situated biography of the teacher-researcher, of his 'real' self. He inserts into his discussion a biographical dimension that goes some way to fleshing out his sense of situatedness - in terms of his sense of being an 'outsider', of being a male teacher; of being one of only two 'southerners', and asking colleagues questions as part of his research. It is also partly in terms of being a 'hard worker' - therefore guarding him from the charge of being a less effective teacher for carrying out research, and 'easy going' - making the establishment of non-threatening relationships possible.

In the introduction to this thesis I have also attempted to situate myself in the research process. I nurtured my own sense of being an 'outsider' - the only male teacher in the school, and critically engaged with my own sense of masculinity. As with Andrew Pollard I sought to use my 'self' as a tool in the research process. David Harvey (1993:108) has referred to this kind of

biography as 'vulgar' situatedness. My 'difference' in relation to the children in my class or my colleagues in the staffroom is treated as an offshoot of my personal biography, which carries an assumption of unity and coherence. David Harvey argues that it is more than this. The articulation of my sense of 'difference', 'otherness' or 'fallibility' (recognising that I got it wrong about involving the children as researchers) act as rhetorical devices for the authentication of my accounts of classroom interaction, of creating distance between myself as researcher and that of teacher. In situating himself in the research process, Andrew Pollard also conjures up this notion of distance. It reaches back to the emergent anthropological orthodoxy of the 'trained' fieldworker who is able to achieve a necessary level of distance between themselves and the research situation. To lose distance, as Andrew Pollard (1985) warned himself, was to go 'native'.

David Harvey posits a different kind of situatedness which he calls 'dialectical situatedness'. The 'difference' or 'otherness' that both Andrew Pollard and myself evoked by our biographical rhetoric are newly articulated in this dialectical frame by taking situatedness 'out of its wooden attachment to identifiable individuals and their biographies and is itself situated as a play of difference' (Harvey 1993: 109). The contextual information (Pollard's 'tacit knowledge') that I accumulated and brought to the research, was from the subject position of classroom teacher, the social relationships it invokes, and the specific network of relationships that subject position itself was located within. On entering the classroom, whether I saw myself as teacher or

researcher, I am situated within a network of relations marked by particular boundaries between 'teacher' and 'pupil', that extend far beyond the individuals who inhabit those positions. The subject positions of 'teacher', 'pupil' or 'researcher' are situated in networks of relation that are variously differentiated along axis of gender (Davies 1989); social class (Wexler 1992); 'race' (Wright 1992; Gillborn 1995); disability (Christensen & Rizvi 1996); sexuality (Redman & Mac an Ghaill 1996); and intersections of these (Connolly 1998). If there was any danger in me 'going native', this was of becoming non-reflexive about my involvement both as a teacher, a researcher and a white male. This is not, however, the same as achieving any necessary level of detachment. Far from it. It is to do with understanding how my 'difference' in relation to the children was produced, both as a teacher engaged in research, and as a male teacher-researcher exploring masculine subjectivities; and how this structured the research process. It is not the invoking of distance that ensures the non-complicity of male researchers with their male research participants, but a reflexive approach to the research process and how it constitutes different research selves.

## **Symmetry revisited**

Within the notion of symmetry explored in this section is that of correspondence. The actions of the boys appear to flow from a coherent and unitary identity. By reducing the reactive effects of asymmetrical social relations - of 'race', gender or class, the researcher can reach into the 'real' perceptions or views of the research subject. In this sense, the asymmetry of

my position as teacher produced a reactive effect on the research. Andrew Pollard recognised this in his own research. His resolution involved the identification of ambiguous spaces where greater symmetry could be achieved and the enlisting of children to interview their peers. While the children and himself would hold different perceptions of the interactional situation of the classroom, the essential coherence of that situation (and their perceptions) is held in place. My reading of the problem of interviewing similarly maintained the notion of unitary and coherent selves (and objective situations, such as the classroom). Other readings of symmetry point more to the 'dialectical situatedness' raised by David Harvey.

The search for access to the unitary and coherent selves of others often overlooks the disruptions and contradictions produced by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on (Stanley & Wise 1993; Connolly 1998). These disruptions and contradictions not only influence the identities of the researcher or research participants, but also the relationship between them. Máirtín Mac an Ghail (1994), reflecting on the possible asymmetry of his relationship, as a white, adult, male, teacher with teenage African Caribbean girls in his school, remarked that his commitment to anti-racist politics appeared to open up spaces for dialogue. As Mehreen Mirza (1998) demonstrates in an account of her own research experience, apparent matching does not necessarily account for the multi-layered identities of those involved. Mehreen Mirza's occupation, her wearing of non-traditional dress, and the absence of familial community links, resulted in the research



participants placing her in the role of 'other'. 'Dialectical situatedness' therefore offers the researcher a way into understanding how difference is produced and how the categories of teacher and researcher can become products of difference. This problematises the idea of symmetry. As a man researching masculinity, it may appear that symmetry offers me a way into the lives of the boys, that a research relationship can be built upon a notion of shared knowledge. But this is to place too much emphasis on personal biography as already given, as the coherent centre of action. Dialectical situatedness foregrounds the productive character of identity. It suggests that the actions that are regarded as flowing from this centre are in fact the processes of identity construction themselves. There is no central point of coherence. The actions speak for themselves. Symmetry between two coherent selves is then no longer possible. Symmetry is dispossessed of its rhetorical claim to authenticity. Symmetry, although it appears to refer to an objective relationship, should be viewed as working through the subjective moment of identity. So, symmetry can be rearticulated as a process of self-making, of constituting the categories of researcher and research subject in new ways.

## ***Distance, Objectivity And Masculine Detachment - The Problematic Of Participant-Observation 2***

### **The emergence of distance**

Educational ethnography has been largely framed by Symbolic Interactionism and its emphasis on the meaning-making practices of educational actors. It has, I argue, given educational ethnography its common themes - a commitment to 'naturalistic' strategies of inquiry, that is the use of predominantly unstructured and un-intrusive approaches to observation and interviewing; an emphasis on social life as processes rather than structures, a focus on the micro-analysis of localised contexts; and a concern with the transmission and construction of social meanings in and through individual interaction (Layder 1993:145). Ethnographic approaches have become commonplace in educational research. These have included the studies of school cultures such as Stephen Ball's (1981) *Beachside Comprehensive: A Case Study of Secondary Schooling*, and Robert Burgess's (1983) *Experiencing Comprehensive Education: A Study of Bishop McGregor School*; pupil and teacher coping strategies such as Lynn Davies's (1984) *Pupil Power: Deviance and Gender in Education*, and Andrew Pollard's (1987) *The Social World of the Primary Classroom*, and in the field of gender and education, in which my own study is located, Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, Michelle Stanworth's (1988) *Gender and Schooling: Study of Social Divisions in the Classroom*, and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill's (1994) *The Making*

*of Men*. Schools, perhaps, provide classic examples of the ‘naturalistic’ settings beloved of the ethnographer, and the central importance of observing at first hand the social interactions that are the focus of study.

Ethnography, as a set of distinctive practices, grew out of the work of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Meade (O’Connell-Davidson & Layder 1994). ‘Immersion’ in the cultures studied, by trained fieldworkers, became a key characteristic of the ethnographic approach. James Clifford (1988:25) points to the fact that by the mid-1930s anthropology (ethnography) had established its authorial voice through the institutionalisation of this ‘participant-observation’ as a ‘science’, its authority gradually coming to be synonymous with the ‘insider-outsider’ dyadic,

*on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts* (Clifford 1988:34)

The ‘trained’ nature of the fieldworker became increasingly important. Their ‘theoretical’ approach, in the early days of academic anthropology often grounded in functionalist understandings of culture, was seen to enable the researcher to quickly grasp the structure of cultural phenomenon without a reliance on ‘native informants’ (insiders), or long-term immersion in the lives of those studied. Theoretical abstraction allowed the ethnographer to focus on the relevant data. While the functionalist paradigm came under critical

attack from Symbolic Interactionism (Layder 1993), the centrality of the trained fieldworker engaged in participant-observation, and the importance given to critical distance as the guarantor of objectivity remained core features of ethnography.

What is the purpose of this distance? Renato Rosaldo (1993:168) outlines the centrality of distance-as-objectivity in anthropology/ethnography.

*This detachment is said to produce objectivity because social reality comes into focus only if one stands at a certain distance. When one stands too close, the ethnographic lens supposedly blurs its human subjects.*

The term participant-observer at one and the same time claims the ethnographer can both be a participant of the situated reality, while maintaining the necessary academic distance needed to view this reality clearly. To 'go native', as was discussed above in relation to Andrew Pollard's work, is to lose some sense of scientific knowledge, to reduce it to the subjective and the biased. Martyn Hammersley (1998) criticises 'partizan research' for this very thing, arguing that the (political) 'commitment' of such researchers makes their accounts less credible. By failing to employ enough academic distance such standpoint epistemologies produce biased accounts, failing to adequately represent the 'reality' of the social situations under study. To view reality clearly the ethnographer needs to obtain an

Archimedian point of vision, critically distanced from the reality observed.

This conception of critical distance as guaranteeing objectivity construes the task of research as one of making true or false claims (or distinguishing between such claims) (Usher 1996b). My argument, like Michel Foucault's, is that truthfulness and falsity are not found in the social reality studied, but in the procedures of the research process itself,

*Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures  
for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and  
operation of statements (Foucault 1973: 133).*

My own research can be read in this way, as being to do with asserting an authorial claim to truthful statements?

## **Distance and the man**

My initial reading of the children's engagement in the research process located the 'problem' in the children's and my lack of preparation. In other words, the children had not been enculturated into the world of research and I had not ensured enough safeguards against reactivity. Despite this, the use of the survey demanded of the children a detachment from the social world that they inhabited and were constitutive of. They were to be disinterested observers and cataloguers of the gendered world of the school. Yet this very world of gendered, and gendering practices, that often demanded a disinterestedness and dispassion in its masculine subjects, was a world

saturated with engagement (Connell et al 1982; Seidler 1991; Davies 1993). Each and every boy was passionately engaged in the precarious business of securing a stable and unitary sense of self in the midst of shifting identities (Davies 1989; Wexler 1992; Warren 1997). What does 'training' to be a researcher mean in this context and therefore what does this example say of the research approach as a whole? What is required in this 'training' that the children can disengage themselves from the very practices that constitute their subjectivities?

Detachment and disinterest are elements within these gendered practices, but elements not equally distributed. This ethic of distance, framed within a binary opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, has a particularly masculinist resonance about it, invoking images of the intrepid ethnographer grappling with the realities of the streets (Riddell 1989). As already discussed, the hegemonic power of Enlightenment rationalism has been produced through the deployment of an organising logic based on a set of binary oppositions which privilege the first statement while subordinating the second (Guterman 1994; Rattansi 1996): mind/body; rationality/irrationality; reason/emotion; subject/object; civilised/uncivilised; culture/nature; public/private; natural/unnatural; male/female. It is not hard to see how these distinctions have come to justify and underpin a gender order that subordinates women and marginalises particular masculinities (Diamond & Quinby 1988; Seidler 1991). Western masculinity, or the masculine social imaginary, has been constructed around a series of denials associated with

the 'feminine' - the rejection of dependency, control of emotions, a projection into the public, etc. This particular rationality positions the masculine social imaginary as the normative gender, one that is the subject of huMAN history that is rational and objective; locating the female as irrational, prone to emotions, and subjective. We can see then how ethnography that evokes critical distance can be passionately masculine in its projection, and especially in its sustenance of a dichotomisation of objectivity - which requires dispassion, and the subjugation of passions, commitment and care. Therefore, to attach situatedness to the fixed solidities of biographical detail, is to reify unitary and stable subjectivities, so veiling how the subject positions of teacher, researcher, children or pupils are constitutive of the interactions in the social settings under scrutiny; and how 'critical distance' is an articulated position, and not one that guarantees a unique purchase on reality.

## **So what now?**

The interpretative or hermeneutic ethnography that has emerged in opposition to the positivist tradition in sociology, has often been marked by researcher empathy with research subjects, of interpreting the meanings attached to behaviours, and a preference for qualitative methods (O'Connell-Davidson & Layder 1994). Feminist research has often positioned itself within the interpretative framework, outlining the genderedness of supposedly 'objective' and 'neutral' positivist claims. The dualism set up between objectivity and subjectivity, as argued above, has been seen to privilege male experience and to generalise from that position (Smith 1987). The particular

form of rationality produced by this dualism is perceived by feminist research as one 'constructed as a masculine domain that is divorced from and deemed superior to the senses, emotion, and imagination (Diamond & Quinby 1988:xvi). This is not to say that feminists reject 'objectivity'. Toby Epstein Jayanatre and Abigail Stewart (1991) argue that while feminism wishes to insert subjectivity into the research process, bias can still be guarded against through the use of 'recognised methodological techniques'. Instead, they wish to combine both subjective and objective ways of knowing, an argument they use to justify their use of quantitative methods. Sheila Riddell (1989) expresses the view that if there is nothing intrinsically feminist about qualitative methods, then the use of multiple strategies, both qualitative and quantitative, can be sensitive to people's lived experiences. However, she also sees this as enabling 'more generalised statements about relationships between variables to be made' (p. 80). This seems to suggest that she still wants to retain the positivist idea of generalisability of research claims. Janet Holland and Caroline Ramazangolu (1993) argue that feminism has produced a powerful critique of positivist models, especially the claim that there is an unproblematic relationship between the truth claims of research and reality. They accept that even if we assume that there is a material reality (outside of us and the research process) which structures people's lives 'such as the reality of gendered relationships' (p. 288), there is no way of ensuring access to this reality through particular research methods, rather, as Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993:7) have argued, social research can only produce partial understandings. This is the postpositivist case encapsulated - ontological unity



but epistemological pluralism: many stories about the same reality

While postpositivist approaches and feminism have powerfully critiqued orthodox scientism, especially its manifestations in social science, the distinctions between the positivist and interpretative traditions may not seem as clear cut as they first appear. Janet Finch (1986) in her overview of educational research, explores the continuities of positivist approaches in interpretative work. She takes up an argument put forward by Paul Willis and Alan Bryman that in delaying theoretical considerations until after data has been collected, at least rhetorically, as is found in the idea of theory 'emerging' from an un-theorised data, participant-observation acts as a form of 'covert positivism', implying that research subjects are actually objects. As discussed above, ethnography has been regarded as particularly suited to feminist research. But, as Toby Epstein Jayanatre and Abigail Stewart have argued above, a distinction between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' is maintained. Whilst the various approaches, some discussed here, have critiqued the masculinist tendencies within research, both qualitative and quantitative, they have largely maintained the Cartesian dualism that sustain the very idea of dichotomous relations, such as those found in the gender structuring of society. Others, such as Valerie Walkerdine (1990), Jane Kenway (1992) and Alison Jones (1993), have argued that feminism needs to break its commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of 'truth' and 'objectivity', and instead view the different traditions as discourses that constitute 'truth', 'subjects' and 'objects' in a variety of ways. It is this emergent

poststructuralist, maybe even postrealist discourse that I am attempting to position myself within and speak from.

Framing the methodological 'problem' presented by the survey exercise in the way I did, was to define what constituted legitimate research and useful data. In suggesting that a major contributory factor in the 'contamination' of the data was that of reactivity, even though this was seen in gender terms, I was also involved in determining the boundaries of legitimate research behaviour. 'Training' in the appropriate use of methods then becomes an act of policing those boundaries and maintaining the authority of particular ways of seeing the world, ways of seeing that might sustain the masculine social imaginary and its necessary distinction between female and male.

Such boundary maintenance can be said to apply to all research approaches. Even though I had invited the children to act as researchers of their own social worlds, I invoked a distinction between the worlds of social practice and the research act. I maintained my position of objective observer, even as I articulated a more participatory mode of activity for the children. I also invited the children to position themselves as detached observers of social life, their own social life - to disembody themselves from practices that are deeply embodied. Also, as was discussed earlier in my review of different paradigms of gender, this 'world view' locates the research process in a space distinct from that of the boys' acts of self-making. One of the critiques of biologism was that it located itself in a similar distinct and objective space.

disengaged from the micro-politics of gender. My reading of this process is that the behaviours of the boys do not refer to an alterior reality, but are the reality of their subjective moment of self-making. Similarly, the research process does not refer to an exterior or underlying reality. Instead I am suggesting that concepts such as 'distance' and 'objectivity', and the procedures associated with them, are practices that work to constitute reality in those terms; that invoke a critical distinction between the boys' acts of self-making and the means of knowing those behaviours.

### ***Collectable Culture - The Problematic Of 'Bounded Systems'***

The ethnographer's approach to the 'real' can sometimes resemble the collections of artifacts found in museums. Items from the 'other' are assembled, placed on display and labelled. Commercial, aesthetic and scientific knowledges intermingle to construct systems of symbols and meaning that give these collections value. These collections, whether they be the archaic imperialist expropriations of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, or the peer reviewed texts of academic research, all embody particular notions of 'culture', how it can be understood, and represented.

### **In pursuit of order**

At the beginning of my research, I set myself the task of discerning the

meaning-making practices engaged in by the boys that produced particular kinds of masculine subjectivities. Built into this was an understanding that social action is produced by social actors, and the meanings attributed to these actions by the actors, rather than as effects of external forces-determined by structures of power or socialisation processes. Consequently, my focus was on 'the processes by which such meanings are constructed, negotiated and shared in the course of human interactions' (Finch 1986). Such an interpretative approach is grounded in the belief that social formations are open and indeterminate, and concerned with interpretation of social interaction and meaning. It sets itself against positivist epistemologies that are concerned with the closed and determinate nature of social life and seeks control, generalisability and prediction (Usher 1996a). As with other educational ethnographies working within symbolic interactionist or critical theory traditions, my emphasis was on a bounded cultural system - a classroom. David Scott (1996:152) describes two underlying assumptions to this approach. First, institutions and smaller social units, such as classrooms, are populated by social actors who share common values and operate within 'systems of rules by which they can be identified'. This is very much the approach that Andrew Pollard took, and which informed my emergent theoretical framework. His idea of the 'working consensus', similar to Anselmes 'negotiated order' (Strauss 1987), invokes the notion of there being systems of rules that govern behaviour in bounded social systems. Secondly, the categories we use allow us to study these identifiable areas of social life, extract elements from them, and discern the rules that govern behaviour in

these holistic units.

## **Cultural borderlands and zones of difference**

Renato Rosaldo (1993) argues against the idea that we live our lives by following rules, by fixed cultural expectations and norms, suggesting instead that we live with ambiguity and uncertainty. This sets Renato Rosaldo against the kind of 'common sense' socialisation theory that both my colleagues and myself articulated in the staffroom discussion explored in the introduction to this thesis. Renato Rosaldo goes on to criticise the attempt by social analysts to interpret culture as inferring cultural order. He traces this to the Hobbesian dualism between culture and anarchic disorder. Social scientists therefore look at/for the 'normative regulations' that order society, conceiving them as control mechanisms. The suggestion is that in searching for the patterns of connection and continuity, social scientists disregard the disconnections and discontinuities in their data. Renato Rosaldo urges us to look beyond this dichotomy to 'non-order'. He speaks of 'cultural borderlands' or 'zones of difference', those social spaces within which we improvise life, and deal with life's contingencies. This brings to mind Barrie Thorne's (1993) work in American elementary schools. She focused not only on the ways children erected borders between the genders, and therefore defined maleness and femaleness, but also the border crossings engaged in by different children. She described the ways gender identities, and thus the borders, were full of ambiguity, how border maintenance had to be worked at and constantly redefined. Border maintenance is also the central theme of

Bronwyn Davies' (1989) germinal work *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*

This idea of border work, of concepts having to be constantly renegotiated provides me with a different reading of Andrew Pollard's description of the ambiguous spaces of researcher-research respondent symmetry. Rather than looking upon these ambiguous spaces as already existing, they can be regarded as 'border zones' where the categories teacher and pupil are not wholly established and where Andrew Pollard actively worked - through the practice of research - to construct ambiguity.

This border work draws on cultural resources far beyond the walls of the classroom or the school, calling on the gender work of families or the symbolic images of popular culture. In such instances, the frontiers of classroom, playground or school seem rather more permeable and shifting than the 'bounded system' approach allows for. This viewpoint is to accept that human culture involves regulatory mechanisms, but, as with the social critique found in the work of Michel Foucault, asks us to attend to the ways apparently unitary structures, such as the family, heterosexuality or the school, are cut across with differences of gender, social class, ethnicity, or generation. This approach not so much asks what the rules are that govern behaviour in given contexts, but how they emerge in those particular forms rather than in others.

## **The emergent classroom**

The specific contexts of these emergent practices constitutes a 'semiotic

square' (Clifford 1988), that sets out the conceptual boundaries of educational subjectivities. Schools and classrooms, as 'identifiable units of social activity', or 'cases', are themselves situated in contingent relations of power, in their own 'semiotic squares'. It is important then to detail the specific historical, political and social contexts of the school, the classroom, or the 'case'. As an organisational form, the classroom, like the boys' masculinities, is also emergent, in the process of becoming, worked upon by a social imaginary. It is situated within political and educational discourses that constitute the possible arrangements of space, temporality, and function; methods of instruction and assessment; and regulation of behaviour (Foucault 1991). The uneven deployment and contestation of these discourses makes possible both the regularities of classroom life across schools, and the discontinuities, resistances and local knowledges. Classrooms need to be located within the specific legislative frameworks that structure their formation, and the different ways these 'texts' are articulated and re-articulated, and given meaning in particular practices.

The establishment of schools as distinct buildings that house large numbers of children, subdivided into classrooms, is an historical phenomena. The nature of classrooms, and what occurs within them, have, and continue to undergo change. They cannot be seen as 'bounded-systems', as closed spaces of given definition. The social definitions of what a school or a classroom is, undergo contestation and change. The classroom, then, is not a 'space' within which the masculine social imaginary is played out and works upon the boys

The masculine social imaginary works in and through the social space of the classroom. There would be no masculinity to speak of without the particular practices found in such institutions as classrooms and schools.

The use of the survey could too easily have led to invoking a conception of fixed, essentialised, a-historical, transcendent gendered subjectivities. The original task was aimed at eliciting from the children their views of what constituted the categories 'male' and 'female'; to distinguish between the different elements that made up these categories; and to illuminate the genderedness of their perceptions. On reflection this now reminds me of the critiques levelled at research on children's 'racial' understandings. Bruce Carrington and Geoff Short (1992) examined research that utilised 'forced choice' approaches. In these examples, children were required to show preference for white or black images, and to ascribe certain stories to black or white characters. Bruce Carrington and Geoff Short rightly accuse these approaches of validating the dichotomous relationships set up within racist discourse, and of only allowing children to 'choose' between these restricted options. Similarly, the original task I had set the children only allowed them to ascribe constituent elements to two categories, even though it was open to the children to describe those elements as they wished. The exercise did not make it easy for the children to construct alternative categories without challenging the way I had framed the questions. The children may well have construed the task as testing their knowledge of normative understandings of maleness and femaleness, rather than their own conceptions of how they



moved through gendered worlds. Consequently, their responses might say as much about the research approach as of their gendered perceptions. The approach I had adopted validated the dichotomisation of gender into two distinct categories, a dichotomisation my research was aimed at deconstructing.

## **Telling it like 'It' is or Venturing Beyond the Impasse?**

The purpose of this discussion has been to demonstrate my view that research, the research process, and the subjectivity of the researcher are all enactments of culture, of semiotic squares. This linguistic turn associated with poststructuralism presents qualitative research with a crisis of representation. Within ethnography, privilege has been given to the direct utterances of research subjects, talk directly reflecting the subject's lived experience. Debates within qualitative research has therefore largely been about the development of methods that allow the research to probe the 'real', 'authentic' lives of subjects through the establishment of mutual relationships between researcher and researched (Oakley 1981; Stanley & Wise 1983, Phoenix 1994). In what sense can we say that the utterances, including the bodily utterances of observed behaviour, or the observation-at-distance of survey and questionnaires, are direct instances of the 'real'?

I have already argued above that what the subjects of research say and do are interpretative practices themselves, situated within interpretative frameworks that make possible certain ways of speaking of the world. There is no deeper reality that interviewing or observation can claim to have access to. Neither are they interpretations of reality. Their direct utterances (through speech or action) are reality; their 'interpretations' are tools for framing reality in particular ways; they are the very means by which, and through which, their identities are constituted.

A possible conclusion to this line of argument is that it renders research impossible, that research is a violence done to others in its attempt to impose 'a truth' upon them. Is there no way out of this impasse?

### ***The Relativity Of Truth***

One possible route, and one I adopt here, is to view research as just one social activity involved in the social construction of knowledge. As such, research does not have to be reduced to some kind of solipsism - that research can only ever speak about research. Neither does it have to defend itself against charges of relativism, since all truth claims are relative by virtue of their location within specific socio-historic conjunctures and relative to the evaluative regimes of their interpretative frameworks (Scheurich 1997). The truth claims of all research, including my own, can then be understood as rhetorical categories whose meanings and shape varies with the

contingencies of history and circumstance' (Van Maanan 1995:12). Research can best be seen then as a series of textual practices (Usher 1996b) that construct a view of reality and how it can be known. Van Maanan (1995) has likened qualitative research, especially ethnography, to a form of storytelling. As such, it therefore involves grammatical, narrative and rhetorical devices, and so it is not a question as to whether educational, or other, research should use narrative forms, but which forms it should use (Richardson 1995).

This line of argument can create the impression of there being no such thing as truth or reality, or that all truth claims are equally valid since none can be privileged. This fits the characterisation of poststructuralism made by its detractors. This is not, however, my position. There is not room in this thesis to explore the wider dimensions of the debates about reality and truth. Instead, I will make a rather schematic claim for my own work based on the arguments and authors I have already referred to. I am not arguing that there is nothing that can be called 'reality'. I have invoked such terms as 'having the effect of reality' or 'as real as'. The purpose of these terms has been to convey the idea of ontological plurality, that any sense of the real is impossible outside that of the particular interpretative frameworks we use. This is not to deny the facticity of objects. In my discussion of masculinity and the natural, I put forward the possibility that the particular bodily configurations (which never escape social construction) provide the factual materials for the development of certain forms of sexuality. The factness of possessing a penis and testicles, despite what naive biologism might claim, does not make the

man. Maleness, masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, etc. are social and cultural phenomena that 'lean on' the facticity of the body, but cannot be reduced to it. Also, while sexuality may act upon the body, the body is not docile, but rather is agentic. So, there is no privileged space for the 'real' outside this interactive process, this constructive process. Hence my claim that masculinity is not real, in the sense of being reduced to its component facticities, but has the effect of reality in that, as a social imaginary, it works through narratives of unity and coherence whereby all those within the category male (no matter how they have been assigned to that category) are joined in relation to each other, and provided with the possibilities for nostalgia and expectation that have the effect of naturalising masculinity. In this way, masculinity is disengaged from any sense of being a representation of something else or an ideology (as John MacInnes has it). The reality of masculinity, in the way I use the term, refers to the way the masculine social imaginary works to construe the world *as if* defined by a radical dichotomy between male and female. This 'reality' makes sense only in relation to the semantic logic of the masculine social imaginary- in other words, **reality is relative**. My analysis, which later I refer to as another form of narrative practice, will seek to explore the narratives that make up the semantic logic of masculinity, the stories that attempt to give it coherence in its distance from femininity.

# ***The Re-Articulation Of The Objective/Subjective***

## ***Distinction***

The astute reader will be wondering how I can sustain my postrealist argument, given that I have reintroduced into my thesis the objective/subjective dyad. Surely, this reader will say, I cannot postulate the idea of ontological plurality and maintain the notion of there being an objective sense of reality.

I have used the objective/subjective distinction in much the same way as Pierre Bourdieu does in his discussions of social class, but disarticulating it from his assumption of ontological unity (Bourdieu 1987; 1995). I am claiming that it is only possible to speak coherently of masculinity because the masculine social imaginary constructs reality as a world made up of distinct ontological spaces, of which objectivity and subjectivity are two of the most important. That is, it makes possible not only the objectification of masculinity as a social reality, so that gender identity feels as if it emanates from a deep self, but also the subjectification of individuals who can be authors of their own lives. This is structure and agency revisited. Socialist feminism and contemporary poststructuralist feminism, in the works of Bronwyn Davies, Valerie Walkerdine, bell hooks and Jane Kenway, have continued to argue for the need to analyse the structural arrangements of patriarchy (sic), giving voice to women and other 'subjugated knowledges' whilst deconstructing the objective/subjective distinction. I too want to hold in tension the idea of reality as constituted in and through discourse, whilst

also deconstructing those discourses and looking at the agency involved in becoming male.

In introducing objectivity into my thesis, like Pierre Bourdieu, I am also arguing that it is important not to collapse the objective level of analysis into the subjective, to read the subjective processes of self-making as expressions of a structural and structuring masculinity, or that masculinity is what men do, is just an amalgamation of subjective self-making, rather like symbolic interactionism. Rather, as in my theoretical framework above, I am inverting the ontological assumption. I am arguing that the objective sense of any reality, the power of discourse to define the possibilities of self, is best grasped, not by looking at the processes of objectification (the objective, or objectifying moment), but at the processes of self-making, where boys work on themselves and others to make themselves male; to fit themselves into the available narratives; and to authorise new narratives of self (the subjective moment). And, since masculinity is not an ontological given, it has to always be reconstituted in the subjective moment, the semantic logic of the masculine social imaginary newly articulated.

While articulating an analytical distinction between the objective and subjective moments of reality, I am suggesting that the relationship between the two is that of imbrication (see Davies 1993: 9). Like Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of 'leaning on', imbrication suggests the way constituted differences (in this case between objective and subjective moments) overlap in

such a way as to produce the effect of singularity and unity. Therefore, in my analysis I need to make sure that I do not assume reality is given, but ask how its givenness, its objective sense, is constituted and how it gives masculinity its seeming order, regularity and naturalness. At the same time my analysis will explore how difference is constituted in and through the boys' narratives of self, the subjective moment, how they work to make themselves in, through or beyond *difference*.

### ***Reflexive Relativity***

So, I have argued for ontological plurality, of reality as relative and for the reintroduction of an objective/subjective distinction into poststructuralist and postrealist approaches. Holding the two together, and this is perhaps the key concept in my thesis, along with the masculine social imaginary, is that of '**reflexive relativity**'. This concept probably best describes my methodological approach and provides it with its overarching logic. I want to explain 'reflexive relativity' through a critique of David Harvey's 'dialectical situatedness' which I utilised above.

'Dialectical situatedness' is important because it disengages reflexivity from personal biography, and biography from a coherent and unitary self. However, David Harvey's use of the Hegelian term 'dialectic' is somewhat unfortunate. Dialectic suggests the possible resolution between two positions. In Hegelian and Marxist philosophy this has meant the resolution, or synthesis, between two kinds of statement - hypothesis and antithesis. The

idea of synthesis (which doesn't mean the seamless joining together of two statements, but their resolution in a new hypothesis) invokes a certain fixity of an already existing world. Factness and the imaginative constitution of reality are compressed into an abstracted reality to which the statements make reference. This I have already critiqued. Similarly, 'situatedness', itself, suggests to me a particular configuration of ontological spaces within which the researcher can be situated. There is the 'research' space of the classroom or school and the interactions within it; there is the 'epistemological' space of the research process and its questions; and the 'biographical' space of the researcher. Situatedness attempts to account for the interaction of these spaces, the way the biography - assumptions, politics, desires of the researcher impacts upon the research situation. While Harvey argues, quite rightly, that categories such as objectivity are articulated spaces, 'situatedness', especially in its relation to 'dialectical', gives no account of the production of these different ontological spaces. Instead, 'reflexive relativity', building on the claims of ontological and epistemological plurality, seeks to account for differently articulated research selves, how these constitute the specific research relationships and how different ontological spaces are thus constituted.

What form does this 'reflexive relativity' take? Drawing on Gadamer's 'field of horizons', this research text represents a series of dialogues between my differently constituted 'research selves' and the other subjectivities constituted by the research epistemology



- **A dialogue between myself as teacher-researcher and my school colleagues.** This dialogue is a response to their theorising of the ‘problem’ of boys in our classrooms, and manifests itself in my journey through different theoretical understandings of masculine construction;
- **A dialogue between the different textual practices of the research process.** In the discussion above, I have argued for the centrality of reflexivity in research praxis. In an attempt to fashion a reflexive style the research process itself is embedded in the descriptive analysis through the use of pertinent references to the epistemological grounding of the research; in the tension between the two moments of exteriority; and the use of commentary from my differently constituted research selves. The embodiedness of the analysis through the adoption of different research voices capture the feel of the research as unfolding, as something produced through a creative process, of research, and the processes of masculine achievement as emergent practices. I conceive of the whole thesis as a story, as a discursive product. It involves bringing together isolated events (data elements) into a single composition. The meanings and truth claims of this story are thus produced through the relations that are established between different data elements, rather than finding an extant

meaning within them (Polkinghorne 1995). Story or narrative, by limiting the selection of events that will make up the final story contributes to Harry Wolcott's notion of ethnography which I largely adopt (see below). This idea that the research itself is a process of narrative construction foregrounds the creative or textual properties of research (Stronach & MacLure 1997: 56). In doing this, the particular arrangement of narrative ingredients (data elements) tells a particular kind of story; invokes a certain ontology. Different arrangements would tell a different story. In the analysis I will attempt to make it clear what elements have been articulated together to construct, or render a theory of masculine construction.

- **A dialogue between myself as teacher-researcher/academic researcher and a wider academic community.** The immediate interlocutors of this dialogue are my supervisor and the readers of this text. As an initiate, I am aware of the dangers of adopting a reflexive narrative style. The way an academic writes can often shape their scholarly identity. To write outside the normative rhetorical forms; to write outside the rational-narrative of realism; to claim that the text does not purport to relate the truth, but to construct a shared understanding in the interaction between writer and reader (Lyotard 1984); to self-consciously include the narrative voice of the researcher is to invite accusations of relativity (as

defined by a normative standard of realism) and/or open my 'self' to public scrutiny by my peers (Troyna 1994; Emihovich 1995). The text does not rely upon rhetorical styles that render the research subjects decontextualised and disembodied, styles redolent of realist epistemology (Scheurich 1997). Instead, the text employs a range of rhetorical styles that foreground its reflexivity. Furthermore, it departs from realist representations in its mode of knowing and verification. This thesis privileges a narrative mode of knowing and verification (see Bruner 1986). Although paradigmatic modes are employed (e.g. thematic coding of observations), and therefore testimonies to the difficulty of disengaging from reductive analysis, these are embedded within a process of writing a story of masculine practice - a *rendering* of a theory of cultural behaviour. Its validity is not secured by recourse to procedures for establishing empirical proof - how lifelike it is, but its verisimilitude - does this story of masculine practice provide a compelling account?;

- **A dialogue between myself as teacher-researcher and academic researcher.** This involves the attempt to literally 'make' sense of the behaviours that I observed through the lens of my research tools. In other words it is an engagement with Harry Wolcott's notion of ethnography as *rendering* 'a' theory of cultural behaviour (Wolcott 1995). I come to the

writing at a different intellectual time and place to the collecting and recording of the data. As discussed above, the research has involved an epistemological drift. I find it useful, then, to locate this text in two epistemological moments, the two moments of exteriority - the realist, where I assumed an ontological unity which was accessible by articulating a sense of distance; and the poststructuralist, where distance is replaced with reflexivity and articulated difference invoked instead. So, there is within the text an epistemological dialogue whereby I attempt to re-read the data from within this poststructural gaze. Following Floya Anthias (1998), this reading views the classroom as a 'relational ontological space' as the focus of analysis and how difference is produced as a principle of social relations. Concepts become signposts for investigating processes of differentiation and how categories of gender emerge as hierarchical. It is necessary then not to view masculine reality as already existing. This immediately inserts a certain tension into my thesis, since most of the research process assumed an ontological unity. Rather than view the accounts provided by the children as 'data', I need to conceptualise them as extracts from their narratives of self. So, instead of reading the elicitation exercises as providing me with insights into the 'real' world of gender, or as representations of gender, I will need to read them as extracts

from their narratives of self. In other words, view the stories as gender in practice;

- **A dialogue between myself as teacher-researcher/academic researcher and the children, especially the boys, in the two classes I worked with during the life of the fieldwork.** This is partially found in the tacit knowledge, the ethnographic detail that connects and contextualises the enumerated data. It is also found in my commentary as teacher-researcher, and as teacher, on my responses to observed events and emergent understandings. It is found in my concerns as to where and how I erected the discursive boundaries between my position as teacher and that of researcher, particularly in my concern over masculine complicity. But overall it is found in my attempt to respectfully present a picture of the boys as being engaged in processes of masculine construction, conscious that it is always done so through my own narrative voice.
- **Finally, there is a dialogue between the subject of this thesis - the practices of masculinity, and my own masculine self.** And that is an ongoing story.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE WEFT - THE CONTEXT OF**

**ENACTMENT**

# The Meanings They Make - Different Worlds

## Introduction

I wanted to elicit from the children their conceptualisations of 'maleness' and 'femaleness'; what elements constituted each category; whether they attributed these conceptual elements according to a principle of difference; and so determine to what extent their social world was based on a dichotomy between two genders structured around differentiated attributes. In order to do this the children were set a task within a normal lesson where they were asked two open questions:

*What is good about being a girl?*

*What is good about being a boy?*

307 statements were made in response to these two questions. 155 statements were made in response to the question '*What is good about being a girl?*' and 152 statements were made in response to the question '*What is good about being a boy?*'. In asking the question 'What do the children say about the nature of maleness and femaleness' I am not trying to invoke a realist epistemology, where the children's statements are themselves examples of an objective untheorised real. As I have stated in Chapter 2 the children's statements might better be understood as commenting upon the function of normative ideas of gender. In fact, these statements can be seen as

expressions of the children's attempts to accomplish their gender under the gaze of the masculine social imaginary that acts to define and constrain the terrain of practice. In examining statements about maleness and femaleness I hope to sketch out a particular cartography of gender. This cartography defines the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, and therefore the 'border zones' of identity work.

An examination of the statements made by the boys will enable me to conduct a paradigmatic analysis of their stories about gender (Polkinghorne 1995). Firstly, I will describe the range of statements produced by this exercise. This will also entail the composition of thematic elements that will allow for such a comparison. Secondly, through aggregating the statements, I will elucidate the modalities of gender as depicted in the boys' narratives, relating them more directly to the theories of gender described in Chapter 1. Although the focus of this study is on the boys' practices of masculine construction, my analysis cannot be properly accomplished without reference to constructions of masculinity and femininity undertaken by the girls. I conducted a similar analysis of the girls' narratives and the ways they spoke to a normative gender. I will therefore make reference to that analysis where appropriate, but I will not go into detailed descriptions of their narratives

## **Narratives of Self**

By familiarising myself with their texts, I was able to draw out the main conceptualisations that the boys had used in assigning attributes to the



different gender categories and the frequency of statements applied to them (see *Table 1*). In both cohorts similar phrases recurred. This allowed me to link sets of phrases together to produce a conceptual attribute, an analytical holding form for the different descriptions offered by the boys. By repeating this process of ascription I was able to formulate an attributional table linking conceptual attributes to descriptors:

**Table 1** *Conceptual Attributes*

Conceptual Attributes	Definition and Descriptors
<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	This entails the attributing of particular modes of bodily presence to the categories 'boy' and 'girl' and the suggestion of differential ordering of physical activities according to gender, e.g. 'play lots of sports'; 'can play netball and other sports'; 'can be faster'.
<i>Superiority - physical/cognitive/empathy</i>	This involves statements that order physical, cognitive and affective attributes in hierarchical relations, e.g. 'have more stamina'; 'can be very educated'; 'kinder and more helpful'.
<i>Appearance</i>	These statements focus on the differential use of clothes, accessories and demeanor in the realisation of gendered identities, e.g. 'clothes are different'; 'wider range of clothes'. These are stories of presence.
<i>Life Trajectories</i>	These statements refer to anticipated futures related to gender, e.g. 'have harder jobs'; 'do more housework'. Through these stories the children negotiate their relations with future worlds.
<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	The ascription of particular strands of the social fabric to gender categories are captured by these statements, e.g. 'go shopping'; 'can go to cubs'.
<i>Biological Difference</i>	These statements assert an association between specific biological functions and social identity, e.g. 'can have babies'. Through these stories, gender is naturalised.

Conceptual Attributes	Definition and Descriptors
<i>Public/Private Realm</i>	The suggestion of different domains of practice associated with gender categories are contained in these statements, e.g. 'can go out more'.
<i>Relation to School/Authority</i>	Degrees of concord and antagonism are attributed to gender categories by these statements, e.g. 'get told off more'.

## Boys' Own Stories

How was maleness defined by boys? Boys describe themselves primarily in terms of what they do with their bodies (see *Table 2*). They 'play sport', particularly competitive sports such as football, rugby and basketball. These sports are defined in opposition to girl's sports, such as netball, which are ascribed a more gentle, simple and less physical function - 'play the same sports as girls but better'; 'play more contact sports such as rugby'.

Associated with the centrality of action in the boys' self-descriptions is the use of physicality to denote superiority - 'more muscles'; 'run faster'; 'have more stamina'. Having 'more' or being 'better' always implies an 'other' that you are compared favourably to. Although not made explicit, the weaker, lesser 'other' is the 'girl' found in the question '*What is good about being a girl?*'. I have already discussed the problematic established by the dichotomous assumptions of the original exercise. Consequently, these are always relational statements that constantly infer the relational other.

**Table 2 CONCEPTIONS OF MALENESS :Comparison of Cohorts 1 & 2:**

COHORT 1 1994/5		COHORT 2 1995/6	
ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION	ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION
<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'play lots of sports'; 'can play football'; 'can get into football teams easier than girls'; 'play the same sports as girls but better'; 'play more contact sports such as rugby'; 'boys eat more because their bodies are different'.	<i>Superiority - cognitive/physical</i>	<i>cognitive:</i> 'write faster'; 'cleverer than girls'; 'better at computers'; 'have got good schools'.  <i>physical:</i> 'better at football'; 'more muscles'; 'run faster'; 'are strong'.
<i>Superiority - physical</i>	'boys should be stronger'; 'have more stamina'; short hair is more sensible when running'; boys are taller/stronger'.	<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'get to play rugby'; 'get to play basketball'; 'get to play Formula 1 racer'; 'get to be a boxer'; 'get to do more sports'; 'don't think twice about beating up brother'.
<i>Appearance</i>	'clothes are difference'; 'not as fashionable as girls'.	<i>Life Trajectories</i>	'can earn more money'; 'can be in movies'; 'can drink yourself silly at pubs'; 'can play for Villa'; don't have to have babies'.
<i>Biological Difference</i>	'don't have babies'	<i>Appearance</i>	'not so fussy about hair'; 'can shave all hair off'; 'are cool'.
<i>Relation to School/Authority</i>	'get told off more'.		

The hierarchy of difference is pursued through the other conceptual attributes. Not only are boys regarded as better than girls physically, but cognitively also - 'cleverer than girls'. What boys wear and what they do with their hair also denotes difference. When considering the direction their lives will take into adulthood, the boys define a world where they may have to work hard,

construct social worlds around alcohol and possibly enjoy the limelight of fame - 'can be in movies'; 'can play for [Aston] Villa'. As well as predicting that their future social worlds might be distinct from women, they describe their contemporary social networks and activities as dissimilar to those of girls. The descriptors not only suggest different activities, but a preference for male associations - 'don't have to play with Barbies'; 'can play boys' games'.

The normative masculinity invoked by the boys' statements is one that places an assertive physical presence and a sense of superiority at its core; entails conflictual relations, whether that be physical ones found in the realms of sport or disciplinary conflicts, as found in school; and a notion of masculinity that assumes a public and aspirational place for men. The analysis of the girls' narratives produced strikingly similar statements (see Appendix 2). The girls made connections between the public orientation of masculinity, freedom from domestic and/or caring responsibilities and aspirational futures. As with the boys' depiction of masculinity, at the centre of this social identity is an assertive physical presence.

### ***Stories From The Centre - Descriptions Of The 'Other'***

If boys defined normative masculinity as bound up with an assertive physical presence and aspirational futures, what are the contours of a feminine social landscape?

A key attribute of the girl's femininity, as defined by the boys, is a concern for appearance (see *Table 3*). Hence, the boys produce a wealth of statements detailing what girls can wear or do with their appearance - 'get to wear nice make-up and jewelry'; 'can do more with their hair'; 'can wear better clothes'. A certain physicality is suggested by these statements, a physicality made more explicit in the statements related to the conceptual attribute 'Physicality & Action'. These statements are not denotative of the image of strong bodies ascribed to masculine physicality. Instead, they concentrate on the different activities open to girls - 'can skip and dance'; 'don't have to play football'. Certain themes found in the descriptions of masculinity are repeated here. Femininity is characterised by girls inhabiting separate social spaces to boys, whether that be particular networks - '[Girls] can go to Brownies', different activities - '[Girls] go shopping more' or their location in domestic social spaces - 'don't go out as much as boys, looking after children and housework'. This fixing of a domestic femininity is also related to the identification of femininity with reproduction - '[Girls] can have babies' and imagined futures being related to marriage - 'can be a bride' and household responsibility - 'can pay the bills'. The contemporaneous situation of girls is partly defined by girls having less antagonistic relations with adult authority - 'get told off less'. But it is also defined by girls having attributes that boys don't. This 'superiority' is located in girls' greater emotional sophistication - 'more gentle and kinder than boys'. However, having described themselves as cognitively superior to girls, one boy at least ascribes this attribute to girls - '[Girls] find it easier to learn'.

Normative femininity, as defined by the boys, is almost the exact opposite to masculinity. Instead of an assertive physical presence, girls are described in terms of their (perceived) concerns with appearance and a less muscular physicality. The location of girls in distinct and more domestic social spheres is re-inscribed in these statements, supported by the association of girls with the affective domain. As with the descriptions about masculinity, there is a great deal of concurrence between the girls' descriptions of femininity and those made by the boys. The girls also identify femininity with concerns over appearance; the locating of femininity in distinct and more domestic social spaces; of having less antagonistic relations with authority; and as being inscribed by affective relations.



Table 3 *BOYS CONCEPTS OF FEMALENESS: Comparison of Cohorts 1 & 2:*

COHORT 1 1994/5		COHORT 2 1995/6	
ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION	ATTRIBUTE	DESCRIPTION
<i>Appearance</i>	'get to wear nice make up and jewelry'; 'can wear a wider range of clothes'; 'more fashionable'; 'more attractive than boys'; 'can have long hair'.	<i>Appearance</i>	'can wear more jewelry'; 'can do more with their hair'; 'can have long hair'; 'can wear better clothes'; 'can wear boys clothes as well'
<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'can skip and dance'; 'easier to get into netball teams'; 'can play netball and other sports'.	<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'can play other sports (netball)'; 'don't have to play football'; 'can have girls games'.
<i>Superiority - empathy</i>	'more gentle and kinder than boys';	<i>Life Trajectories</i>	'can be a bride'; 'can have an easier life'; 'can pay the bills'.
<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	'go shopping more'	<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	'can go to Brownies/Girl Guides'; 'can have Barbies/dolls'.
<i>Public/Private Realm (Domestic Arrangements)</i>	'better at cooking'; 'don't go out as much as boys, looking after children and housework'.	<i>Relations to School</i>	'find it easier to learn'.
<i>Biological Difference</i>	'can have babies'.		
<i>Relation to Authority</i>	'get told off less'		

**‘Semantics of Gender’**

It is now possible to define the semantic logic of this normative idea of masculinity, of the conceptual elements that make up the masculine social imaginary as depicted in the narratives of self.

## ***Physicality and Action***

This describes a certain orientation towards the world, one structured by participation and accomplishment in competitive sports. Boys are seen as being shaped (literally) by physical prowess. This notion of prowess can perhaps be taken in both of its senses, as being to do with a certain agility or mastery over the body and athletic skills - control of the ball, running at speed, stamina, development of muscles; and in its articulation with competitive (contact) sports, notions of bravery, courage, virility. It is striking how similar both boys and girls descriptions are of boys physicality. This orientation also suggests an external and public dimension to masculine embodiment. It is not just that boys have a physical presence in the world, but that this physicality manifests itself in action, in participation in sport and other competitive activities. Competitiveness calls forth notions of combatants, of opposition relations, of vying for dominant positions.

## ***Superiority***

Given the centrality of physicality and action in these ideas of a normative masculinity, it is not surprising that they should be expressed through notions of superiority. As described above, a fundamental principle in the deployment of masculine dispositions is that of competition, and therefore, oppositional and hierarchical relations. In both the girls' and the boys' statements this is epitomised by male superiority. There is no recognition given to any possible differentiation between boys. Later we will see that, indeed, masculine accomplishment is highly differentiated. This omission in the children's



statements gives greater weight to the interpretation of these statements as attesting to the children's understanding of normative gender relations rather than the actual practices of individuals. Such physical superiority is affirmed by girls' supposed poorer performance in traditionally 'male' pursuits, such as football. In fact football, both as actually practiced within school life and as a signifier of difference was a sight of gender contestation within both classes. Not only is male superiority ascribed to boys' physicality, but also to their academic achievements. Despite contemporary official and popular concerns over boys' apparent underachievement in relation to girls, both boys and girls subscribe to the notion of some inherent superiority in boys' academic ability producing such statements as boys being 'cleverer than girls' and 'better at computers'.

### ***Social Networks and Pursuits***

The social world of boys is distilled through gender specific networks such as participation in 'boys games', 'cubs' and football and basketball. The focus of male social activity is affirmed by its distance from what are ascribed as girls' activities. So boys' pursuits are defined in oppositional terms, boys being able to play with 'action men' but 'don't have to play with Barbies'. What is interesting here is the distinction between what is, and is not a 'doll'. Boys intersubjective relations are given a particular nuance that speak of their greater social license. Boys are seen as being permitted an active sexuality where they are the ones who 'get to ask girls out' (girls' statement, see Appendix 2). Such sexuality has its own normative criteria, that of an

assumed heterosexuality. These differentiated social networks operate outside of the school - cubs, brownies etc. but the highly gendered practices that give rise to these networks, function in the school, regulating the children along the principle of *difference*.

### ***Life Trajectories***

As their bodies are externally oriented, so too their projected life chances. The differentiated social activities of their present lives continue into adulthood. The inflection of *difference* as superiority is given in one boys perception that men 'have harder jobs' and another's belief that men 'can earn more money'. The ideas of boys' greater strength and academic ability are suggested in these statements. Men's' lives as public activities is also given expression through the aspiration for public recognition whether that be starring in movies, playing for Aston Villa or becoming a pop star. Again we have an image of men acting upon the world, of moving in a public terrain. The instrumentality of men's lives implies both the use of devices for securing their place in the public domain, and a notion of individual agency which relates back to the heroic image of competitive sport. Sociability is also a public venture. In almost classical form, adult male social life involves drinking 'yourself silly at pubs' and drinking 'more than girls'. This aspect will be looked at again in an analysis of an additional activity asking the children what they would do when they were older.

## ***Biological Difference***

This appeared to be stated as a marker of difference without any necessary implication of superiority/inferiority. Boys are simply characterised as being without the ability to reproduce. However, the fact that such statements were produce is important. The linking of gender categories to reproductive capacity, is suggestive of gender identity being an expression of biological make-up. I do not know how much these children knew about reproduction. Also, there is nothing in the statements that suggests any sense of male involvement or responsibility in the reproductive process.

## ***Appearance***

There was a recognition by the boys that they were 'not as fashionable as girls'. Again, an instrumentality in relation to clothes and hair was invoked. Boys saw themselves as being 'less fussy about hair' and short hair or shaven heads seemed available to them in a way that suggested it wasn't to girls. Yet there is also a sense in which boys feel they are more constrained as to bodily adornment. Boys talk about girls having more options where girls can 'wear more jewelry', can 'do more with their hair' and that girls can 'wear boys clothes as well'. This last statement in particular speaks of sartorial boundaries being born of social constructions rather than innate tendencies. This can also be explained in terms of practicality - short hair being regarded as a more sensible option when engaged in physical activities.

## ***Relations to School/Authority***

A world of antagonistic relations between boys and school authority is summoned up by the recurring statement 'boys get told off more'. This avers to different orientations towards school by boys and girls, calling into being notions of the 'quiet schoolgirl' and 'troublesome boy'. The exploration of the sample boys contrasts to this expectation of antagonism enshrined in a normative masculinity.

## ***Public/Private Realm***

Statements referring to boys being able to 'go out more' without their mums worrying 'about them as much' and not having 'to do as much housework' paint a picture of distinct gendered realms where the public is coterminous with male. The public becomes a space of distance from domestic responsibilities. This relates back to the statements that construct masculinity in terms of acting upon the world. Masculine identity is given meaning through its external, performative actions, as something constructed in opposition to the private, domestic sphere.

## When I am Older

In addition to asking the children to respond to the questions *What is good about being a girl? What is good about being a boy?* I also asked them to say something about what they thought their lives would be like when they were adults. This task was organised in response to the original elicitation exercise. Also, there was no requirement, on the children's behalf, to complete the task and hand it in to me. In that sense, it is incomplete. However, it does provide useful supportive data. Although 34 responses were produced in all, here I examine the 21 responses produced by boys (1994/5 - 10; 1995/6 - 11). These responses reinforce the highly differentiated futures imagined in the previous exercise.

I described above the external and aspirational character of the children's statements about male futures. All of the 21 responses made by boys were externally oriented. Eleven responses featured such aspirational expectations as being a movie star, film producer, professional athlete (football, rugby, basketball) and t.v. presenter. Some of these boys (4) qualified these aspirational expectations by also citing alternative jobs such as bank manager, fireman, solicitor, teacher. These qualifications suggest that for some boys there was the realisation that their preferred choices were unrealistic. Yet, this was not necessarily so for two of the boys. One boy, who stated that he would like to be a professional football player, was being considered by a Premiere League club for their youth training scheme. Another boy, who said he wanted to be an 'action hero' actor, was already an accomplished martial

arts competitor and was involved in the kind of drama activities that many young t.v. presenters have been through. Eight boys, all from the 1995/6 cohort, described their preferred futures primarily or wholly in terms of being rich. The route to wealth was ascribed either to winning the National Lottery jackpot (3), being a professional athlete (2) or just being a 'millionaire' or having 'lots of money'(3). But, possession of the symbols of wealth - 'big' cars, 'big' houses, mansions, private jets, private yachts, 'lots' of money featured regularly in the boys' responses.

Four boys made reference to what might be called 'realistic' job choices. Their choices appeared to be linked to skills or aptitudes that they already possessed, and were occupations that were realistically within their grasp, even more so than the potential professional footballer and actor. Two of these boys believed they would be carpenters. Another boy also chose something within his grasp, that of being a photographer. However, he prefixed this with the aspirational adjective 'famous'. Nevertheless, this boy was already interested in photography, and, if he was to keep this interest up, could realistically be a professional photographer. The fourth boy aspired to be a cartoonist. Given that he spent much of his curriculum time drawing elaborate and very skilled cartoons, instead of mathematics or science, this was also a realistic option.

Only two boys mentioned the expectation of relationships or family being part of their imagined futures. For one of these boys, the desire for family - 1

want to have two children, get married' was tied into his aspirational dreams - 'be a famous footballer, have a nice house and have a nice sports car' (Boy 1995). Although he mentions his desire to be married, a wife appears to be mainly instrumental in providing him with children. The other boy sets out a plan for the way he would like his life to go:

*When I am a man I would like to be a footballer and a fireman. I would like to have a big house and I would like to have lots of flowers in my garden. I would like to have a nice wife when I am older. I would like to have two children when I am older. When I am older I would like to watch the [Aston] Villa play.*

Although he includes the aspirational desire to be a professional footballer, this is immediately qualified with a more 'realistic' occupational expectation. Yet it is one that is similarly highly masculine, with its attendant images of fitness, strength and bravery. But, unlike the other highly aspirational stories produced by the boys, this one seems to hold out a different kind of desire. I say this, perhaps, because of what I know about this boy, Dan. I know, for instance, that his relation with his father was an antagonistic one, that he felt rejected by his mother after the birth of a baby and that he was already involved on the periphery of the local criminal culture. It is a desire for 'normality' and stability and certainty. It is a world where unemployment doesn't rob him of his masculinity and where his sexuality is secured within

the heterosexual modality of marriage and children. But it is, perhaps, more than this. It is also desire to have beauty in his life, a garden full of flowers

## Summary Analysis

‘nothing is good about being a boy because boys spend their money on football, clothes and junk food and they sleep all day’ (10 year old girl)

This statement contradicts the overall impression of male superiority that pervades the depiction of normative gender relations. It questions the notion of an active masculinity lived through the metaphors of sport. Instead, an image of slothful voyeuristic engagement with action is evoked. But it also hints at a world structured along a principle of *difference*. While this girl speaks of boys, girls are an absent presence, that is gender as relational, masculinity always understood in relation to femininity. What is important here is not masculinity or femininity as such, how they may be understood and defined, despite the children themselves engaging in such an activity. How the category masculinity (and therefore femininity) works as a signifier of *difference*, how this category defines the possibility of being male, and how this structures and organises material relations - discursive materiality, is the matter of this discussion.



## ***Relative Normality***

The above data can be read as representing the boys' understanding of the normative gender order, of the masculine and feminine imaginary. These are normative statements against which the boys measure themselves, and more importantly, each other. The definition of a normative masculinity in terms of a dominant physical presence and accomplishment in competitive sports is not a description of fact - not all boys do and can accomplish this mode of masculinity. As we shall see later this definition or imaginary acts to differentiate between boys, regulating the positioning of boys as marginal or subordinate to the dominant groups who had appropriated the culturally dominant codes of the masculine social imaginary.

The imaginary of the dominant gender order is based upon the understanding of masculinity and femininity as relational categories. Masculinity/femininity, male/female, boy/girl form the central oppositional couplets of the dominant gender order (Guterman 1994). The statements are riven with these oppositional couplets. We see active boys defined against sedate girls; male enactment's in the public against private femininity; male social license against female circumspection; the 'troublesome' boy against the 'good' girl; the aspirant male against female domesticity

## ***Accounting for Difference***

The statements not only describe gender *difference*, but account for it also. Immutable differences are suggested again and again. The descriptions of a

normative masculinity and femininity are constructed around the image of a 'naturalistic' body (Shilling 1994). Gender is recognised through bodily gestures, postures, gaits, adornments; physical dispositions towards strength or frailty; the psychological dispositions towards cognitive or affective intelligence, with a clear hierarchy ordering these; and most fundamentally, reproductive capacity. Within this discourse of the 'naturalistic' body male and female bodies take on a pre-social dimension, a biological basis on which identity and society are founded. The reason why girls and boys inhabit distinct and separate social spaces, whether that be in particular social networks and pursuits, or the fundamental division between the public and the private, can be drawn back to this essential biological foundation. The distinction between aspirant public accomplishments and nurturant or domestic relations in adult life can also be accounted for by this primary distinction.

The foundation of gender identities on the biological, 'natural' body are witnessed in the statements on biological difference, which repeat the same mantra - 'boys don't have babies'. Of course, this simple statement of difference works through a biological discourse of gender that defines a fundamental difference between male/female as signified by the possession of certain combinations of hormones and reproductive organs. Such bold scientific fact valorises the social structuring of reproduction in patriarchal society. Boys are positioned in an instrumental relation to sexuality whereas girls are defined in terms of their responsibilities within a gender division of

labour (in both senses of the word). The discursive outlining of children's sexuality is held within a narrative of marriage that naturalises the gender division of labour. This is most starkly revealed in the boys' narratives of their possible adult lives. Male sexuality is delimited by the greater social license afforded boys- 'mums don't worry about them as much', and the relative freedom from domestic responsibilities - 'don't have to do as much homework'. Female sexuality is confined to being the object of the male gaze ('can go out with boys'); the nurturer and carer ('kinder and more helpful'); and eventually the wife and mother ('can be a bride', 'can have babies'). Within these stories of desire and desirability the girls are placed with the responsibility for sexuality. While for boys an active heterosexuality is presumed - 'boys get to ask girls out', and centred on their physical being in the world, girls have to be desirable - 'get to wear nice make-up and jewelry', 'are pretty'.

### ***Romance...and It's Absence***

This discourse of the natural body and its social expressions runs through the children's references to sexuality and marriage. Gerder Siann and Helen Wilkinson (1997) have suggested that a growing number of young men were decoupling their sense of masculinity from an identification with work. This was seen as ushering in a new culture of intimacy. Gerder Siann and Helen Wilkinson's study suggested the emergence of a new future of democratic relations within relationships and the home. The boys' statements also speak of gender relations in the home and in imagined adult futures. However, these are quite different from those found in Gerder Siann and Helen

Wilkinson's study. The 'family', for instance, is evoked by the boys' statements, and supported by those made by the girls, in terms of an essential public/private dichotomy. The boys do not describe their involvement in more equitable domestic relations. The boys see themselves living in public spaces. They are the ones who go out without approbation from their mothers while the girls wash up and look after their younger siblings. There is a sense in which these practices are preparations for their adult lives. When considering their possible adult futures all of the boys imagined adult masculinity being coterminous with the world of work. For many of the boys this was articulated through the language of the public/heroic e.g. 'Win the jackpot on the lottery; Be a famous rugby player; Be a movie star; Be a T.V presenter; Be a famous tennis player; Be the fastest man on earth; Be a famous swimmer' (Boy 1996). Apart from two boys, who registered the desire for a family, familial or romantic relations were totally absent from the boys' statements. These statements seemed to evoke a future where food did not need to be cooked, clothes washed nor houses cleaned. Even one of the boys who did desire a family spoke in terms of having a 'nice wife', with all the domestic responsibilities that the social category wife denotes. Most fundamentally, the boys' statements described a life without others, even though a family obviously involves others.

## A Few Concluding Remarks

A number of features appear to present themselves on first reading of the data on gender perceptions and adult futures. The ways of practicing maleness and femaleness seem quite distinct. For boys a physical presence in the world seems to be a key characteristic, with their life lived in more public spheres organised around gender specific groupings, antagonistic relations with school and authority and directed towards acquiring public social goods - jobs, cars, fame, etc. Girls, on the other hand, are depicted as having a less physical presence in the world, characterised more by a projection of self through the ciphers of beauty, a relational being in the world structured around gender specific groupings, the domestic sphere of familial responsibility and lives centred on relations with others. In other words a world of the instrumental male and the expressive female.

## **Friends - As Seen On T.V?**

### ***Presenting The Data - Spinning The Yarn***

Both cohorts of children were asked to produce a friendship tree with at least seven branches. The name of a friend in school was to be attached to each branch. The assumption here was that the names on the tree would represent the core of each child's friendship network in the school. This is a pretty blunt instrument. At different times of the year the same exercise could produce different results, children's friendships changing over time.

Children's friendships are much more dynamic than such a method can properly allow for. Without follow-up interviews or detailed observation, there is no way of knowing to what extent the names on the trees represent existing friendship groupings or the friends a boy would wish for. Neither do they indicate the extent of the friendships. Again, my analysis concentrates on the networks produced by the boys. The results examined here have to be understood as partial and fragmentary. However, given the limited number of names allowed on the trees, and assuming a certain degree of honesty on the part of the boys, I believe that the trees do detail the kind of patterning that occurred in the lives of these children, at that time, in the school. Also, in relation to other data examined (observation of interactions and gender perceptions survey), the friendship trees are indicative of wider processes of gender differentiation. In particular, the patterning of friendship networks along single-sex lines appears as the most striking feature of the children's social world.

## Grouping by gender

### *all boys together - 1994/5*

The 1994/5 cohort comprised 13 responses from boys. When looking at the boys' responses in terms of gender, eight or 2/3 of the boys had boy only friendship networks. These can be split into two distinct groups. The first group comprises six out of the eight boys with male only friendship networks. Although 18 different names make an appearance in these lists, six boys in particular appear frequently. The frequency of their appearance stands out above all other names, ranging from six to eight appearances. Most other names are only mentioned once, or at most four times. I am not surprised by this finding. If I had been asked to predict the most popular boys in the class, I would have chosen these six. Apart from one of the boys, who will be discussed below, they constituted a coherent group similar to Máirtín Mac an Ghaill's (1994) 'academic achievers'. They all lived in the more middle class part of the school's catchment area, they were all in the same scout troop, and most of them participated in the same out of school sporting activities. Most of these boys were also high academic achievers. The particular response to academic activities that these boys developed will be discussed in the focus on the sample group later. One of the boys in this group, Robert, did not inhabit the same pedagogic or social location as the others, yet he was very well represented in the friendship networks. He did not show any enthusiasm for physical activities within the curriculum, and I never observed him participating in playground activities involving skilled physical movement. However, he was an active member of the scout troop that the other boys

were part of. Neither was Robert a high academic achiever. So why was his name mentioned so frequently on the friendship networks along with these other boys, if he did not inhabit the same pedagogic and social locations? Could it be that social class - movement within a particular social milieu, and/or some other personal trait, such as his humour, allowed him recognition within this dominant middle class grouping? I will return to these questions when examining the sample group of boys.

The other group consisted of just two boys, Michael and Stewart. I mark them out because of their marginal position in relation to the rest of the class. Their school careers had been severely interrupted by long periods of illness and hospitalisation. They had never established the kind of long standing friendship networks that most other children had done. Also, they both displayed behaviours that many children in the class found difficult. Michael required a great deal of curriculum support. However, budgetary restrictions meant that his progress through the statementing process had not produced the levels of additional support that both the school, Michael and his family expected. This was causing all concerned a great deal of worry. Michael was critically conscious of the disparity between the curricular outcomes he was able to achieve and that of others. This meant that either he continually asked others for help, which caused tensions, or his frustration led him to reject support from other children or classroom assistants. This rejection of help was often highly voluble. Stewart also needed curricular support, though not to the same extent as Michael, Stewart being able to perform as well as many



other children in the class. His ailments, though, were much more physically obvious, and Stewart was particularly sensitive about this. Working in groups seemed difficult for Stewart, and he preferred working alone, although there was another boy he occasionally partnered himself with when possible.

The marginal position of these two boys expressed itself differently in the friendship tree exercise. Stewart's name, for instance, appeared three times, which was as often, if not more often, than some other boys. This was despite the fact that these other boys were more obviously popular than Stewart. His marginality was marked by the subordinate positioning of the boys who mentioned him on their own lists. One of these boys was the one Stewart showed a preference for working with. Another was a boy who shared a similarly marginal position in relation to the class as a whole. None of the boys who could be considered mainstream to the life of the class mentioned Stewart as a friend. Michael's marginality was even more marked, not just because he only appeared once in any of the networks, but also because he found it extremely difficult to complete the exercise and put any names down on his own list. Michael lived in the middle class area near the school and both of his parents were health service professionals. He was also a member of the same scout troop as the *Princes of the Park*. His marginality may have been related to his numerous absences and convalescence's as a result of the many operations he was forced to endure. This does not seem a total answer. Another boy, later in the same academic year, was absent from school for a term due to an operation. He had been part of the football

network in the class. His absence from football did not seem to diminish his popularity on his return. Could it be then, that the lack of physical prowess, as coded through the vernacular of football, was a contributory factor in Michael's marginality?

### ***including the girls***

In contrast to the 2/3 of boys who registered a preference for male only networks, five boys did in fact include girls. Four of these boys included just one girl each on their list, while another boy included four girls.

Given that the majority of boys registered a preference for boy-only networks, I wondered what significance there might be to the naming of these particular girls in these boys' friendship trees. The significance can be suggested from a consideration of the pedagogic and social class locations of the girls in comparison with the boys. I will consider three of these boys first. Two of these boys named the same girl, who was a high academic performer and lived in the middle class area near to the school. The pedagogic location of the boys, however, was quite different, both receiving extra curriculum support, one of them being on the Special Needs Register. Both also frequently asked other children to help them with their work, including the girl they had named on their friendship trees. Apart from this I had not noticed that these boys spent much social time with this girl. I was left wondering to what extent the inclusion of this girl in the boys' networks was as much aspirational as real.

The third boy, Andrew, who will be discussed later in the examination of the sample group, although he tended to achieve well academically, seemed largely isolated from the main friendship networks in the class. Observations of the children in the playground, for instance, did not suggest that he spent any time with the girl he had named on his friendship tree. While they were grouped together in a number of curriculum activities, if anything, the girl displayed aggression and annoyance towards him. Also, this boy lived on the working class estate, and both of his parents were unemployed. I am left wondering how far her inclusion in his network was also aspirational.

Another tentative reason for the inclusion of these girls in these particular boys networks could be romantic attraction. This is particularly so for the third boy mentioned above. His interactions with girls often seemed sexualised in terms of the language he used. He was accused, by both girls and boys, of being overly sexual in the content or intimations of his discourse. The absence of overtly sexualised narratives in the children's interactions, as I observed them, appeared to emphasise this particular boy's marginal position.

The fourth boy, Dean, who included a girl in his friendship network deserves some discussion, not only because of the inclusion of a girl in his main network, but also because of the addition of a girl in a supplementary list of three names. The boys on the tree did not surprise me. Dean was the most dominant boy amongst the working class boys in the class and most of his associations were to do with football. I therefore looked at the girl included

in this network and the three additions in light of that knowledge. As the teacher, but with an eye to ethnographic detail, I had gathered tacit knowledge of the children and their lives. Thus, I know that the girl in Dean's main list lived close to him and their respective families were friends. Of the boys, one was also part of the football milieu, and so, in that sense, not a surprising addition.

The other boy, however, struck me as lying outside of this particular network of footballing boys. What was the connection between him and this friendship network. Through the kind of casual discussions that make up part of the relationship between teacher and pupils, I gathered that this particular boy was not as distant from the football milieu as I had thought. It transpired that his participation in football took place outside of school, and he was a member of a local junior football team. The girl included in Dean's supplementary list, Kelly, turned out to be a close friend of Dean's. Two questions arose for me in thinking about this. If Kelly was a close friend of Dean's, why did he locate her on the periphery of his network of friends, and why did I never see them together in the less regulated spaces of the school? Answers to these questions address, firstly, the boys' understandings of the friendship tree exercise, and, secondly, the performative nature of masculinity.

In asking the children to complete this exercise, I explained that I was interested in who their network of friends were in the context of the school. Of course, this can impose artificial boundaries on the geography of

friendship. Dean may well have interpreted my request correctly, in that the six boys named on the tree were all from the school, as were the additional three names. But he may also have felt the need to include these additional names in order to give some recognition to friendships forged more in the domain of home and street, than school. I have no way of securing an answer to this. It does, though, raise a cautionary note about the contingent nature of research data and its interpretations. The peripheral location of Kelly on Dean's friendship network may also say something about masculinity as a performative practice. It may be that the particular dynamics of masculine identification in the locale of the school, requires Dean to amplify a social distance from girls. Such an amplification may not be as necessary in the context of the home and street. This perhaps goes some way towards understanding the inclusion of the girl in the main list, since I had not observed them together in the school. Also, the fact that he did include a girl within his network, albeit one on the periphery, could attest to his sense of security in his masculine identity. A boy less secure in his sense of maleness may well have refused such an inclusion, preferring instead to assert a greater social distance. These questions will be considered in more depth later.

Another of the boys who included girls in their friendship networks was significant in that half of his network (4) comprised girls. In observations of his interactions Craig displayed an ability to work equally well with girls and boys. He worked hard to encourage others to participate, reprimanded others if they took somebody else's turn in a game, or spoke too much in

discussions. He volunteered to help other children with their curriculum work. He also displayed a great deal of sensitivity. For instance, during the life of the research he was reading 'Schindler's List', and in the work with a drama in education company on the theme of the Holocaust, the integrity and sophistication of his affective involvement was noted. Yet, he was very much part of the culture of football, participating in the school football team and a local junior team. He was also a high achiever academically. But, unlike most of the other boys, competitiveness with others did not seem to be integral to his identity.

### **More of the same - 1995/6**

The 1995/6 cohort consisted of 17 responses. Thirteen, or 2/3 of the boys in the 1994/5 cohort produced boy only networks, a similar proportion as the 1994/5 cohort. A more detailed examination of the 13 responses that produced boy only networks revealed a different patterning to the 1994/5 results. Instead of a largely homogenous dominant middle class group of boys, analysis of the 1994/5 cohort suggested a broader range of associations that did not appear to be enclosed within geographies of social class or pedagogic location.

#### ***traversing the divide***

Four boys, Matthew, Carl, Richard and Brian stood out as encapsulating a kind of transverse mode of friendship patterning. They did not all inhabit the same pedagogic or social locations in the classroom. Matthew and Richard,

for instance, received extra curricular help, particularly with reading, while Carl and Brian were both high achievers in most areas of the curriculum. In the context of the classroom Matthew and Richard shared a number of friends and participated together in various activities. This was partly the result of the grouping strategies I used and the tendency for the school to adopt the practice of setting children for English and Mathematics. Although this meant that they often found themselves in the same curriculum groups, this did not necessitate friendship. It was my impression that they shared a sense of humour and often supported each other in their curricular activities. This humour was one that they also shared with a small set of other boys, who together formed a coherent group. Carl and Brian were seldom in the same curricular groups. Carl had formed a close working and social friendship with Kunle, the Nigerian boy in the class. Brian, on the other hand, had a similar friendship with a boy called Thomas. Carl and Brian had other differences. While Carl exerted a controlled and athletic physical presence - almost every evening was taken up with one form of sporting activity or another, Brian appeared gangly and uncoordinated.

The boys did not inhabit the same social class locations either. Matthew and Richard were both from the working class council estate. Matthew's mother was separated from his father and worked full time to support Matthew, his younger brother and herself. Both of Richard's parents were unemployed. Carl also came from the council estate. However, both parents worked full time, his father was a printer; they had bought their council

house; and Carl's father was an active member of the community, being involved with football clubs and the scouts. Carl was also part of a large extended family, with whom he spent much of his free time. Brian lived in the middle class part of the school's catchment area. His mother worked part time and his father worked in middle management.

The different social class locations that the boys inhabited expressed themselves in their parents' educational aspirations for their sons. Matthew and Richard were expected to go to a local comprehensive. Their parents wanted them to do as well as they could, but didn't think they would be able to compete for a place in the cluster of selective and grant maintained schools in the area. Carl's father took an active interest in his academic performance. He wanted Carl to go to one of the 'better' schools, which meant either taking a school's own entrance exam or completing the 11 plus. Talking to Brian about his own expectations, it became obvious that the maintained comprehensive was not within the scope of aspirations for either himself or his parents. The only question they had was which school should he go for.

These four boys, despite their different pedagogic, social, social class and aspirational locations, appeared on a range of networks in a way that other boys did not. Matthew was the most frequently listed name amongst the boys, with 12 appearances. Carl closely followed with 11 appearances, and Brian and Richard next with seven and six appearances respectively. What marked these boys out was the appearance of their names on such a wide



range of networks. Brian, whom I associated with particular academic friendships appeared on four separate networks where I felt football was the common thread linking the disparate names. Carl, who was similarly academically oriented, appeared 10 times in networks which, again, seemed built around shared participation in football. Although Matthew nor Richard featured in academic networks, they did appear in networks associated with football and social connections. Matthew and Richard appeared five and four times respectively in one particular social network of boys who shared an interest in comic books. They also appeared in a football network, Matthew seven times and Richard twice. This was the same network that both Brian and Carl were represented within.

### ***more girls - but only some***

Four boys included girls in their friendship networks. Three listed one girl each while the other listed two. The only thing that these boys share is their inclusion of girls in their friendship networks. Otherwise, they did not represent a coherent group. When I looked at which girls were listed in these boys' networks, it struck me that three of the boys had mentioned girls from the other Year 5 class. Reflection on this helped me refocus and draw my attention to the fact that many of the friendship trees included the names of children from the other Year 5 class. This was not as significant a feature in the 1994/5 cohort. Before jumping to the conclusion that this signaled a new kind of patterning of friendship formation, I remembered that this current Year 5 was composed of a horizontal re-organisation of the previous Year 4

These boys had not come up with their previous year's class intact.

This did not provide a total answer to this observation. One of these boys had only joined the school at the beginning of the new academic year. The girls he was most likely to associate with were those in his own class, yet he chose to list two girls from the other Year 5 class who were also part of his mathematics group. There was very little evidence that he spent any time with these girls in school. My own observation had been that one of these girls actively disliked him and complained about his attentions during Mathematics lessons. I had not observed much evidence of romance playing an important part of the children's lives in school, though this could be to do with a lack of focus and judgement on my part. But this particular boy was of note because sexuality and a narrative of romance appeared to be a significant element of his masculine practice. Over the course of the year girls complained about the overtly sexual tone of his language and the spreading of boyfriend/girlfriend stories. Since there did not seem to be much evidence to support the idea that these girls were consciously his friends, this might represent another example of the kind of aspirational friendship discussed above. It might also be one that was framed by a sexualised and romantic narrative.

Kunle was another boy who had only joined the school that year. He also included a girl in his friendship network. Unlike the others, he included a girl from his own class. This friendship appeared to be genuine. Although Kunle

was new to the school, he quickly established himself as a key figure in the football network as well as being a high achiever. To some extent the girl included in his friendship network was part of the football network. She was one of a group of girls in Year 5 who wanted to play football. This caused some tension with the boys, but also a degree of respect. She was also a working friend, co-operating with Kunle on curriculum tasks.

## **Grouping by Social Class and Ethnos**

Gender, and in particular masculinity, is the central focus for my investigation. However, a fully embedded and embodied composition must make reference to the salience or otherwise of social class and ethnos. I will do this by comparing the two cohorts and the ways social class and ethnos featured in the boys' representations of their friendship networks.

### ***two ways of doing class***

Social class featured differently in the two cohorts. The dominant group of boys in the 1994/5 cohort, as discussed above, were connected by interweaving strands of pedagogic and social location. Their geography of friendship was structured through a strong association with academic achievement, involvement in the same scout troop, participation in a series of sporting activities and their shared middle class milieu. This was not a feature pertinent only to this middle class grouping. Although Dean, the dominant working class boy in the 1994/5 cohort, displayed a certain flexibility by including girls in his friendship network, these were drawn from the working

class housing estate he lived on. In fact Dean's, and another boy's network, were of interest because they both listed the same set of cousins. For these boys social class could have been bound up in particular familial relationships. On the basis of this social class connection, I identified Dean, in particular with a working class grouping I call the *Working Class Kings*. Social class also provided a structuring role for the girls in the 1995/6 cohort. Social class did not seem to have the same saliency in the 1995/6 cohort of boys. As the discussion about Matthew, Richard, Brian and Carl suggested, instead of social closure, social and pedagogic transverse was one of the distinctive features of the boys' friendship patterns in this cohort. Similarly, the dominant group of girls in the 1994/5 cohort were connected through shared interests more than class or pedagogic location.

### ***the ethnos of friendship***

'Race' and ethnicity did not seem to have the same saliency as social class, but they did feature differently in the two cohorts. Only four boys from the 1994/5 cohort included girls in their lists of friends. One of these boys, Craig included the girl of Pakistani origin, as well as three other white girls. Only one girl from this cohort mentioned her name as well. As to why none of the other children included this girl, or the girl of mixed parentage, I can only speculate. Two of these boys included white middle class girls who had given them peer support in curriculum tasks. The other boy, Dean, included girls from his working class locality. The girl of mixed parentage also came from the same area as Dean. The fact that he did not regard her as a friend is not

enough to claim a racial intent. All the same, the social relations of the working class estate that Dean and other boys lived on were publicly racialised. The British National Party regularly stood candidates in both local and national elections in the area.

Given the preference for gender specific networks, the possibility of racialised friendship patterns presenting themselves as a problematic could have been more evident in the 1995/6 cohort. A boy's ability at, and enthusiasm for football seemed the overriding principle of association. Kunle, the Nigerian boy, was a central figure in the football network of boys. Nirmal, the Sikh boy, was also a figure in this network, as was his close friend Alan. It is perhaps worthy of note that none of the boys who included girls in their friendship networks, included the only African Caribbean girl. This girl was located within a broad working class grouping across Year 5 which included a number of girls of mixed parentage. However, she did maintain an exclusive girl only friendship group of her own.

### ***a sorry tale - Nirmal and Alan***

I want to briefly look at the close working and social friendship between Nirmal and Alan. Football was an associative feature of their friendship which they shared with a large number of the boys in the class and Year 5 as a whole. It is their classroom interactions that I want to focus on briefly as part of this discussion of ethnos and friendship groupings. Nirmal and Alan were almost inseparable, a situation that I felt was not conducive to a positive task

orientation.

One incident raised serious concerns about the way friendships, including this one might be racialised. During the course of an afternoon I observed a series of notes being surreptitiously passed around the classroom. This was causing a wave of interest and subdued discussion around the class. Nirmal and Alan appeared to be the origin of this communication. Finally, I pinned it down to Nirmal and Alan, who were sat together. When I read one of the notes I was shocked. It had been written by Alan and contained a list of racist taunts directed at Nirmal. The discussion with Alan later produced the usual reasoning that any teacher will be familiar with. The notes were only meant as a joke, but yes, he did know that they were hurtful and insulting. After all, that was their power. Despite them being close friends their friendship could still be heavily racialised in terms of how it could be played out in relation to other children. I will look at this again in the following discussion.

## **A Summary Of The Story So Far**

A certain breadth of vision has been made possible by the friendship tree exercise. What the story tells us is that beyond the regulatory functions of teacher organised groupings, and possibly within them also, most of the children chose gender specific friendship networks. From this story of difference we can make out some of the features of the boys' gendered world and the vernacular of masculine practice. As such, I will concentrate my analysis primarily on the boys.

## ***The Masculine Constituency Of Football***

Within this segregated world, active participation in, and enthusiasm for football seemed to provide a social space within which boys could mark out their distance from girls and distinctions between boys. This gendered feature of primary school life has been noted by Christine Skelton (1997). Football, then, can be looked upon as a form of cultural capital particularly associated with the dominant groupings of boys. It grants them the means with which to secure certain kinds of status and access to privileged social networks. The names of these boys appeared on each others networks in different combinations, this frequent cross-referencing instituting those networks as a particular kind of masculine constituency, a constituency of football. This masculine constituency of football has a certain performative quality to it, in the form of technical competence, physicality - the physical grammar of football, and authority through knowledge - the semantics of football.

For this group of boys, football is more than a topic of discussion, or a game they casually participate in during playtimes. To be an initiate, proficiency in the game needs to be publicly demonstrated. Within the school, this was witnessed by the exclusivity involved in the management of playtime football. Those thought not to meet the technical standards set by these boys were routinely prohibited from taking part. One girl, Jacky, did manage to enter this masculine constituency to some degree. Her demonstrable technical skill and knowledge of the game - her cultural capital, can be understood as

constituting her, in the eyes of the boys, as a proxy or token male. This is much like the 'tomboys' studied by Barrie Thorne (1993) who were given temporary license to cross gendered borders. What is important about Barrie Thorne's observation is not just the possibility of such border crossing, but that it was more readily accorded to girls than boys - the implication being that male transgression was more troubling for masculine coherence, and was a temporary license. Football was also very much part of the cultural milieu of the area, where a highly competitive infrastructure of junior leagues existed. Almost all of the dominant boys were members of local teams. Such participation, and the status of the different clubs may well have contributed to the positioning of these boys in this dominant male constituency of the school, and possibly to their position within it also. The public display of skill in real games offers a means for measuring the boys' degrees of masculine accomplishment, not only against each other, but also against the wider world of men through the connection with local and national football cultures.

Another aspect of performativity is the role of football talk in potentially solidifying this social network and achieving positions of authority. All of these boys engaged in frequent exchanges and accretion of information related to scores, league tables and players. Such talk could lubricate social interaction between these boys, and act to exclude the uninitiated. It provides a context for intimacy through joking, playful antagonism and mutual support. It can be argued that this is very similar to the role of gossip attributed to women-only groups (Cameron 1997). For these boys, their sports talk serves



a very similar purpose accorded gossip - the affirming of group solidarity and the informal exchange of information. What might make sports talk a particularly masculine mode of discourse is its gender exclusivity and as a culturally exhaled way of performing masculine, heterosexual gender identities. All the same, the emotions of joy and disappointment can be shared in their affective engagement with the sport, with their own performance, with the successes and defeats of their favourite teams. But this intimacy seems heavily circumscribed, possibly refusing narratives of doubt, uncertainty and private reflection. This point will be taken up again in the analysis of the children's statements about femaleness and maleness.

Football talk is not just a means of communication between this group of boys. It also provides them with the means to participate in a national, predominantly male, dialogue through the proliferation of sports, and particularly football t.v programmes. Competency in this field, as in technical skills, could well contribute to an individual accruing capital, and so further securing their place within the constituency of football. Football talk directs attention away from the personal and private preoccupation of the boys, and displaces these concerns on to a depersonalised socio-cultural space of scores, league tables and players. Yet these practices, while displacing personal reflection, represent the very discursive mechanisms through which each boy works to establish a recognisably masculine identity. Football becomes a metaphor for masculine accomplishment

The high profile and culturally privileged position that football enjoys, gives these boys' local practices a legitimacy, but also constitutes the cultural conditions of their emergence as significant practices in the construction of masculine identities. The institutional organisation of football and its stars provides exemplars of a gendered world and the social relationships that sustain it. It gives a legitimacy to a gender order predicated on a primary distinction between maleness and femaleness, of identity instituted in the body, and of a particular physical masculinity as the normative gender.

### ***The Exclusionary Function Of Football***

This normalising aspect of football can be apprehended in those boys excluded from football's circle of legitimacy. The lack of this form of capital limits status and access to privileged networks. With a particular kind of physicalness central to the dominant masculinity, boys such as Michael and Stewart, are propelled to the margins of the male cultures of the classroom. The semantics and physical grammars of football may discipline and regulate practices of the dominant boys, but so they do those of Michael and Stewart. As well as the male/female duality, the discourse of the 'athletic' body, so central to sport's masculinising practices, sets up another binary couplet, that of the able/disabled. Michael and Stewart are not wheel chair bound, though Michael some times needs a stick to assist his walking. Yet, in terms of the depicted friendship patterns they are rendered almost invisible under the normative gaze of a physical masculinity.

## ***Crossing Over - But Only A Little***

A question I found myself asking was how were Dean and Craig able to sustain their positions as popular boys, linked into the masculine constituency of football and include girls in their friendship networks. While participation in the semantics of football was not a prerequisite for constructing a gendered social distance, after all even the more marginal boys produced boy only networks, social distance from girls was the central principle of differentiation in the boys' friendship patterns. Dean, who was the dominant working class boy in the 1994/5 cohort, was able to include two girls in his network when other boys were not. What could it be about the kinds and amounts of capital that he possessed that allowed him to traverse this fundamental social division. I wondered whether the answer might lie in his dominant position within the world of boys, and in particular the masculine constituency of football. Dean not only participated fully in competitive sports in the school, always excelling in them, but he was the linchpin of the school football team and was being considered by a Premier League club for an apprenticeship. Could it be, then, that this position of dominance, secured by the status of the cultural capital he possessed, allowed him the privilege of including girls in his network of friends.

Craig can be considered in a similar fashion. While football was part of Craig's social orbit, it was not as central as Dean's, and did not provide him with as much capital in that field. I feel though, that a mixture of his pedagogic location in the class and his social maturity gave him forms of

capital that enabled him to balance that gender divide. His sensitivity and emotional maturity did not seem to undermine his position within the world of boys. He shared the pedagogic location of high achievement with the other middle class boys in the 1994/5 cohort. He could participate successfully in the languages of football, and he was liked for his caring approach to those who found their curricular activities difficult. Dean possessed enough capital to secure his position in the constituency of football. So secure was his position that he was able to include girls in his friendship network. Craig, on the other hand, possessed a much broader range of capital - the cultural capital of football skills and knowledge, and academic achievement, and the social capital of the middle class networks. But he also possessed a different form of cultural capital that marked him out from other boys in the class, an emotional maturity that seemed to enable him to position himself in non-antagonistic relationships with others. It is this particular configuration and amount of capital that seems to have secured for Craig the possibility of having so many girls in his friendship network. This is not to suggest that boys cannot have friendship with girls unless they possess adequate amounts of valued capital. That would be too deterministic. I am arguing that the possibilities for establishing such friendships within the context of the school and, more importantly, establishing them as public entities, appear heavily circumscribed. The possession of valued forms of capital that secure positions of dominance in male networks can legitimise such friendships without necessarily inviting discourses of derision.

Although the cultural capital found in the masculine constituency of football, especially in the 1994/5 cohort, reproduced lines of differentiation along social class lines, it also allowed certain boys to traverse social divisions. Matthew, Richard, Brian and Carl, from the 1995/6 cohort, were able to cross over their pedagogic, social, social class and aspirational locations. For these boys, football provided them with the means to construct transverse friendships and therefore forms of social inclusion. Kunle's, and to some extent Nirmal's inclusion within the constituency of football, are examples of how the cultural capital of football can be deployed in such ways as to provide a material basis for social inclusion. However, I am aware of the potential racialisation involved in Kunle's participation in the cultures of football. Bob Connell (1995) has pointed to the way African American sports stars can become exemplars of a hegemonic physical masculinity, while African Americans are systematically excluded from the benefits of a rich society. In similar fashion, Kunle could achieve a dominant position in relation to other boys in the class, while also being constructed as the 'other'. The story of Nirmal and Alan points to the contingencies involved in practices of social inclusion. Rather like Les Back's adolescents (1996) or the primary aged children in Barry Troyna and Richard Hatcher's study (1992), Alan can both inhabit, then vacate an egalitarian identity. He can turn to racialising discourses of derision, evoke a public recognition of Nirmal's 'racial' difference and otherness, while maintaining the unspoken normative of his own whiteness. He may only be able to do this because the semantics of race are readily available in the habitus of the classroom and locality.

In this summary of the friendship networks I have discussed football as a social space of distance between boys and girls, football as a constituency within which dominant masculine identities are constituted and constitute the social space of difference. I have suggested that the semantics and physical grammars of football that most of the boys participated in was a culturally exalted form of capital. It was not the only form of capital available to boys, however. Academic achievement, the sharing of other social interests and emotional maturity were other forms of capital used by different boys. Depending on the form and amount of capital a boy possessed, he could traverse social divisions. Some boys constructed transverse relationships that took them beyond their pedagogic, social and aspirational locations. Other boys were able to include girls in their networks while maintaining their dominant positions in relation to other boys. Football, though, was closely associated with securing a dominant position within the world of boys, and its semantics and physical grammar worked to exclude as much as include, and constitute some boys as the 'other'. The geography of friendship suggested by the friendship trees extended beyond the classroom and its pedagogic structures. It extended into the playground, the dining hall, the social and family milieu of the children. This analysis is suggestive and will be extended in the following critiques.

In the various stories of self that the children produced - statements on gender and the friendship trees, a world of difference has been evoked. These

have not so much been descriptions of self, reflections on what they as individuals have done, since many of the stories told do not speak of the individuals involved. Rather, they speak to notions of a normative gender, and do so with noteworthy consistency. They can be seen then as enactment's of gender in their own right, of speaking through discourses of gender difference. The contours of the masculine and feminine imaginary are quite clear. Normative masculinity is defined by an active physical presence in the world where the male is oriented towards the public domain of aspirational goods and achievement. Normative femininity, in contrast, is defined by a sedateness, a less muscular presence, a greater concern for desirability and an orientation towards the private, domestic sphere. These distinctions, and their social expressions in differentiated adult futures, are grounded in a discourse of the 'naturalistic' body. It is our bodies, and the potentialities of our bodies, that define us as male or female. Normative gender is also seen to regulate the children's sexuality. Female sexuality was tied up with reproduction and an ethic of care, articulated through narratives of marriage. Male sexuality was ascribed a more agentic, and less responsible role, fitting into the masculine/heroic images that provided a narrative structure to the boys' stories of self.

These are not just narrative enactment's. In these stories we see the children structuring their social world in terms of segregation. Football, for instance, is constituted as social space of difference and distance. It is instituted through particular semantics (knowledge and sports talk) and

physical grammars that construct a masculine constituency of football in its interior, and a site of marginality on its exterior. The masculine constituency of football privileges certain kinds of cultural capital, the possession of which secured access to its privileged networks. The possession of valued cultural capital also allowed certain boys to traverse, though not cross, gender and class boundaries.



**CHAPTER FOUR**

**THE WARP - ENACTMENT IN**

**CONTEXT**

# Introduction

This chapter, the *Warp*, focuses on the kinds of interactions that I observed in the classroom. I look first at the way the pedagogic structure of the classroom, the pedagogic context of enactment, was formed. Then I turn to the interpersonal interactions, the immediate context within which boys sought to construct themselves as male. As well as enumerating these interactions, I draw out thematic elements based on the interactions that go some way to producing a narrative of masculine construction.

## Patterns of Interaction

As I walk into the classroom, I am struck by the duality of my presence. I am both interior and exterior to the ebb and flow of activities surrounding me, the constant movement of bodies, the particular spatial arrangements of children and furniture. My sense of exteriority is also dual in its points of departure and trajectories. One sense of exteriority evokes an out of body sensation, a notion of being separate from and outside of these events. I am only attached to this 'other' world through a special kind of seeing, one that filters it through the coding machine of the observation schedule. Its codes and definitions rigorously focus my eye, regulate my attention, the zoom lens of some methodological camera. This aesthetic experience is tempered by the cultivation of a desire to recognise certain patterns, to direct observed

phenomena to their appropriate holding place in the schedule, to note their frequency, and in so doing, already mark their saliency.

The apparent clarity of this vision rendered the classroom, the people inhabiting it, and the occasion of their interactions within it, strange. I found myself recording such features as the type of grouping strategy found in use in the classroom, and the tasks undertaken. I recorded them as if it were somebody else who had instituted them within the pedagogy, or as if they were somehow a consequence of the interactions of the boys themselves. Yet, the decision to privilege such organisational strategies were mine. They came out of my positioning as teacher. Long before considering the option of doing an M.Ed. my teaching had been marked by attempts to apply the understandings gained from Maurice Galton's ORACLE project, particularly the relationship between teaching styles and pupil type (Galton et al 1980; Galton 1989). Therefore, the 'strangeness' of finding that *Working Groups* and *Collaborative Groups* predominated as grouping strategies in the 1994-5 observations was one attained through the constitutive practice of a 'naive realism' (Scheurich 1997). I was conjuring up a world that could be meaningfully captured by recording the frequency of certain phenomena. So, what might this enumerated world look like?

## The Pedagogic Structure

### Groups

Table 4 - Comparison of Grouping Strategies

Group Type*	1994/1995 Cohort	1995/1996 Cohort
	n= 13	n= 18
<i>Working Group</i>	7	14
<i>Seating Group</i>		1
<i>Cooperative Group</i>		
<i>Collaborative Group</i>	6	3

(\* These terms are defined on page 86)

What does this tell me, or you, the reader? It says that in the 13 observations made in 1994/5, seven involved *Working Groups* and six *Collaborative Groups*. Of the 18 observations made in 1995/6, 14 involved *Working groups*, three were *Collaboarative*, and one *Seating*. The extent to which *Collaborative Groups* were used in 1994/5 is a feature that is not readily found in the literature on group work in primary schools (Galton and Williamson 1992; Biott & Eason 1994), and attests to my commitment to co-operative styles of working. To say that I had adopted these particular grouping strategies is perhaps to overstress the possible intentionality involved. I had certainly not planned that the whole period of the 1994/5 observations would be confined to just two strategies. The prevalence of *Collaborative Groups* during this period says something about the focus on certain curriculum areas, particularly Geography and Drama, which lent themselves to the use of co-operative styles of working. There is a certain

serendipity involved here. My commitment to the development of group work in my own practice as a teacher, certainly established a pedagogic context for the subsequent interest in conducting my research. The particular texts I drew upon in this pedagogic work, my interest in learning as a social activity, and my stress upon active modes of learning all sensitised me to certain ways of structuring my professional practice. In short, they constituted my professional habitus. In this way, then, myself as the teacher, and the research activity itself, are always present in the following depiction of the social world of the classroom.

## Tasks

This professional habitus is also manifest in the range of tasks made available for the children to engage in (see *Table 4*). Of the 13 observed events recorded in 1994/5, five entailed Writing as the generic task engaged in. In the 1995/6 observations Writing accounted for eight out of the 18 observational events. This difference in the frequency of Writing as a generic task is related to the differential deployment of *Collaborative* grouping strategies. As can be seen from the table, Collaboration was the predominant generic task engaged in where *Collaborative Groups* were deployed as the grouping strategy. In 1994/5 all six occurrences of Collaboration were found in *Collaborative* groups. In 1995/6 there was only one occurrence of Collaboration, which was found in a *Working* group context.

**Table 5 - Comparison of Generic Tasks and Grouping Strategies**

<b>Generic Tasks*</b>	<b>1994/5 Cohort</b>			<b>1995/6 Cohort</b>		
	<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Seating Group</b>	<b>Collaborative Group</b>	<b>Working Group</b>	<b>Seating Group</b>	<b>Collaborative Group</b>
<b>Writing</b>	5			8		
<b>Reading</b>					1	
<b>Looking/ Listening</b>	1					
<b>Collaboration</b>			6	1		
<b>Construction</b>				1		3
<b>Drawing/ Painting</b>						
<b>Physical Activity</b>	1			4		

(\* These terms are defined on page 88)

As *Working* groups are the most used grouping strategy in British primary practice, so Writing is the most commonly engaged in task (Alexander, et. al. 1989). It is not surprising then to find that this task was the one predominating in *Working* group situations in my own observations. All of the recorded instances of Writing were found in *Working Groups* (five in 1994/5 and nine in 1995/6). It's the typical image of children engaged in individualised activities while sitting in group formations.

## **The asymmetrical teacher**

Despite my desire for more intellectually engaging interactions with the children, as a consequence of promoting collaborative group work, there was

still the asymmetry of pupil-teacher interactions found elsewhere (see Galton et. al. 1980). The tabulated reality of the enumerated world displays this well, if bleakly,

**Table 6 - Comparison of Pupil-Teacher Interactions**

	1994/5 Cohort	1995/6 Cohort
	n= 13	n= 18
<b>Interactions*</b>		
<b>Wait</b>	1	2
<b>Init Tch</b>	3	1
<b>Tch Init</b>	5	2
<b>Av Int</b>	3	3
<b>Dis Int</b>	1	10
<b>Int Tch Grp</b>	5	16
<b>Int Tch Own</b>	4	2
<b>L Tch</b>	5	17
<b>Tks Tch</b>	4	1

(\* See page 90 for a definition of terms)

My interactions with the boys was characterised by the majority of the boys observed interacting with me, but with me controlling those interactions. These interactions entailed me either giving task instructions, managing boys' behaviours or 'checking up' on task completion (evaluative feedback). Even on the three occasions in the 1994/5 observations when boys did initiate their interactions with me, two of them involved me in giving evaluative feedback while the other concerned a complaint about another boy's behaviour. Similarly, the boy in the 1995/6 cohort who initiated his interaction with me, did so in order to request help. However, this did entail more than task

management in that I worked with him for a while during his construction of a car in Technology. Four observations in 1994/5 and 13 in 1995/6 involved boys in either avoiding my attention or disregarding any interaction with me. These will be discussed in more detail later. In this respect the act of looking at classroom interactions as if from outside did disrupt my complacency and force me to reconsider the easy relationship between grouping strategy and high order interactions that I had perhaps assumed.

### ***The 'Normative' Context Of Interaction***

This is not just a description of observed phenomena, 'bits' of some ubiquitous objective reality. My focus here on the pedagogic products of my professional habitus details something of the terrain of the ontological space of the classroom. From this we can see that *Working* groups provided the normative context for classroom interactions during the two periods of observation; that within this, *Collaborative* grouping strategies were deployed as techniques for constituting pupils as active and responsible learners; that while a range of tasks were made available for the boys to engage with, Writing was the dominant mode of curriculum activity, and the tone of my interaction with the boys was one of behaviour and task management.

As I have stated above, the normative setting of classroom interactions was that of children engaged in individualised tasks in *Seating* or *Working* Group formations. This pattern was redolent of primary classrooms found in other research (see Galton 1989). However, my personal commitment to a



social model of learning meant that I instituted, within the pedagogic structure, a more co-operative mode of grouping strategy. This was evidenced in the relatively high proportion of groups that could be categorised as *Collaborative*. The adoption of particular grouping practices; pedagogic relations between teacher and pupil; the pedagogic orientation of tasks - oriented towards individualised or co-operative activities; the temporal arrangement of bodies and resources; all work to constitute both the boys' and my experience of the classroom.

## **Patterns Without Voices**

### ***Introduction***

I stated at the beginning of this thesis that a motivation for conducting this research was my disgruntlement with my colleague's theorisation about the 'problem' of boys behaviours in school. I needed to know what the characteristics of their interactions were in my own classes. Did they match the reductive and pessimistic analyses of my colleagues? Or did the patterning of their interactions suggest something more complex and contingent?

### ***Getting Along Just Fine***

Sitting in front of the 31 Pupil Observation Records was like contemplating

the scratches and squiggles on the seismograph, attempting to decipher these inscribed reverberations that had emanated from a distant rumbling below the surface of the earth. There was the worry that I would find a dysfunctional class, something that would only feed the sense of imminent failure that I, like many other teachers, feels is just below the surface, just like the earthquake. I needn't have been so fearful (see *Table 7*). In the 1994/5 observations, nine out of the 13 interactions involved boys working on-task (Co-op Task Verb & Co-op Tsk Cntc), usually with others. This was reinforced in the 1995/6 observations where 13 out of the 18 interactions, that is 2/3, were on-task (Co-op Task Verb, Co-op Tsk Cntc & NInt). There was a sigh of relief. Did this mean that I could refute the pessimistic outlook on boys' behaviours by presenting this empirical data? No serious generalisations could be made using such a small sample, and there was nothing in the data that suggested that the particular kinds of interaction engaged in by individual boys represented the tendency of their interactions overall. However, I felt, intuitively, that below this surface phenomena lay a richer seam of encounters.

**Table 7 - Comparison of Pupil-Pupil Interactions: General Observation**

	1994/5 Cohort	1995/6 Cohort
	n= 13	n= 18
	(where 'n' = the number of boys observed)	(where 'n' = the number of boys observed)
<i>Pupil-Pupil Interactions*</i>		
<i>Co-op Tsk Verb</i>	9	6
<i>Co-op Tsk Cntc</i>		5
<i>Verb</i>	4	2
<i>Cntc</i>		3
<i>Nint</i>		2
<i>Intf SS</i>	2	5
<i>Intf Sev</i>	2	
<i>Intf OS</i>		
<i>Int Mal</i>		
<i>Intf Pl</i>	4	5

(\* These terms are defined on page 89)

## Or Are We? - The Formation Of Tacit Groups

Where did these co-operative interactions occur in the pedagogic structure I had established? In the 1994/5 cohort, six of these co-operative encounters took place within *Collaborative* group settings, three in *Working* groups. The very grouping strategy aimed at encouraging co-operative styles of work appeared to be doing just that. Perhaps grouping strategies that encouraged more co-operation could provide an organisational context for gender co-operation. When the location of these encounters were looked at in terms of the group composition, co-operative interactions took on a different hue (see *Table 8*).

**Table 8 - Comparison of Group Composition and Task Interaction**

	1994/5 Cohort		1995/6 Cohort	
	n= 13		n= 18	
	Mixed Grp	Boys Grp	Mixed Grp	Boys Grp
<i>On Task</i>	3*	6	3	10**
<i>Off Task</i>	2	2		5

(\* One of these boys was situated in a Mixed group but worked independently)

\*\* This number is made up of 6 boys who interacted only with other boys, and 4 boys who either did not interact with others or participated in the work of a group without personal interaction ).

Of these nine interactions, six took place in groupings made up wholly of boys, while the other three did so in mixed groups. It needs to be born in mind that all formal groups established by me, were mixed. Consequently, the subsequent construction of gender specific groups was the result of the children's own interactions. What we see here is the active formation of tacit gender specific groupings within the context of mixed formal groups. If boys tended to co-operate on-task, they also registered a preference to do so with other boys. Although *Collaborative* groups might engender more co-operative work, that co-operation was also gendered.

The different curriculum focus during the period of the 1995/6 observations meant that *Collaborative Groups* were less frequently used as an organisational strategy. So what were the locations of the on-task and co-operative interactions here? Boys' preference for working with other boys was even more extenuated in this cohort. Out of the 13 observational moments that can be classified as 'on-task', 10 were in boy only groups. Of this 10, only one was formally established. A further four involved either none or minimal interaction, resulting in five out of the 10 on-task interactions involving tacit group formation. Apart from the boy working on a Technology task, which was formally situated within a *Collaborative* group setting, all of these on-task interactions in tacit groups were found in *Working* groups. I need to re-emphasise that almost all formal groups were established as mixed groups. Only one occasion, a Technology lesson, required two boys to work together as a formal group. On all other

occasions boys were required to either work individually, as part of a class activity or in mixed groups. Therefore the process of forming tacit groups of boys is a highly gendered activity.

### ***Is He Or Isn't He? -How Can You Tell When Some One Is Co-Operating?***

There were a number of boys, whose interactions raised questions about how to categorise them. One of these was part of the 1994/5 cohort. Although he only ever interacted with the other boy on the table, and avoided all interaction with the girls, he was not involved in forming a tacit group of boys. My reason for concluding this was that he continued to participate co-operatively in the group's work, but mediated that participation through the other boy and me. This was actually a fairly typical approach adopted by this particular boy. He will be looked at in more detail later as he was one of the sample group of boys observed. So, he was recorded as working co-operatively with the others, albeit by proxy. This example helps to clarify the concept of tacit group formation. The formation of a boy only (or girl only) tacit group requires a redirection in the trajectory of interaction from gender inclusion to exclusion.

The other two boys whose categories I reflected upon were part of the 1995/6 cohort. They did not interact with anybody else, boy or girl, instead working in a solitary fashion. The category 'No Interaction' does not quite convey what these boys were engaged in. They were observing the rules of

the particular grouping strategy in operation - *Working Group* which did not require them to directly interact with anybody. However, it is not the case that they were not engaged in some form of interaction. The fact that they did not interrupt anybody else does not negate the sense in which they were working co-operatively with others in the classroom by not causing interruptions. This can be seen as another form of proxy interaction. Also, they were responding to the task instructions that I had given, so interacting with me as the teacher via the medium of their work. 'No Interaction' in this case can be read as interaction by proxy.

### ***Bad Boys Do It With Friends***

Not all boys, of course, were observed co-operating on-task. Five out of the 13 boys in the 1994/5 cohort and five out of the 19 boys in the 1995/6 cohort were witnessed engaged in playful acts involving laughing, jokes, chatting and horseplay. None of these off-task interactions were malicious, although one boy in the 1995/6 cohort was misusing a chisel in such a way as to possibly endanger himself or others. But if co-operation was a gendered activity, could the same be said for off-task playfulness?

All of these encounters in the 1994/5 set of observations took place in *Working Group* settings where interaction with others, apart from routine classroom management - the use of shared resources and requests for information, was not integral to the grouping strategy. Given that this playfulness did involve interactions with others, who was this playfulness

directed at? Three of the five off-task interactions occurred in what were formally mixed table groups, while one was in a boy only grouping. What is significant is that these three acts of playfulness in mixed groups were all directed towards other boys. In fact, there was only one playful interaction which was played out, almost literally, to a mixed audience. A similar pattern can be constructed from the 1995/6 observations. Of the five that were recorded as off-task, four occurred in tacit groups of boys while one took place in a formal group of two boys. While most of these (3) took place in *Working Groups*, such instances of off-task interaction were found in a *Collaborative* and a *Seating* group arrangement. The pedagogic context for the interactions was more or less the same for both sets of observations. Not only did the playfulness occur in group settings made up of boys, but they directed their playfulness towards boys. Taking both sets of observations into account, it can be said that off-task playfulness was as gendered as co-operative work.

## **Modelling the Interactions**

Throughout this writing I have been attempting to embed the process of analysis in the actual research and pedagogic praxis, that is write it from within the subjectivities of being a white, male, primary school teacher conducting research on the production of masculine identities amongst the boys in my classes. It is also being written from the perspective of having spent three years as a full time educational researcher. As I outlined above, this has involved me in two kinds of exteriority, a cultivated observation as if



from outside the interactions, and a reflexive exteriority. This has allowed me to weave my own voice into the descriptions of observed phenomena.

I have not described phenomena as such. I came to the task of observation with the epistemological assumption that order was imminent within this envisioned reality. The recorded observations are therefore already imbued with a certain salience, selected as they are from a range of observable moments, abstracted from those moments, and manipulated into frequency charts and academic narrative. But I am also re-reading those texts from within another interpretative framework. I look back on the above paragraphs aware that they are already suggestive of a particular order. Certain words and phrases stand out for me, begging me to conjure up a cogent reality from their lexicographic whispers - ‘contingent’; ‘co-operation’; ‘nefarious’; ‘playfulness’; ‘proxy’. But I have Harry Wolcott (Wolcott 1995) peering over my shoulder, telling me that all this description is fine, but what does it matter if boys tend to co-operate, but in the context of being with other boys. For Harry Wolcott, such thick description is made meaningful only to the degree that connections are made between various data elements, or, as David Polkinghorne (Polkinghorne 1995) would have it, draw together different happenings into a thematic thread, a narrative of masculine construction. The full story is not ready for completion, but I can present some of its constituent elements, its thematic elements. I want to mould the enumerated descriptions around four thematic elements that range across the Pupil-Pupil Interactions, Pupil-Teacher Interactions, and Pupil-

The danger is that these themes will take on the mantle of typologies. I have no wish to add to the typological trail already laid out by others. As I said in Chapter 2, I am concerned that typologies impose an abstraction upon contingent and embodied practices. Their boundedness can misdirect our attention from the act of constructing boundaries. As Renato Rosaldo has suggested, we should be looking at the border zones, at the processes of border construction. It is in the process of constructing identities around proximity and distance to others, around similarities and difference that the boundaries of 'self' are erected and policed. This is the focus of the post-structural gaze and the second moment of exteriority. The thematic elements I develop below are heuristic devices. They do not exist in reality but are tools of analysis for understanding how gender works as a principle of differentiation in the classroom groups observed.

### ***Key Features***

The key feature of classroom life as I observed it was of boys engaged in the curriculum tasks that I had set them. Mostly, this occurred in the context of *Working Groups* where there was no requirement to interact with other pupils other than in the process of normal classroom routines. So, boys would be seen collecting curriculum materials such as books from the classroom or corridor library, or mathematics apparatus, they would be sharpening pencils, borrowing rulers, and asking their neighbours to clarify the meaning of a

word in an English exercise. Work would be intermittently punctuated by short discussions about the previous night's television or football game. These usually lasted for no more than a few minutes. Overall the pattern was of high levels of work interaction.

Similar patterns were found in the context of *Collaborative Groups*. In these settings the pedagogic principle was that of problem solving and joint endeavours. Pupil-Pupil interaction was at a premium, and curriculum tasks were premised upon these in their structure and outcomes. Clear structures were provided for these activities, whether they be Science or Geography, requiring the children to discuss hypotheses, task processes and group organisation. And this is what was seen to happen. Within this overall pattern of co-operative and on-task interactions, a series of themes or strategies of interaction can be constructed on the basis of the observations.

## **Contingent co-operation**

The formal grouping strategy required boys to be placed in seating arrangements with girls. Therefore, whether in the process of carrying out everyday classroom routines or involved in problem solving activities, boys would have to negotiate their interactions with girls. Within these formal arrangements and the overall pattern of co-operative, task oriented interactions, a more subtle and highly gendered process was in operation. There was a provisional nature to these interactions in that the conditions of their production was usually that of tacit groups of boys. Boys interacted

with the curriculum tasks and co-operated with others, but did so through a process of rupturing the formal mixed groups and establishing autonomous groups of boys. This was the case in all types of grouping strategy. Within *Working* groups this meant positively directing requests for help or co-operation at other boys, though girls might have been closer to hand. In *Collaborative* groups this process meant that gradually, two gender specific groups would form. These groups would be contiguous with each other, still engaged in a co-operative endeavour.

## **Flexible co-operation**

The overall tendency was for boys to be task oriented and co-operative, albeit with a strong preference towards other boys. Some boys, though, maintained co-operative interactions with girls. Boys who were more flexible in their orientation would work quite happily with girls. In the context of *Working* groups this might be in the form of sharing resources and supporting each other on their individualised tasks. Routine tasks, such as pencil sharpening, did not become pretexts for forming boy only groupings. These were as subtle as tacit group formation, but did not contribute towards segregating the classroom along gender lines. Similarly, in *Collaborative* groups, boys established good working relations with all members of their group. They would defer responsibility for tasks, ensure that girls contributed to group decisions, and participated equally with girls in task completion. The conditions for co-operation did not entail gender specific grouping and segregation.

## Nefarious playfulness

The constructions I was able to establish on the basis of the observations, that is of most boys interacting with the task and co-operating with (male) others most of the time, did not accord with the sentiment of troubling boys suggested by my colleagues in the staffroom. Some boys did interfere with their own and others' task relations and co-operation. These made up a small proportion of the total number of interactions. Also, these off-task interactions were playful. They involved story telling, jokes, the pulling of funny faces, general avoidance of work. The outcome of such activities was to distract those particular boys from their own work and to cause some disruption to others. By and large these playful interactions were directed at other boys. Even if those other boys did not in fact join in, they usually provided a receptive audience. These boys would often be aware of my location in the classroom, keeping a watchful eye on my movements. They wanted to avoid any confrontation with me, so, if I was in the vicinity of their group they would appear to be working - head down, pen poised, gathering curriculum materials or looking thoughtfully in their mid distance. Although only consisting of a minority of interactions, their gendered character contributed to the construction of a general differentiation of social activity along gender lines. As with Contingent co-operation, Nefarious Playfulness was intertwined with processes of proximity and distance - proximity with boys, distance from girls. These mostly occurred in the pedagogic context of *Working* groups. These were contexts of individualised work that lacked the co-operative structures associated with the tasks engaged upon in

*Collaborative groups.*

## **Interaction by proxy**

Co-operation with others did not always necessitate direct interaction. Some boys chose not to interact at all. This was always in the context of *Working* groups. Their focus was directed at task completion. By virtue of the fact that they did not interrupt others through playfulness, or engage in tacit group formation, they were involved in a different kind of tacit engagement with others. They contributed to an atmosphere of inclusion, task orientation and routine co-operation. Their personal motivation for singular working might well be to do with not wanting to work with girls, or of wanting to do better than girls. But they were not actively implicated in those practices that created distance between boys and girls. Their co-operation, then, was by proxy.

Another form of proxy co-operation was to be found in the practice of one boy in particular, Dan. He did not interact directly with the girls in his table group, despite being engaged in a collaborative task. His interactions were confined to the other boy in the table group and me, as the teacher.

However, as I described above, this did not produce an autonomous group of boys with whom the collaborative task was continued. The other boy in the group, and to some extent myself, acted as conduits for his participation in a mixed group activity. Again, co-operation by proxy.

## Summary Analysis

The enumerated description of the boys' interactions and the attendant narratives, emphasise the situatedness of the boys' interactions, that the orientations of their agency is both made possible, and is constrained by the conditions of their production. There is always a context. Les Back (1996), in his discussion of the emergence of new ethnicities amongst South London adolescents argues that social context is crucial in understanding how these identities emerge and are configured. He sets out three understandings of context that are useful in analysing the interaction of the boys in this study: *context as the socio-economic circumstances of practices*; *context as the immediate situational circumstances of events*; and *context as the immediate set of class, race, gender, community cultures, or habitus that individuals are located within*. These three contexts will frame the following summary analysis, allowing to me to draw together different strands of analysis, and so forming a basis for the production of a narrative of masculine construction.

### ***The Socio-Economic Circumstances Of Practice***

The pedagogic structure, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, can be interpreted as the socio-economic circumstances of practice. I have already elaborated the policy setting within which the practices of the school were set. All the same, these deserve further discussion in relation to the descriptions offered above. The reforms of the 1980s aimed to reconstruct the education system as a quasi-market. This was part of a more generalised response to the 'crisis of Fordism' as the world moved from an era of economic

nationalisms to the dominance of global capitalism (see Ball 1994, Brown & Lauder 1991). By opening up schools to market forces they would become more efficient in producing the kinds of knowledge and skills required for economic growth and competitiveness. The relationship between education and the economy was reinscribed in particular ways, with the relationship with the economic realm being privileged.

The new system of education can be referred to as a 'political economy of education' wherein education involves the development of the greater utility of learning with the aim of increasing 'human capital'. The function of schools and teachers work has increasingly been regulated through the performative discourses of efficiency and effectiveness. Such performativity provides the meta-narrative for educational discourse, the National Curriculum, SATs, league tables and OFSTED constituting its regulatory mechanisms. These regulatory mechanisms, then, framed the possible orientations of pedagogic practice available to me. The pedagogic actions of the new political economy of education provided the context for the development of the particular pedagogic structure in operation in the classroom.

The normative gender order, then, is not the only context for masculine enactment. The observed practices of the boys took place within a particular pedagogic context. The spaces for masculine enactment were partly provided by the pedagogic structure of the school and classroom. This pedagogic



structure was largely characterised by the privileging of individuated settings by the political economy of education. These individuated settings constituted the children as 'pupils', as knowable learners placed within a network of assessment. I am suggesting that the individuation of learning instituted by the political economy of education resonates with the idea of the individuated self found in the boys' narratives. Although I am not able to make any further claims about the relationship between pedagogic structure and the institution of the masculine social imaginary, I believe that it is certainly an area for further study.

### ***The Immediate Situational Circumstances Of Practice***

To help me construct a narrative of meaning regarding the immediate context of interaction - classroom groups, I want to draw on Foucault's dual use of the concept of 'discipline' as simultaneously referring to the practices that confer control over others, and as a body of knowledge (Foucault 1991). How can the immediate context of interaction be understood in terms of Foucault's disciplinary power?

The 'pupil' appears to be a given within the ontological space of the classroom. Imagine instead that the pupil is not a given, but is actively constituted by pedagogic actions and structures. As well as being the subject of bodies of knowledge, they are subject to those knowledges. As a 'knowable' learner, pupils can become the subjects of a body of knowledge, this knowledge aiding the more productive organisation of learning. The

knowledges produced about pupils through diagnostic, formative and summative assessments, provide teachers with information about individual's capacities, and therefore informs the distribution of resources. Grouping strategies become an element within this. The use of academic setting in the school requires that I know enough about the academic capabilities of different pupils so that I can allocate them to the appropriate group.

As well as knowledge being produced about pupils, they are also made subject to these knowledges. While pedagogic action distributes the range of possible activities, grouping strategies and assessment locate individuals within its structures. Grouping renders the population of pupils simultaneously homogenous, in that they are all equally measurable and categorisable, yet differentiated. This differentiation acts through the classificatory systems of ranking the pupils on the basis of their performance against the criteria set out in the Statements of Attainment, the levels of attainment, SATs, and other tests. This assessment regime produces the pupils as 'gifted', 'underachieving', in need of 'special needs', etc.

Classroom groups, then, can be seen as more than the physical accretion of individuals or the location of activities. They can be understood, instead, as examples of disciplinary architectures, devices for managing the population of pupils, and for rendering them knowable as particular kinds of learner. The above discussion might give the impression that it is only the pedagogic structure of *Working* groups that regulate the behaviour of pupils in the

production of the individuated learner. *Co-operative* and *Collaborative* groups also act to regulate the behaviour of pupils. If *Working* groups regulate the behaviour of individuals in terms of individuated action, *Collaborative* groups regulate behaviours in terms of an interdependence of fate. In the individuated settings of *Working* groups, for instance, the kind of solitary working exemplified by the practices of 'Interaction by Proxy', are legitimised. Indeed, 'Nefarious Playfulness' can be contained in these settings and need not seriously detract from pupils' task relationships. However, in *Collaborative* groups 'one person's experiences, actions and outcomes are linked in some way to the experiences, actions and outcomes of others in the group' (Brown 1989:27). Co-operation is at a premium. But the competitive nature of the assessment regime can induce an instrumental relationship with the task, producing a negative task interdependency, or task dependency (Brown 1989) which would set up competitive relations within a group, and could result in one person, or a sub-group, benefiting at the expense of the others.

Such an approach could be understood as a rational reading of the situation. A boy does not require a cognisance of 'disciplinary mechanisms' to interpret the regulatory processes at play in the classroom. He only has to register the fact that the normal pedagogic experience is that of individual work and individual marking - the individuated classroom. This is further supported by the observation of my practice as a teacher as dominated by task and behaviour management, as well as evaluative feedback. The relationship

between the children and me goes further than that. My pedagogic habitus provides the legitimate (and legitimating) pedagogic discourse in the classroom. Pupils are then required to position themselves in relation to that discourse and its narratives - focus on work; co-operation; self-regulation of behaviour; children taking responsibility for learning, etc. The children do not passively accept this discourse, but work with or against it. Interaction by Proxy or Flexible Co-operation are examples of attempts to work within this legitimising discourse. Contingent Co-operation, on the other hand, and the establishment of tacit groups of boys, in particular, challenges my pedagogic discourse and its normative educational subject. Contingent Co-operation allows boys to draw upon cultural resources associated with academic achievement while simultaneously refusing my attempts to construct a social commonality, by reasserting a zone of masculine exclusion.

The pedagogic habitus of the classroom, the disposition towards particular actions, structures and relationships is produced through a tension between a normative experience of the individuated classroom (and the individuated pupil) and the institution of an interdependency of fate through the use of co-operative modes of grouping and task relation. The pedagogic discourses that produce co-operative and individuated practices, can also be regarded as 'techniques of the self' (Foucault 1991; Gore 1993). That is, pedagogic action involves me, as the teacher, doing things to the children - grouping them, instructing them, assessing them, etc. and me requiring them to do things to themselves - attend to work, co-operate, take on the primary

responsibility for learning. It is the 'techniques of self' that provide the interface between pedagogic discourses and the production (and self-production) of gendered identities within school arenas. In other words, pedagogic actions and structures are not just implicated in the production of pedagogic selves - the 'bright' pupil, the 'underachieving boy', these actions and structures become the very material of identity-work itself.

### ***The Immediate Context Of Habitus***

So far, in the discussion above, I have only alluded to gender. Now I wish to focus on the concept of habitus to explain the formation of a segregated classroom. When a boy enters the ontological space of the school and classroom, not only is he constituted as a pupil, and a pupil of a particular kind, but he enters a space of *difference*. He enters into a pedagogical world wherein the normative experience is that of the individuated learner. But there is another normative context of interaction into which he also enters, a normative world of gender and gender segregation. The analysis of the children's friendship networks has constructed a meaningful narrative that depicts the normalcy of gender segregation. There I investigated the role of football as constituting a social space of difference which demarcated the boundaries between boys and girls, masculinity and femininity. It also demarcated boundaries between privileged networks of boys and more marginal or subordinate boys. I also examined the way that football knowledge and skills were forms of capital, and that the possession of this

capital in different amounts made it possible to become part of the masculine constituency of football, or not, and also made possible the formation of various transverse friendships.

My argument is that whether a segregated classroom is the product of deliberate actions - such as when Dean moved girls out of his way in the Mathematics lesson; or, more usually, in the context of the production of tacit groups of boys proper - as in the Science lesson, segregation is not the intended outcome. Rather, segregation is a 'natural' outcome of the semantic logic of the masculine social imaginary. The 'idea' of gender as dichotomous does not provide a sufficient condition for producing tacit groups, boys to orient their interactions towards other boys, or to construct pedagogic spaces of *difference*. Masculinity is not so much defined by the 'idea' of maleness as in the institution of social spaces of masculine exclusion. In this way certain networks of practices, which have no necessary articulation with each other, produce masculinity as the normative centre of gender and femininity as its relational 'other'. Masculinity is thus brought into being through these practices rather than these practices being considered as 'expressions' of an already existing masculinity.

## Conclusion

In the *Weft* I produced a narrative that detailed the normative context within

which the boys' practices of self-making took place. I argued that the gender stories the children produced spoke to an objective sense of reality, of gender as normative and already ontologically present. So, when a boy enters the classroom there is already a context of enactment, a space of possibilities. I have not been content, in this chapter, to confine myself to ethnographic description. I always have in mind Harry Wolcott's definition of the purpose of producing an ethnography, that is the production of a narrative that renders a theory of behaviour, in this case a theory of masculine construction. So, since the classroom is constituted as a space of possibilities, of it being constituted by the tension between the privileging of individuated modes of learning instituted by the political economy of education and my own pedagogic habitus of co-operation; by a social imaginary that produces gender as dichotomous, which itself constitutes masculinity in particular ways, and always in opposition to and dominant over femininity; and by the construction of social networks on the principle of gender segregation, I need to ask why boys adopt certain strategies.

The picture painted by this chapter is not one of 'troubling boys', despite this being the overarching narrative theme of my colleagues' staff room discussion. As with other classroom studies (e.g. Galton 1989), most boys worked on-task and co-operatively for most of the time. However, the specific orientations that boys gave these co-operative interactions worked to construct the classroom in terms of gender as *difference*. I am arguing that this production of *difference*, whether it be through the formation of tacit

groups of boys in co-operative settings, the preference for interacting with other boys in individuated settings or the direction of playful distraction towards other boys were habituated actions. Despite the discourses of co-operation that I deployed, the boys were compelled to construct distance between themselves and girls, and between each other, even when maintaining co-operative structures.

My final point is that pedagogic actions, whether they be co-operative or individuated, are resources that boys can draw upon in their endeavour to produce coherent narratives of self. Understood in this way, co-operation can become a context for boundary maintenance and the production of spaces of masculine exclusion.



**CHAPTER FIVE**

**TOWARDS BIOGRAPHIES OF**

**POWER - IMMEDIATE**

**COMPARISONS: SAMPLE**

**GROUP AND GENERAL**

**OBSERVATIONS**

# Introduction

The eye of the observational camera now moves even closer, focusing on the interactions of just six boys, a sample group drawn from the 1994/5 cohort.

Although the original research plan was to conduct an in-depth observation of a sample group from both cohorts of boys, I made a strategic decision in 1995 to confine this part of the study to the 1994/5 cohort. The reason for this was that I wanted to focus on the group process skills of a sample group drawn from the 1995/6 cohort instead. My decision to leave Park View school in April 1996 meant that the work generated from this focus on group skills was incomplete. I therefore decided not to use this data.

This chapter refers back to my original reading of Maurice Galton's 'ORACLE' study (Galton 1989). I wanted to observe the boys in the way I did because I wanted to see how representative my class was of Primary or junior classes more generally. I was concerned with the generalisability of my findings. The observation of the sample group was a continuation of that position, a shadow of positivism. How, then, do I read the data generated by such an approach? As with the tone already set, my present reading regards the data as representing a series of narratives concerning the production of masculine selves. I am concerned then to see if the normative context of interaction outlined earlier, and drawn from the general observation of boys in 1994/5 and 1995/6, holds for the sample group. This is only partly to do with rhetorically claiming the ground of generalisability. It is also about testing my

theoretical framework, especially my reintroduction of the concept of objectivity into a poststructuralist position. If I am right in arguing that the stories of gender produced in the *Weft* speak to an objective sense of gender, of gender *imagined* as already ontologically present and configured around certain narrative themes, I would hope to find a similar normative context of enactment in my analysis of the sample group of boys. At the very least I would have to account for any similarities and differences. To what extent, then, were there similarities (and differences) between the general observations and the sample group?

## **The Normative Context of Interaction**

In the analysis of the general observation of boys in 1994/5 and 1995/6, I argued that the boys' interactions took place within a normative context of individuated settings wherein Writing was the predominant task made available, and task and behaviour management characterised the tone of interactions between the boys and myself as teacher. The sample group boys were observed using the same Pupil Observation Schedule, methodological and theoretical note taking as the general observation of boys in 1994/5 and 1995/6. The observations took place over a two month period in 1995. Each of the six boys were traced in different group contexts for a week, producing 30 observational events. The boys were chosen to cover the broad academic and social locations contained within the class. To what extent then is the context of interaction in the sample group similar to that found in the general observation?

## Groups

Across the 30 observational events, 15 (50%) occurred in *Working* groups, 10 (33%) in *Collaborative* groups and five (17%) in *Seating* groups (see Table 9),

**Table 9 - Comparison of Grouping Strategies: Sample Group**

<i>Group Type</i>	<i>1994/5 Cohort</i>  <i>n= 13</i>	<i>1995/6 Cohort</i>  <i>n= 18</i>	<i>1994/5 &amp; 1995/6 Cohorts</i>  <i>n= 31</i>	<i>Sample Group (1994/5)</i>  <i>n= 30</i>
<i>Working Group</i>	7 (54%)	14 (78%)	21 (68%)	15 (50%)
<i>Seating Group</i>	0	1 (5%)	1 (3%)	5 (17%)
<i>Co-operative Group</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Collaborative Group</i>	6 (46%)	3 (17%)	9 (29%)	10 (33%)

(n = number of boys observed)

One feature of the sample group is the differential deployment of grouping strategies compared to the general observation of boys. In the sample group, individuated settings (*Working* and *Seating* groups) account for 67% or 2/3

of observational events. This differs from the 1994/5 cohort where *Working* and *Collaborative* strategies were deployed relatively equally. It also differs from the 1995/6 cohort where individuated settings accounted for 15 out of 18 (83%) observational events. As has already been stated, the differential deployment of grouping strategies can be accounted for by reference to my professional habitus. That is, the political economy of education privileges individuated pedagogic structures - *Working* and *Seating* groups. These grouping strategies provide exemplar contexts for constituting pupils as knowable subjects and locating them within networks of evaluation. However, my own professional and political commitment to social models of learning, led me to institute more co-operative structures into the pedagogic landscape of the classroom. Hence the relative prevalence of *Collaborative* groups.

The differences arise from a comparison of the range of grouping strategies deployed at different times. Such a comparison says nothing about the pedagogic objectives of such strategies and how these might be situated within the field of possibilities provided by the political economy of education. A simplistic comparison would only be able to say that I used different grouping strategies at different times. My concern, however, is to see if a similar normative context of interaction pertained in the sample group as it did in the other observational populations. The comparison is then one of the degree of individuation promoted by particular grouping strategies across different temporal locations. When the 1994/5 and the 1995/6 cohorts

are taken together (column 3 of Table 9) and compared to the sample group, a familiar picture emerges. Two thirds of observed events entailed individuated contexts. The combination of *Working* and *Seating* groups in the general observation accounts for 71% of recorded events, while in the Sample group it comprises 67%. One third of grouping strategies (general observation - 29%; sample - 33%) entailed co-operative contexts.

## **Tasks**

During the period of observation of the sample group most of the generic tasks were engaged upon. Again, the differences in distribution of generic activities between the two sets of cohorts, as with grouping strategies, introduces a disruptive effect into any easy comparison. I have already explained how this difference is to be found in the particular curricular emphasis given over the course of any one academic year. As above, a comparison between the aggregated observations of both cohorts and the sample group seems more fruitful (see *Table 10*). The emphasis upon Writing as the predominant mode of curriculum activity engaged in by the children is reinforced. In both the general observation and the sample group, Writing comprises around half of all generic activities engaged in (general - 44%, sample - 50%). Collaboration, as a generic activity introduced through the institution of *Collaborative* grouping strategies, comprises half again - general: 23%; sample 24%. The frequency of other generic activities range from 16% (Physical Activity - general) to 3% (Reading - general). Constructing a meaningful interpretation of these is difficult. The choice of

observational events was not controlled to allow for a representative balance of the range and frequency of generic activities. The enumerated description does not claim statistical relevance for the frequency of different activities, nor posit a correlation between these generic tasks and grouping strategies or modes of interaction. What it does is provide a suggestive argument for the individuated character of the pedagogic context of interaction.

**Table 10 - Comparison of Tasks: Sample Group**

Task	1994/5 Cohort n= 13	1995/6 Cohort n= 18	1994/5 & 1995/6 Cohorts n= 31	Sample Group n= 30
Writing	5 (38%)	8 (44%)	13 (42%)	15 (50%)
Collaboration	6 (46%)	1 (6%)	7 (23%)	7 (24%)
Drawing/Painting				3 (10%)
Physical	1 (8%)	4 (22%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)
Looking/Listening	1 (8%)		1 (3%)	3 (10%)
Reading		1 (6%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Construction		4 (22%)	4 (13%)	

The location of these generic activities in the sample group underlines my argument that the normative context of interaction in the school, framed by the political economy of education, was that of individuation.

### ***The Asymmetric Teacher - Again?***

Analysis of the tone of interaction between me, as the teacher, and the boys in the two sets of cohorts, described a context where a majority of the boys interacted with me, but as part of a group; that the majority of these interactions involved the boys listening to me; and that the dominant mode of my communication was to do with behaviour and task management - evaluative feedback. A similar patterning is found in an analysis of the sample group (see *Table 11*).

Twenty four (80%) observational events in the sample group recorded the boys interacting with me as part of a group. Although I deliberately utilised grouping strategies in the hope of reducing the occurrence of queues of children waiting to have work marked, or clusters of hands raised expectantly in the air. It was aimed at increasing the amount and quality of the communications between the children and myself. Yet, 23 out of 30 interactions (77%) involved the boys listening to me provide evaluative feedback and manage pupil behaviour rather than entering into a dialogue. Also, a reading of the boys' interactions with me as part of a group (Int Tch Grp) or individually (Int Tch Own), while the specific ratios may differ slightly from those found in the general observation, are still strongly



suggestive of the asymmetrical nature of pupil-teacher interactions that characterise the normative context of interaction in the class.

**Table 11 - Comparison of Pupil-Teacher Interactions: Sample Group**

Interactions	1994/5 Cohort n= 13	1995/6 Cohort n= 18	General Observation (1994/5 & 1995/6) n= 31	Sample Group n= 30
Int Tch Own	4 (31%)	2 (11%)	6 (19%)	6 (20%)
Int Tch Grp	9 (69%)	16 (89%)	25 (81%)	24 (80%)
L Tch	9 (69%)	17 (94%)	26 (84%)	23 (77%)
Tks Tch	4 (31%0	1 (6%)	5 (16%)	7 (23%)

### *Pupil-Pupil Interactions*

Although the research gaze has now focused down on the interactions engaged in by a sample group of six boys, I am still involved in articulating the objective moment of their interactions. I am concerned to compare the sample group with the general observation of boys.

## Getting along just fine- ?

The enumerated description of the general observation claimed that the majority of interactions between boys were on-task and that boys showed a preference towards working with other boys. To what extent can the same be said about the sample group?

Twenty one out of the 30 interactions, that is 2/3 of interactions, involved boys working on-task. This mirrors the character of interactions found in the general observation of the 1994/5 and 1995/6 cohorts. Where did these interactions take place in the pedagogic structure of the classroom and what was their orientation in terms of the gender segregation found in the general observations?

The majority of recorded interactions in each of the three grouping strategies deployed, involved boys working on-task. However, the distribution of this task relation was uneven. In both *Working* and *Collaborative* group settings on-task interactions accounted for 2/3 (approximately 70%) of the total in each category. In *Seating* group settings a little over 1/2 (60%) of interactions were recorded as on-task. The uneven distribution of this kind of task relation was also found in the general observations in both the 1994/5 and 1995/6 cohorts. Of the 21 on-task interactions, nine were in mixed groups of boys and girls, while 12 were in boy only groups. Fourteen of the 21 on-task interactions occurred in individuated settings, that is in *Working* and *Seating* groups. Eleven of these

were in *Working* groups and three in *Seating* groups. The majority of interactions in individuated settings (11 out of 14) took place in the context of boy only groupings, leaving three to take place in mixed groupings. However, almost all of the on-task interactions that occurred in co-operative settings took place in mixed groups (6 out of 7). On the basis of this construction, it is possible to argue that, like the general observation of boys in 1994/5 and 1995/6, boys' preference for working with other boys in individuated settings was also a strong feature of the sample group; but, unlike the general observation, in the sample group co-operative settings appeared to foster high levels of mixed interaction.

The picture, though, is more complex than this. To what extent was the formation of tacit groups a feature of these interactions?

## **Working together but also apart**

All of the eight observed events, in individuated settings, involving direct co-operative interactions involved boys orienting their interactions towards other boys. Seven of these involved boys establishing tacit groups, with only one of the boy only groupings being formally established. Six observed events in individuated settings were recorded as involving no interaction (NINT). It is not possible to establish the extent to which boys adopted solitary working as part of a wider strategy of distancing themselves from girls. All of the boys recorded under this category sat next to other boys, yet still adopted a solitary style of working. Tacit group formation, unlike that of

the 1994/5 observations, was not a predominant feature of interactions in co-operative settings. Of the seven on-task observational events, six involved boys interacting co-operatively with girls. There was only one example of tacit group formation.

Tacit group formation, then, was as much a feature of the Sample group on-task interactions as the 1994/5 and 1995/6 general observations.

However, the deployment of this strategy was different. As with the other sets of observations, on-task interactions in individuated settings were highly gendered. But, in the context of co-operative settings, in the sample group, cross gender co-operation was the dominant feature. However, this group of behaviours were predominantly produced by one boy, Stephen, so cannot be read as indicative of any particular trend amongst the Sample group boys.

## **Where are the bad boys?**

As with the general observations, the primary character of sample group interactions was that of boys working on-task. In the individuated settings of *Working* and *Seating* groups, six observed events were recorded as off-task. Five of these were playful in nature encompassing such activities as talking, laughing, facial expressions, gesticulations and misuse of materials. Only one observational event was recorded as 'Malicious'. This involved a boy spending the whole of the reading session observing the other children in his table group and reporting on what he regarded as their off-task behaviours. Three of those boys involved in off-task activities were recorded as

attempting to avoid my attention. Two of them pretended to work when I was in their vicinity. The other boy simply reduced the volume of his talking, but persisted in his playful interaction with others. Two boys appeared to pay no attention to my position in the classroom.

Three out of ten interactions in co-operative settings were recorded as off-task. Two of these involved boys in the usual playful interactions. One acted comically during a Physical Education lesson, encouraging other boys to laugh at his antics. The other boy joined in an off-task discussion with two other boys. The third boy was recorded as not interacting (NINT) rather than engaging in deliberately disruptive activities. Although formally involved in preparing a collaborative group presentation, this boy withdrew from the group and positioned himself some distance from them, occasionally observing their activities. Two of the three off-task observed events involved boys orienting their interactions towards other boys, while the third boy withdrew from interacting with anybody in his group.

Off-task interactions in both individuated and co-operative settings were gendered, with boys demonstrating a preference for orienting their playfulness towards other boys.

## The Sample Group in More Detail

The enumerated description offered above serves the purpose of setting the scene for looking at the sample group of boys in more detail. It set out to establish that the pedagogic context of interaction and the tone of interactions were similar to those constructed from the general observation. It is important to remember, though, that I am talking about real flesh and blood boys. I remarked earlier that the map set out by the ORACLE observations were peculiarly absent of real pupils and teachers, they spoke constantly to an abstracted reality. Also, such an approach reifies structures and interactions, making the individuals who live in the context of schools mere objects. One of my main arguments in this thesis is that any objective sense of reality, the way individuals are caught up in abstracted categories (e.g. masculinity), is best grasped by focusing on the subjective moments of reality making, the way individuals are both positioned *as if* those locations were already present, and work to construct themselves in particular ways.

In the next chapter I want to use my theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1 to analyse the sample group boys. But first, I want to introduce them more personally, to provide some biographical detail that will be useful to the reader. This is not to suggest that the boys' behaviours can be understood as flowing from some biographical centre. The descriptions I offer are somewhat conservative, in that they fix the boys' in particular bounded categories - social, social class, and pedagogic locations. As with

the thematic elements developed from the observation of boys' classroom interactions, these 'locations' are heuristic devices, analytical tools. Their reductiveness must be born in mind, and therefore these biographies must be considered as providing only one particular reading of the boys' complex realities.

### **Stephen**

Stephen was a central figure in the middle class grouping of boys in the class, which I have called the *Princes of the Park*. Stephen showed himself to be very academically oriented, performing well in all areas of the curriculum. He was expected by his parents, other teachers, the other *Princes* and by himself to perform at a consistently high level. This expectation was reinforced by the way he was compared to his older brother, who had acquired the reputation for academic 'excellence'. Stephen was marked down to go to one of the most 'popular' semi-selective secondary schools in the area. As well as in the academic arena, Stephen was a very able athlete. Although football represented the predominant mode of physical activity engaged in by the *Princes*, Stephen's interests and talents were much wider. As well as being a core member of the school's football, cross country and swimming teams, Stephen also participated in national competitions and exhibitions in one of the martial arts. As a consequence of this, he was not able to compete in the local junior football leagues. Like the other *Princes* Stephen was in the local scout troop. Stephen had a keen interest in the arts, particularly drama and dance. He was a member of a local dramatic society.

Stephen was observed in three co-operative and two individuated settings. At first, the dominant characteristic of Stephen's interactions was one of flexible co-operation. The three *Collaborative* groups he worked in all involved mixed groups of girls and boys. In fact, in two of these co-operative settings, Stephen's role was critical to the way the groups attended to their tasks. In both cases, the co-operative nature of the tasks - one involved the planning of a group presentation on 'bullying', the other a practical science experiment, can be said to encourage greater positive task interdependence (Brown 1989). In this sense then, the groups may construct their collective identities around the notion that their own goals (both personal and pedagogic), in relation to me as the teacher, their peers and the school in general, are related to a positive task completion. In the first group ('bullying' presentation), Stephen took on the role of 'scribe', noting down all of the various suggestions. The group in question was Stephen's table group. By this time in the academic year (January), the children had already gone through a fairly extensive process of 'forming', of sussing each other out, placing each other within the various networks operating in the children's cultures and the pedagogic structure of the class. It can also be argued that the norms of intra group interactions were fairly well established. I had noted how well this group co-operated with each other, how intra group conflict was minimal and so, how focused they often were on their tasks. Such was the case during this observational event. As well as recording the group's ideas, I noticed how Stephen managed to direct the work of the group. Although he seemed keen to move the group quickly onto task completion,



he did not circumvent the socio-emotional aspects of group-work. He invited all members of the group to contribute their ideas and sought to establish an equitable basis of participation. This entailed listening to girls as well as boys, to ensuring a common level of visibility for each of the characters in their emerging narrative of bullying. That is, he demonstrated characteristics of empathy that are often associated with positive group-work (Brown 1989).

The other *Collaborative* group was a curriculum group, different in membership from the table group above. As such, the formal group roles circulated around the members of the group. I recorded Stephen as participating in the group's task as 'largely [involving] himself with putting the paper clips on [the apparatus], or putting weights in the bucket' (Observational Notes 17.1.95). Stephen did not formally have a directing role in the group. Later I recorded the way he initiated interactions: '[Stephen] often offered suggestions and instructions' (Observational Notes 17.1.95). As with any member of a *Collaborative* group, Stephen was encouraged to offer suggestions. Once the group had completed the practical element of their work, I asked them to describe the process of deciding who was going to do what. They all said that it just 'seemed to happen', that no one really made conscious decisions about the distribution of responsibility. However, one boy commented that Stephen was the 'leader' of the group. Observing Stephen, not only did he make suggestions, but that these were almost always taken on by the group. It was as if his voice carried a certain authority. It might be of note that the boy who described Stephen as a 'leader' was the

only working class boy in the group. Furthermore, although formally recorded as a mixed group, it was composed of four boys and only one girl.

The third (*Collaborative* group was a follow up to the table group working on a presentation on bullying. On this occasion they were rehearsing their playlet as part of a whole class assembly. Stephen had realised that he would not be able to take part in his group's contribution to the class assembly. The consequence of this was he and the group would have to renegotiate parts in the presentation. In my Observational Notes (19.1.95) I noted: 'Since [Stephen] will not be in school next Friday, he would not be able to participate in the performance. He sat himself away from the group. Did not watch or make suggestions, etc.'. Stephen's response to this situation was to withdraw completely from the group, not even offering suggestions as to how they could reorganise the presentation. This was the only recording of non-interaction in any co-operative setting.

Both of the two individuated settings that Stephen was situated in entailed him orienting his interactions towards other boys. The first of these involved Stephen co-operating on-task with another dominant middle class boy. They shared ideas related to the task. While much of this comprised humorous exchanges, often related to the task, Stephen not only completed the task but went beyond the immediate demands of the task. The other individuated setting involved Stephen in playful exchanges with a dominant middle class boy. As I have just described, Stephen was able to engage in humorous

exchanges without this detracting from his positive task relation. On this occasion, though, the laughing and joking interrupted this relationship.

## **Dean**

Dean was the dominant boy in the working class network I have called the *Working Class Kings (Kings)*. He was also a central figure in the football network. As well as the school football and cross-country teams, Dean participated in the local junior football league. Dean and his family shared an educational project of improvement. Dean was encouraged by his family to aspire to one of the 'better' secondary schools in the area. Within the context of the school this represented itself in Dean's positive relation to the formal curriculum. Dean talked about getting ready to take his 11 plus exam for entrance into a selective school. While being a hard worker, with a flair for creative writing, Dean never quite matched the performance of boys such as Stephen. Both of his parents - his mother worked part time in the local supermarket, his father worked in the building trade, were very supportive of Dean in his school work.

The history of the relationship between Dean's family and the school, and the headteacher in particular, was characterised by tension. This focused around the role of football in the life of the school. Before I resurrected the school football team, Dean's parents had been a vocal part of a group of predominantly working class parents who lobbied for the school's participation in competitive football. The headteacher had resisted this

pressure, arguing that the school did not encourage competitive behaviours. However, she would not prevent the creation of a school football team so long as a teacher was in charge and it did not disrupt the formal curriculum. Once the team was formed, the focus of conflict between the headteacher and Dean's parents moved to concerns over their behaviour during matches. These concerns had first been raised in relation to the use of the school's grounds for the local youth football league. Dean's parents' highly vocal interactions with referees had led to them being banned from attending youth league matches for a period of time. This ban did not cover their attendance at school's league matches, however. An incident occurred when the school's team played away at another school. The match had to be cancelled temporarily because of the disruption that Dean's parents and wider family were causing. This led to the headteacher prohibiting Dean's participation in the school's football team. Not long after this, Dean's parents withdrew him from Park View school.

Dean was observed in four individuated and one co-operative setting. During the period of observation, Dean's positive task relation was clearly demonstrated, with him working on-task in all five observational events. There were two aspects of Dean's task relation and how he managed his interactions with others. The dominant aspect was Dean's highly focused relation to task, very similar to Galton's (1989) 'Solitary Worker' pupil type. This characteristic was noticeable in three out of the five observational events. Two of these involved Dean taking advantage of the individuated settings in

which he was located, by not interacting with others: '[Dean] made no sustained interactions. He was sat next to another boy... Made only the briefest of interactions with his seat partner' (Observational Notes 11.1.95); '[Dean] worked throughout the session. He made no effort to communicate with the other pupils on the table. I noticed no communication between [Dean] and [Robert], next to him' (Observational Notes 13.1.95). Although informal interactions were common in individuated settings, occurring during the process of negotiating the use of shared items, such as rubber erasers and pencil sharpeners, Dean avoided these in his effort to complete his tasks. This is possibly related to the educational project of aspiration outlined above.

The other example of a highly focused task relation occurred in the context of a *Collaborative* group engaged in a practical science experiment: '[Dean] immediately launched in to working with the materials. He took charge of holding the elastic band/bucket construction while others recorded and measured' (Observational Notes 10.1.95). Dean's role here contributed to the group's activities. He was not disruptive or withdrawn. He made suggestions about what weights to put in the bucket. But, his primary focus was on control of the apparatus with attendant suggestions that appeared to be aimed at promoting task completion. His actions did not seem to incorporate a concern for the socio-emotional dimensions of group-work.

The second aspect of Dean's relation to task and others involved a preference for working with other boys. Two out of the five observational events depicted Dean either explicitly directing his interactions towards another boy or manoeuvring himself into a position so that he was working with a boy

Contingent Co-operation and Interaction by Proxy were features of Dean's repertoire of strategies within the pedagogic structure of the class.

### **Robert**

Although Robert was situated on the margins of the *Princes of the Park*, the friendship tree exercise suggested that he was a very popular member of the middle class grouping of boys. Compared to the *Princes*, Robert was not particularly academically oriented. He was imaginative, which expressed itself in creative writing. He was also good at searching out and retrieving information on topics that he had an interest in. Unfortunately, although this meant that he performed moderately well within the official curriculum, his strengths were not necessarily recognised within the assessment regime. Consequently, out of the five observations made of Robert, two occurred in off-task situations while three were on-task. Also, he did not seem to engage in the kinds of discussion about possible secondary schools that other *Princes* engaged in. Talking with his mother, it appeared that his family expected Robert to go to a local maintained comprehensive, the more selective schools lying beyond their aspirational reach. Unlike the *Princes*, Robert was not positively oriented towards physical activity. He actively disliked physical education in the curriculum and did not participate in playground sports. However, he was part of the middle class milieu and social networks inhabited by the *Princes*. He was a member of the same scout troop and took part in the troop's activities, such as weekend camps.

Robert was involved in three individuated and two co-operative settings. When Robert was working on-task (three out of five occasions), he displayed characteristics reminiscent of 'solitary working'. That is, his focus was primarily upon the task. Interactions with others was minimal. On one occasion, Robert avoided any interactions at all. The lesson involved the children watching a history video. In this individuated setting, interaction with others was not required. However, while others passed casual commentaries on the video or continued subdued playtime conversations, Scott 'appeared to be focussed upon the video images, no interaction with other pupils of any kind, not even when the quiet was disturbed by another class' (Observational Notes 17.2.95). On another occasion, an art lesson, the class was involved in a series of tasks related to the study of William Morris designs. This involved them in either reproducing a section of a William Morris design in detail, or the development of their own design. Again, this was an individuated setting, so interaction with others was not required. I noted that Robert 'concentrated almost exclusively on his task... Did not talk to the other children on the table apart from the occasional exchange... When this did occur it was co-operative, discussing colours used [in the design]' (Observational Notes 13.2.95). Even when Robert did involve himself in co-operative interactions, these were circumscribed. The context for this co-operative interaction was a *Collaborative* group. The table group were involved in examining a series of historical maps and extracting relevant information. Robert remained on the periphery of the group, focusing on the map set in front of him in a 'solitary working' style. Although he was

partnered with another boy, and did share information and ideas, Robert tended to work in parallel for much of the time. The kind of 'solitary working' witnessed here seems different to that adopted by Dean. Robert's solitary working appears to disengage him from others, while Dean's becomes part of his family's educational strategy for academic achievement. Dean's solitary working also worked to establish him in dominant positions in relation to others, especially in the control of materials. This does not appear to be the case with Robert.

The other main characteristic of Robert's interactions was his preference for interacting with other boys. Robert did not interact with any girls in the five observational moments. When he was working on-task, if he was not working in a solitary fashion, his interactions were directed towards other boys. When he was not on-task he demonstrated the same preference. His dislike for physical activity expressed itself in the Physical Education lesson observed. I noted that '[Robert] tried to amuse himself during this session by playing around, acting 'the fool', getting others to laugh at him, or making humorous situations where he made mistakes in the task or was confronted by [me]' (Observational Notes 16.295). The 'others' he attempted to get to laugh at him were other boys. On another occasion, Robert was in a *Seating* group, which necessitated even less interaction than a *Working* group, Robert showed the ability to engage in Nefarious Playfulness while forming a tacit group of boys



[The group was recorded as Single Sex] *because, although Emma was on the table, [Robert] interacted solely with boys...He was engaged in talking to other boys on the table. This fluctuated between talk that related to tasks of others, but did not contribute, or appear to contribute to their performance, and talk that was off-task...This interaction also involved a lot of laughing and physical interactions that resulted in pen marks being made on [Robert's] face* (Observation Notes 15.2.95).

Robert interacted in terms of Contingent Co-operation and Nefarious Playfulness. The co-operation was nuanced in terms of his preference for 'solitary working' and all of his interactions contributed towards the construction of a segregated classroom.

### **Andrew**

Andrew was rather an isolated figure in the class. Although he lived on the same working class estate as Dean, he was not associated with the *Working Class Kings*, and did not appear to have any noticeable friends in the area. Also, while he was academically oriented, he was marginal to the other high academic achievers who were mostly middle class. Neither was he linked into the football network. Like Dan, who I shall come onto soon, Andrew's family circumstances appeared to impact negatively on his ability to socialise easily with other children. Andrew was often late in the mornings. The

school's response to Government concerns over attendance resulted in Andrew regularly becoming the recipient of disciplinary measures. But, the reasons for his lateness were rooted in his family situation. Andrew's mother was already at work when the children woke up in the morning. Although Andrew said that it was his father's responsibility to get him and his younger sister ready for school, the task was usually undertaken by Andrew himself. This story was confirmed by a number of school staff who knew Andrew's family. Although Andrew and his sister were almost always late for school, they were seldom absent and Andrew always managed to ensure that they were fed and well groomed. In these circumstances, it is perhaps no surprise that Andrew never considered the possibility of going to one of the more selective academic schools, despite his obvious academic abilities.

Andrew was observed in three individuated and two co-operative settings, three of which were on-task and two off-task. The three on-task events represent three different sets of relation to task and interaction with others. Two of the three on-task events involved individuated settings. In one of these settings Andrew worked co-operatively with another boy, discussing ideas and proof-reading each others work. This was an individuated setting, not a co-operative one. Also, since they were engaged on different tasks, co-operation did not offer immediate benefits to Andrew. It seems, then, that the co-operation was not necessarily instrumental. The interdependency of fate involved in Andrew's mode of co-operation was not built into the pedagogic structure of their interaction. This contrasted with the other individuated

setting where Andrew did not interact with anybody at all. The situation was quite different. The children were organised in *Seating* groups, so they were all engaged in different tasks. One of the other teachers, in Year 3, was ill, so the children from her class were dispersed across the school. Andrew found himself on a table group that comprised a girl from our own class and three younger boys. In this context Andrew worked in a solitary fashion, avoiding any interaction with other children around him. The other on-task event involved Andrew co-operating in a *Collaborative* group in a Music lesson. I noted that 'During the class activity [Andrew] responded appropriately to the tasks. In the group task he immediately offered suggestions for completion of the task, but seemed willing to agree to other suggestions, co-operating with one of the girls' (Observation Notes 9.2.95). In fact, not only did Andrew co-operate closely with this other girl, but the two of them directed the working of the group. The majority of suggestions came from Andrew and this girl.

The two off-task events were also quite distinct. One of these events involved Andrew in a co-operative setting where he was supposed to be engaged in a shared reading activity with Samira, the girl of Pakistani origin. Andrew and Samira were working in the corridor just outside the classroom. Two other boys, David and Michael, were also supposed to be engaged in a shared reading activity. While Samira sat patiently, Andrew entered into a distracting discussion with both David and Michael. When Andrew saw me observing them, he looked at me guiltily and returned to his reading activity.

with Samira. The other off-task event involved Andrew watching the same history video that Robert watched. The task relation the two boys presented could not be more different. While Robert watched the video without distraction, Andrew was involved in 'continual, though short verbal communications with his neighbours' (Observation Notes 17.2.95). These verbal communications were not gender specific and were accompanied by physical gestures and facial grimaces.

No one mode of interaction or task relation dominated during the period of observation. Like the overall pattern of interaction, the majority of his interactions were co-operative and on-task. Some of his interactions contributed to a general differentiation of the class along gender lines, such as the shared reading activity with Samira, but then, he did cooperate with the girl in the Music lesson. There was nothing in these observational moments to suggest that his interactions were guided by a principle of gender differentiation.

### ***Ian***

Ian, like Andrew, was not associated with any of the main male networks in the class. Although he lived within the middle class catchment area of the school, Ian was not part of the scout troop the social milieu inhabited by the *Princes of the Park*. As with Robert, Ian was not attracted to the culture of physicality emblematic of the dominant masculinities. However, unlike Robert, Ian seemed to find this culture of physicality threatening. This will be looked at in more detail below. Ian was more interested in issues surrounding

wildlife than football. Instead of displaying his grasp of league fixtures and players careers, Ian had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the tiger and was involved in a tiger sponsorship scheme. Ian's pedagogic location also marginalised him from the dominant middle class boys. Ian was in the lower sets for both English and Mathematics, received extra support for his reading and was on Stage 2 of the Code of Practice for Special Needs.

Ian was observed in five individuated settings of which three were on-task and two off-task. Despite Ian's low attainment in the official curriculum, he displayed a positive relation to task in three of the observational moments. In all three of these I observed Ian working co-operatively with boys, despite these interactions occurring within individuated settings. Two of these co-operative interactions involved Ian working with the same boy, Matthew, in maths lessons:

*'[Ian] worked consistently with [Matthew] for whole session. They both discussed the task and offered solutions to each other' (Observational Notes 6.2.95).*

Although the two boys did not perform well, in terms of outcome, their co-operation enabled them to engage positively with the process of problem solving. In the session noted above, having reported their outcome and the process used, and being informed that they had made a mistake, they returned to the task immediately, reviewing their process. The fact that they had not

got it 'right' did not deter them. The third on-task event also involved Ian working co-operatively with another boy. This time Ian asked to work with (Stewart). In this situation, the mode of co-operation went beyond any direct relation to task:

[Ian] *asked to work with [Stewart] and acted as an advocate for [Stewart], asking me if it was OK for [Stewart] to work in a certain way or clarified previous instructions* (Observational Notes 2.2.95).

It is, perhaps, significant that Ian shared the same pedagogic location as both of the boys he worked co-operatively with.

This co-operative on-task behaviour stands in marked contrast to his two off-task interactions. In the first of these Ian was involved in writing a report on a previous co-operative activity. In my observational notes I recorded Ian talking to the boy next to him and leaning across the table to talk with other boys. When he saw me watching him, Ian pretended to work until he thought I had moved my gaze. In the second off-task event, the other children on the table group complained that he had talked for most of the session. I had noticed him occasionally looking in a dictionary - he was engaged in an English comprehension exercise, but mostly talking to the boy next to him and the girls across the table. This was the only time that I observed Ian interacting with girls. In the Mathematics lessons he could have co-operated

with girls, but chose to work with Matthew. In the first off-task event Ian directed his talk towards the boys on the table, ignoring the girls. On this single occasion where he does interact with girls, he chooses to discuss a situation in one girl's family. This intervention on Ian's part upsets the girl.

Ian demonstrates a willingness to work co-operatively in certain situations, though on all three occasions this was with boys. Even though he did interact off-task with girls on one occasion, this interaction was directed negatively at one of the girls. Ian's Contingent Co-operation and Nefarious Playfulness contribute to the differentiation of the class along gender lines.

### ***Dan***

Dan seemed to have a fraught relationship with the curriculum and his peers. Dan's low achievement placed him in a subordinate relation to the school's academic trajectory. The expectation held by teachers in the school, as well as by Dan, was that he would automatically proceed to the maintained Comprehensive in the working class catchment area. Dan was Dean's cousin, which, along with Dan's involvement with football, made him part of the *Working Class Kings*. However, he was located on the margins of this group. As will be discussed later, this marginalisation revolved around his relationship with Dean. Situated on the periphery of the *Kings* and oriented towards other working class boys, Dan was a solitary character in the class

This solitariness and tense relationship with both the curriculum and his

peers was manifest in the mode of his observed interactions. Four of Dan's interactions were on-task, of which two were in individuated and two in co-operative settings. In the two individuated settings, Dan worked in a solitary fashion. In the first of these, although Dan was 'involved in the same task as two others on the table, who were working together, [Dan] made no effort to work with them' (Observational Notes 26.195). Dan's solitary working was even more marked in the other individuated setting. The children were involved in designing and producing their own patterns and motifs based on an exploration of William Morris prints. Across the classroom children were looking at or showing each others work, all except Dan. Dan focused on his own work, using his arm as a shield against others eyes. Only once did he break out of this withdrawal. This was to show his design to Dean. Perhaps Dan wanted or expected a positive response from Dean. When this didn't appear, Dan responded angrily, walking off, throwing verbal insults at Dean, sitting down and scowling at all around him.

This difficulty in his interactions with others continued in co-operative settings where withdrawal was more difficult. In the first of these Dan was in a group made up of a dominant middle class girl, a dominant middle class boy, Michael and Robert. Although Dan was largely involved in a co-operative way, this was interspersed with intra-group conflicts and temporary withdrawals. For most of the time Dan remained silent as the group discussed how to approach the task. Occasionally he would offer a suggestion. When this was not taken up by others he responded defensively.



complaining that 'you never listen to me' (Observational Notes 25.1.95) or moving himself away from the group for a few minutes. In the other co-operative setting, a music lesson, Dan found it easier to cooperate in the whole class rather than the small group task. The whole class task required Dan to respond as an individual to instructions, with no need for direct negotiation with others. However, the small group task called for more involvement in organising individual actions and decisions about sound patterns. In this setting, Dan positioned himself literally on the margins of the group, waiting for Dean to tell him what to do.

The one observed off-task interaction was an extension of Dan's tense relationships. The context was an individuated setting where the children were engaged in individual reading. During the course of this session, Dan repeatedly complained to me about the other children on the table group talking. He appeared to spend the whole session observing the others, telling them off for talking and complaining to me. It was almost as if he was enlisting my support in his efforts to control the other children's behaviours.

Dan's behaviours do not easily fall within any of the interactional themes. Dan demonstrated a preference for solitary working. In that sense his interactions can be characterised as Interaction by Proxy. But his co-operative interactions in co-operative settings can also be described as Interactions by Proxy, in that he positioned himself on the periphery of these groups and his relation to the group task was weak. Either he remained

passive in relation to the group dynamics or temporarily withdrew. Dan's co-operation was also contingent, in that he did not directly interact with any girls, but neither did he show a positive orientation towards other boys. It seems that issues of status were more important in these contingent relations than gender specifically.

## Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with bringing the research gaze to bear on the sample group as it did on the general observation of boys. This has involved the same abstraction of elements and the moulding of those elements into an enumerated reality. It is through these means that I am able to make a comparison of the two sets of observations. Although there are differences between the general observation and the sample group in respect of the specific deployment of grouping strategies, array of generic tasks made available and the tone of pupil-teacher interaction, nevertheless, a certain regularity or patterning can be construed on the basis of my reading of the enumerated reality of the pedagogic structure. The sample group, like the general observation, depict a classroom experience where the normative context of interaction is one of predominantly individuated settings, of Writing as the dominant mode of curriculum activity and pupil-teacher interactions characterised by task and behaviour management. There is a difference between the general observation and the sample group in the deployment of co-operative settings. This can be accounted for by the

uneven distribution of grouping strategies in the two sets of observations and the concentration of *Collaborative* group contexts in the observation of just one of the boys.

Again, there is a high degree of similarity between the orientation of interactions. The dominant characteristic of the sample group boys, as with the general observation, is that of on-task interactions, although this takes place within the context of a greater predominance of individuated settings compared to the general observation. Whether it is in on-task or playful distraction, the boys show a marked preference for interactions with other boys and the production of tacit groups that contribute towards the construction of a segregated classroom. This preliminary focus on the sample group explored these interactions within a matrix of each boys social, pedagogic, class and aspirational locations - a matrix suggested by my discussion of the friendship networks in the *Weft*.

My reading of these enumerated descriptions is that the boys' classroom interactions are placed under the objectifying gaze of both the masculine social imaginary - where social contexts are instituted through *difference*, and the political economy of education which re-imagines educational subjectivities in terms of the greater utility of education and which privileges the production of individuated learners. The preceding chapters - the *Weft*, the *Warp* and this one have focused on an analysis of the depiction of the objective moment of reality. The next chapter, 'Biographies of Power' moves

its attention more to the boys' subjective moments of self-making, drawing together the different strands of analysis.

**CHAPTER SIX**

**BIOGRAPHIES OF POWER**

**STORIES OF PRESENCE AND**

**DIFFERENCE**

## Introduction

In the conclusion to my discussion of different paradigms of gender, I set out the aim of this thesis as looking beyond gender *as difference* by investigating how masculinity works as a signifier *of difference* in the classroom under study. I suggested four themes that would enable me to do that - masculinity as **agentic**, **embodied**, as **socio-historical** and **imaginative**. These four themes will form the structure of this concluding chapter, drawing together the different strands of my analysis into a discussion of the six boys in the sample group. This is more than a discussion though. It is an attempt to render a theory of masculine practice, and as such, is concerned with the production of narrative. The 'data' on which I draw are the boys' stories of gender, and, in particular, the stories of masculinity. These stories have both been personal in that they have been the product of individuals, but collective in that they have spoken to an objective sense of reality, to masculinity and femininity imagined as coherent, continuous and unitary. In constructing my own narrative I draw upon my observation notes of the sample group of boys and the tacit knowledge I built up over two years working with them. This allows me to locate my rendering of a theory of masculine behaviour in particular interactional settings in the classroom. As well as these narrative elements, I draw upon the boys' own statements about their imagined adult futures which are both comments on the present and anticipations for the future.

This rendering of a theory of masculine behaviour will not provide for the

reader a sociological hermetic seal. If we regard poststructuralism as a genre within the literary body of social theory, it is one that does not include the rhetorical device of closure, as I argued in Chapter 1. Therefore I include a discussion of the way the production of masculinity as coherent, continuous and unitary is simultaneously disruptive of this process, institutes discontinuities, and opens up spaces of *difference* that the social imaginary cannot quite inhabit.

## **The Animated Action Man - Masculinity as Agentic**

The masculine social imaginary enacts a certain kind of paradox. While it insists that masculinity is already present as an ontological fact, it also claims that identity is of one's own making. Agency, or self-making, then, is already part of the make up of identity within modernist discourse. It is on the basis of this that action is understood to flow from our personal biography. What kind of agency is invoked in the boys' interactions, what kind of reading can I make of the sense of agency contained within their actions? I outline two kinds of agency, though this is not to exhaust other possible readings.

### ***Agency as Authorship***

In Chapter 1 I argued that agency can best be understood as a process of narrative construction, that the boys are engaged in positioning themselves within culturally available storylines of gender, and that the dominant

storylines insist that we position ourselves as either female or male. So far this leaves little room for agency. So, I want to use the idea of narrative construction to illustrate what agency might entail in this regard. To do this I want to look at what sorts of narrative are actively taken up by the boys in the sample group and the ways they use these to construct meaningful selves

## **Stories of presence**

I have discussed football as a space of difference, as a ‘masculine constituency of football’. This space of difference institutes a dominant physical presence as a key characteristic of masculine achievement. Physicality presents itself as a primary narrative element within the boys’ stories, making them stories of presence. I want to look at Stephen and Dean as exemplars of enactment's of stories of presence in their dominant form.

Stephen and Dean exemplify, not only the dominant Middle and Working class groupings, but the dominant masculine imaginary. For both boys, a masculine/heroic narrative structures their stories of presence. Stephen aspires to be an actor, a movie star ‘like Jean-Claude Van Damme’. Not only is the object of his desire an ‘action hero’, and as such a modern day replacement for the soldier and explorer heroes of empire (see Rutherford 1996 & 1997), but Stephen ascribes his aspiration a noble quality. To be an actor is not to do with making money, but is a ‘dream’. If he is not able to achieve this he will accept his mother’s wish that he become a teacher. There is something of the Victorian ‘boys own story’ about this. Stephen implies



that his dream is perhaps beyond him, but is worthy of the possible sacrifices that await him. Since being a star is not about money, it becomes a kind of self-sacrifice. In the place of distant lands where his manhood could be tested, we have the movies. And if he should fail in his quest, he will adhere to his bourgeois destiny of being a teacher. But it also has a postmodern ring to it. The 'real' challenges of colonies and exploration are replaced by the 'hyper-reality' of Baudrillard's 'simulacrum', where the fantastical heroes of celluloid become as real as the accomplishments of Ranolph Fiennes treck across the North Pole or the humanitarian aid workers in the former Yugoslavia.

There is something rather narcissistic about Stephen's self-making here. Jonathan Rutherford (1997) has drawn attention to the role of narcissism in the make up of the Englishman of Empire. Bob Connell (1995) has also highlighted the sexually ambiguous impact of narcissism on the construction of the exemplary masculine body of sportsmen. The masculine imaginary, working through a narcissistic heroic narrative and articulated through the aspirational languages of movies, marks Stephen's body with the inscriptions of masculinity. Stephen's masculine practice is focused on his body and on literally giving him shape. To be the kind of man who could be a movie star 'like Jean-Claude Van Damme', he must mould his body, command it into an assertive muscular presence - the expanding male body (Shilling 1994). This is not just the stuff of dreams. His desire involves Stephen in different forms of labour that aim to accrue the necessary forms of cultural and physical

capital. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Stephen was an accomplished sportsman as well as being part of a local dramatic society. He also read the local education market in order to locate the secondary school that would support his personal project of becoming. His choice of school, one that had a reputation for the performing arts as well as the academic curriculum, was something that seemed to cause tension between Stephen and his mother.

Dean's preferred future pictured him as a professional footballer. This immediately involved Dean in a national dialogue, a dialogue that constructs football as a social space of difference and masculine exclusion. It also situated his narrative of self firmly within the masculine constituency of football. This marks a difference with Stephen as well. While Stephen was socially located within this space of difference, his personal project of becoming was not so closely bound up with the masculine constituency of football. The differences should not be over exaggerated. As with Stephen, Dean's masculine practice is focused upon his body. His desire to be a professional football player, and the interest shown in him by a Premiere League club, impel him to engage in a narcissistic construction of his body appropriate to his desire. Dean's body resembles Arthur Frank's (Shilling 1994) description of the 'disciplined body'. The accomplishment of a muscular masculinity redolent of professional football, requires a physical and psychological regimentation. The body is focused on itself. In this sense, the body becomes agentic in developing physical capital. Unlike the body depicted in Arthur Frank's model, however, Dean is conscious of the

desirable effects of his bodily practices. Dean's construction of a muscular sporting body, and its necessary regulations, cannot be contained within an instrumental relation with the body. Dean's relation with his body, and the agency of his body in securing for Dean an exalted position within the masculine constituency of football, cannot be grasped by the imposition of a simplistic dichotomy between the instrumental male and the expressive female. Dean gains sensuous pleasure out of the aesthetic experience of giving shape to his masculine imaginary. The confidence in his postures and the sheer look of exhilaration on his face during physical activity, I believe, attest to this. His concern with his outward appearance is no less 'fussy' than many girls. Although Dean adopts a 'utilitarian' haircut, one that cannot possibly inhibit his athleticism, he constantly tends to it. Similarly, if he wore a shirt and tie, the top button was always fastened, the tie straight and the knot immaculate. While these practices can be given meaning by Arthur Frank's 'disciplined body', and they are acts of control and discipline, they are also expressive practices.

## Writing the 'other'

I want to look at Andrew to illustrate how boys can be written into and place themselves within narratives of the 'other'. Andrew appears to be fashioning a sense of self around his distance from family and peers, and therefore his *difference*. In conversation with Andrew, and with one of the senior teachers in the school, it arose that Andrew's family found him rather difficult. This 'difficulty' was focused on his ability to succeed academically.

which apparently contrasted with that of his parents, and the fact that he felt he had to 'grow up quick' to look after his younger sister. Academic achievement seemed to create tensions with his parents - 'they don't know what he is on about' as the senior member of staff commented. Unlike Stephen then, Andrew is not able to write himself into a narrative of aspirant achievement in such a way that it would become a familial form of capital. Andrew does not have the social capital available to Stephen through his family; the social knowledge of the education system; resources in the form of computers and other educational materials (which relates to economic capital); and therefore a family project of educational achievement. One of the most important aspects of Pierre Bourdieu's work on the social reproduction of educational advantage, was the fact that this advantage was the result of collective struggles on the part of both the family and the group imagined as social class. Without family support, in contrast to Dean, Andrew struggles to appropriate academic achievement and mould it into a coherent narrative of self. Academic achievement is one of his storylines, but one that does not quite fit.

This jarring of academic achievement in his narrative of self is also manifest in his relations with other academic achievers. Andrew was placed within the top reading group, which comprised three boys, including Stephen, who were part of the *Princes of the Park* grouping and a high achieving middle class girl. While the other four children engaged with the task at hand, along with the occasional off-task discussions and joking, they were usually

intent on attending to the job of reading or discussing genre and use of characterisation, Andrew seemed unable to join in. Andrew would put on silly voices when taking his turn to read and make continual commentaries about the characters in the book or the way the text was being read. But these comments did not seem to be directed at one person in particular, as if he was outside the group anyway. Despite the audibility of his comments it can be argued that Andrew was rendered silent by these acts. Unable to mobilise a narrative of aspirant achievement so redolent of this particular reading group, his joking acted to further mark his marginalisation, to render him socially silent. But Andrew was also actively taking up this narrative of the 'other', of extenuating his otherness in relation to the group, of using it as a resource to define himself. This is not the same kind of agency enacted by Bob Connell's (1989) 'cool guys'. He is not fashioning a resistant working class identity against that of an academic middle class one. Physical masculinity is something that both working class and middle class boys share imaginatively in this classroom, though differently articulated. It is more that the available narratives are not enough to construct a coherent narrative of self that can take account of his material circumstances, perhaps especially those of his family. Things, then, do not quite fit. Andrew does not seem to want to drop his appropriation of academic achievement, as much as it invites him into tense relations with both family and peers.

## ***Agency as Negotiation***

### **Negotiation through football**

A theme working throughout this thesis is that of narrative construction as a means of negotiating relations with the *world* of men, that is, with imagined masculinity. I have already referred to the way the masculine constituency of football was a kind of national dialogue, a way that some boys in the classroom could construct and maintain relations with a world of men that they would never meet. The dialogue works in this way because it already contains within its semantic logic the assumption that masculinity is ontologically present and that the forms of physicality, modes of discourse and psychic commitments offered are expressions of that shared identity.

One way this dialogue is constituted is through football talk. This dialogue offers its participants the possibility of constituting relations with the *world* of men in the past (masculine nostalgia) and the future (masculine anticipation). Despite the different articulations of masculinity in the modern moment, as will be detailed later, this dialogue offers continuity. Dean, then, can enter into relations with a masculine nostalgia through the kinds of exchange of information (scores, players, teams, FA Cup winners, etc.) so common to football talk (see Johnson & Finlay 1997). Football, articulated as the 'national game' becomes eternal, reaching back into a national/masculine past. Dean, dominant within the school's masculine constituency of football, can perhaps secure for himself a sense of identity built on this history. Masculinity also reaches back into unitary time. Part of

constructing a coherent narrative of self is about locating oneself in this meta-story of nation and manhood. It can also be argued that this form of nostalgic dialogue becomes even more salient at a time when the assumption of male hegemony in the labour market is made problematic. Of course, this continuity of presence has to be accomplished each time the dialogue is entered into, re-articulated in a changing socio-historic landscape.

## **Negotiation through the world of work**

Being outside the constituency of football does not relieve the other boys of a need to negotiate some form of relation with the *world* of men. For Ian this negotiation occurs in that other realm of presence demanded by the masculine social imaginary - the masculine world of work. This other narrative of presence suggests a certain orientation towards the world where the public domain, rather like football, acts as a space of difference. In this instance we see Ian negotiating his relations with masculine expectation through the articulation of masculine futures. He states that 'When I am older I would like to be a carpenter because I like building things' (17.7.95). Ian writes himself out of a narrative of aspirant achievement, defined here as academic success (see 'the aspirant pupil' below) and into a male world of work. This statement of Ian's invokes masculinity as a set of practices concerning 'doing', acting upon the world physically, having presence through action. I want to claim, though this is obviously suggestive, that Ian is writing himself into those stories of maleness that project masculine identities into public domains - work, politics, the masculine/heroic, celebrity

It marks a distinction from the private domain of femininity - family, romance, nurturance, domesticity. It invokes this distinction as ontologically real rather than the effects of a social imaginary. Ian is able to engage in this kind of narrative construction because the masculine social imaginary projects the masculine space of the public as a coherent line stretching from the past and into the future. This male future of work is one that Ian takes on as his own. It is male in other senses since it is one that includes being able to 'go to the pub with my dad'. As the obverse of Carol Steedman's 'Tidy House'(1987), it is women are absent from this imagined future. Imagining the future (and therefore the past and present) in this way allows Ian to construct a narrative of self involving coherence and continuity.

## **Celebrity as negotiation**

Another way that boys negotiate a relationship with the *world* of men is through stories of celebrity. Andrew and Robert are both engaged in a similar project to that of Stephen, that is, writing themselves into stories of celebrity. Celebrity acts as another form of presence, a way of attaching themselves to a culturally valued form of capital. It suggests that popular culture, particularly television and film play an important role in these boy's lives and act as resources in their narrative constructions. Andrew says that 'When I am a man I want to be a TV presenter on a game show' (16.7.95), while Robert says he 'would like to be a producer of a film'(17.7.95). What is of note here is not just that they project their adult futures into the public domain of celebrity. After all, there were some girls who did likewise. These storylines



also negotiate a relationship with the dominant boys, an aspect of narrative construction I will come onto shortly. What I want to focus on at this point of my argument is that these storylines position Andrew and Robert in dominant positions within the narrative. In the context of a culturally valued form of popular entertainment - the big prize game show, Andrew positions himself as presenter, the one who is publicly in control. Robert does likewise, though at first it appears oblique. While producers, and here I imagine he might mean director, do indeed control the production of films, they are not normally regarded in the same light as the stars - which Stephen wants to be. But, Robert is 10 years old, and the director/producer Steven Spielberg is as famous as his films. Such films as 'ET' or 'Jurassic Park', popular amongst the boys, are more associated with Steven Spielberg than they are with their actors. Though both boys can be understood to inhabit subordinate male positions within the masculine hierarchy of the class, the masculine social imaginary insists that any appropriate male narrative of self involves presence and dominance. Instead of constructing alternative narratives, they draw on available cultural resources to write themselves into existing narrative forms that sustain the social imaginary.

## **Negotiating sexual constituencies**

If the masculine imaginary insists that the boys articulate their sense of identity in terms of presence (physical and aspirational), it also demands of them that they negotiate their relations with its compulsory heterosexuality

This assumption of heterosexuality as the normative space of sexual identity was found in the children's narratives of gender discussed in Chapter 3. These narratives, produced both by girls and boys, invoked a particular chain of relations: dichotomous gender based in biology - male/female distinction represented by sexual reproductive capacities - differential location of males and females in public and private domains respectively - differential life trajectories - differential relational orientations. Boys, then, are characterised through this semantic chain as being distanced from relations of care and nurturance and oriented instead towards individuated public action. This orientation is witnessed in the stories of gender told by the sample group boys. These boys all speak of adult futures devoid of family, lovers or children. Their orientations are dramatically public. These different narratives involving the absence of relations of affection and care in male subjectivities have to be read in the *con-text* of the evocative descriptions of normative gender found in the gender elicitation exercise ('What is good about being a girl? What is good about being a boy?') and the outlining of friendship networks. I want to focus on a number of statements within the sample group's descriptions of normative gender as examples of attempts to construct narratives that constitute sexuality in particular ways.

One of the key symbolic differences invoked by these statements is that of biological difference centred on different reproductive capacities - boys 'don't have babies', girls do have 'babies' (Dean 17.7.95); and the subsequent location of femininity in the private domain of care and nurturance - 'Girls

don't have to go out as much because they normally have to look after children' (Stephen 17.7.95). Statements such as these can be articulated with others that stress the importance of an expressive orientation towards the female body - 'Girls get to wear nice make-up and jewellery' (Stephen); 'girls are more attractive' (Ian); girls 'dress fashionable' (Andrew). I argued above that the articulation between these two kinds of statement are productive of the female body and identity as desirable, placed under the masculine gaze and are given meaning within a narrative of heterosexual love that leads to sexual reproduction. This further locates women in a private domain of affective relations. Here, as in the wider lexicon of statements they are drawn from, it is girls who are largely written into this narrative of heterosexual love, who are its object. The agentic subject of this narrative is the invisible author - masculinity. If girls are to be attractive, they have to be attractive to boys like Ian, Andrew, Robert, Dan, Dean and Stephen. I have already discussed Dan's invocation of this particular narrative. The narrative works as a coherent storyline because of its semantic logic, a logic that is assumed rather than foregrounded. The semantic logic entails femininity and masculinity imagined as coterminous with normative heterosexuality, within which masculine sexuality is also articulated in terms of a distance from affective relations and an instrumental relation to the body.

Another example draws upon a statement produced by Stephen in the gender elicitation exercise which attracted the response 'you don't get teased for having short hair'. This simple statement is suggestive of two others, that

girls would be teased for having short hair, and that boys would be teased for having long hair. Why should the length of one's hair produce such concern about gender identity? This concern expressed by Stephen points to the need for gender identity, in this case masculinity, to institute the masculine social imaginary in real social practices. These practices then generate their imaginative power through the ability to invoke gender as radically dichotomous and embodied in differentiated social practice, including the length of one's hair. This statement makes reference to the uncertainty of gender accomplishment, that the narratives have to be constantly re-written, that their semantic hold cannot be assumed. It also foregrounds the paradox of masculine instrumentalism. In order to write oneself appropriately into a dominant narrative of self, in Stephen's case a muscular masculinity, the instrumental effect can only be achieved through a narcissistic, and therefore expressive, focus on the body. Assumed heterosexuality and masculine instrumentality are confounded by paradox.

The assumed heterosexuality of the boys' narratives of self forms a constituency of sexuality. This constituency provides a context for the articulation of identity as coherent and unitary, an affirmation of self as recognised in other's narratives. In this sense it establishes relations of solidarity. This solidarity is another form of negotiation with the *world* of men, a world imagined heterosexual.

## Negotiating hierarchy

The principle of differentiation runs through the whole narrative construction of masculine selves as constituted by and through the social imaginary. The narrative construction of *difference* in the boys' stories of friendship and normative gender certainly lend some weight to this reading. The formation of tacit groups, the gendered nature of contingent cooperation and interactions by proxy and the gender specific orientation of off-task interactions point to the habituation of the principle of *difference* in the daily life of the classroom. I want to argue that this primary distinction is only sustained as long as a rhetoric of masculine unity and coherence also works to police the behaviours of boys. Furthermore, masculine unity and coherence is only powerful to the extent that boundary maintenance work is successful. It is my suggestion that the distinction between boys relies upon the amounts and types of capital they have managed to accumulate and the value that each type of capital can attract. The value attached to this capital accumulation has to be re-asserted constantly, and, therefore, open to challenge.

The institution of the masculine constituency of football through the combination of technical skill, football knowledge and the possession of enough economic capital to participate in the consumption of football gains a boy access to this privileged circle. This is not to ensure equanimity amongst its inhabitants. Dean and Stephen may share similar degrees of skill and knowledge, but the fact that Dean is being considered for a youth training scheme by a Premier League club attaches a great deal of value, and so

cultural capital to his narrative of self. Stephen's physical and cultural capital established through his athletic skills, academic achievement and social class location maintain him in a dominant position in the classroom. This accumulated capital allows him to assume and be given 'leadership' roles in group work situations. They also allow him to risk transgression through his interest in the arts. This interest is partially legitimated through the articulation of his desires in a masculine/heroic narrative. The practices that Dean and Stephen engage in (the subjective moments of self-making) and the value attached to their capital drawn from culturally esteemed storylines (the objective moment of self-making), mark out the normative space of masculinity against which other boys measure themselves.

Other boys become positioned as subordinate because the amount and types of capital they possess do not attract the same kind of value as the dominant boys. Although Robert's social location places him within the orbit of the *Princes of the Park*, he does not share their athleticism and does not write himself into their narrative of aspirant achievement. One of the ways he negotiates his relationship with this normative masculinity is to write himself into a narrative of the 'other'. This is achieved through taking on the 'joker' role in the class. This is exemplified in PE lessons where he deliberately draws attention to his 'lack' of physical presence by exaggerating his difficulties in co-ordination. This will be looked at again in the analysis of masculine embodiment below. This negotiation is also manifest in my identification of him as deliberately avoiding contact with me during

curriculum time. Ian also draws on a narrative of the 'other' in a very similar fashion to Robert. Rather than exaggerate his 'diminishing body' Ian attempts to displace the masculine gaze through feigning illness or injury. He also negotiates a subordinate relation to narratives of aspirant achievement by physically locating himself with other low status boys.

Dan, perhaps the one most unsure about his placing, creates distance between himself and others. He co-operates with others, but mediates this through either myself or other boys who do not question his status academically or in terms of masculine accomplishment. At other times, though, Dan finds himself in situations he cannot manage through this device of interaction by proxy. In one situation he found himself confronted with a high status middle class girl, a high status middle class boy and two other low status boys. Given the co-operative structure and task involved, distance was not an option open to Dan. Unable to assert an assumed high status masculinity as a result of his participation in the masculine constituency of football, his response was to refuse co-operation all together. Refusal, as an alternative source of power, simply served to underline his marginality within the group and his subordinate position within the male peer cultures of the classroom. Although Dan might have been attempting to write himself into a relation of dominance, to assert a power he believed he embodied, this storyline was not recognisable to the others who, I suggest, simply constructed him as 'other'.

It is also worth pointing out that the kind of narcissistic endeavours associated with Dean and Stephen are probably not available to other boys in quite the same way. It is unlikely that if Ian or Robert were to engage in such narcissism they would be able to maintain an assumed heterosexuality. It is more likely that such self-pleasure would result in them being derided and marginalised as 'gay'. It is significant, then, that despite their positioning as subordinate in the male hierarchy they are careful not to draw on narratives of femininity. These subordinate boys have taken on as their own the need to maintain distinct boundaries between male and female, taking on as their own stories of *difference* which also subordinate them. As Ellen Jordon (1995) suggests, it is even more important for these boys to define themselves against the female, to vociferously defend the boundaries of masculinity.

## **Just Look at those Muscles - Masculinity**

### **Embodied**

#### ***Classes Apart***

The narcissistic labours that both Dean and Stephen are engaged in are given particular nuance by the boys' social class locations. The boys' narratives of self are focused on their bodies, and their bodies are agentic in developing physical capital and giving shape to their masculine accomplishment. The orientation of this capital accumulation is of a different kind for each boy. Dean holds on to a definition of working class masculinity bound up with



physical strength. This connection between physicality and industrial labour has been well documented elsewhere (Connell 1995; Willis 1977). As much as his physicality provides Dean with sensate pleasure, his body is an investment in his future, his body is the real business of life for as long as a youth training scheme with a Premiere League club beckons. Like other working class boys observing the adult world of work, he must be aware of the vulnerability involved in manual work. The reliance on just one form of capital, physicality, imposes a reduced timescale on its productivity. Also, in the context of economic transformation, reliance on physical capital alone is to confine oneself to the periphery of an economy undergoing radical transformation. Dean is involved, then in trying to convert his physical capital into social and economic capital through entry into a sporting career.

For Stephen, there is no necessary relationship between his physical capital and his possible futures. Sport, as the dominant metaphor of masculinity, increasingly becomes a 'pastime', an adjunct to the real business of life. As Bob Connell (1995) and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (1994) have pointed out, middle class masculinities are increasingly identified with the high value skills of information technology and management. Stephen's physical capital can always be cashed in, exchanged for the more secure futures afforded him by the social and cultural capital of his social class and pedagogic locations.

Both boys also exemplify the the academic trajectory that characterises the hegemonic masculinity of the school. This brings within it other disrupting

effects. Paul Willis (1977), Rob Connell (1989) and others have produced ethnographic accounts that support the view that the school and the official curriculum are often the foil against which working class masculinity is constructed. For some of the *Working Class Kings*, the apparent assurance of employment at the end of compulsory schooling - as a professional footballer or working with their fathers in the building trade, or perhaps, a view that 'real' school work happened in secondary school, seemed to produce a certain resistance to the curriculum and school authority. However, Dean had developed a positive orientation towards the curriculum. Dean and his family's educational project had appropriated the kind of academic aspiration normally associated with middle class families. Dean's positive task relation has to be seen within this context. Máirtín Mac an Ghail (1994) has pointed to the way working class academic achievement is articulated in different ways to middle class achievement. Dean's postures and gait during curriculum work were productive of a working class ethic of hard work or academic 'labour'. It was not enough to be positively focused on curriculum work, but to show it. While Stephen's mother spoke about the hours Stephen spent on homework; his worries and fears about keeping up with curriculum work; and the need for him to be pushed academically, Stephen was more often to be seen lounging, slouching and joking. This is not to say that Stephen was not attentive to his relative positioning academically, but that there was a certain bodily casualness in relation to the academic curriculum

## ***Ailing Bodies & Artful Dodgers***

Physical education lessons provided the context for a set of practices that serve to illustrate a particular construction of embodiment. Although all pedagogic spaces, whether they be geography or mathematics lessons were occasions for masculine enactment, physical education lessons provided a unique setting. The uniqueness derives from the visibility that physical education lessons imposed upon boys. The centrality of masculine presence, the need for the masculine social imaginary to be embodied, brought a particular kind of gaze to bear upon subordinate boys. While boys such as Dean and Stephen might struggle over their dominant positioning within the male hierarchy - proving themselves through their mastery of technique, speed and strength, subordinate boys might struggle to simply be recognised as male at all. One option would be to compete on the same grounds as Dean and Stephen. But I feel that for Robert and Ian, this would simply work to further marginalise them.

Instead of disengaging himself from other boys, Robert actively courts attention, directing the masculine gaze upon his inability to conform to a muscular presence through joking and humorous behaviour. My argument is that this is a form of 'diminishing body'. Robert invokes a 'foolish' body as an object of shared (male) humour. By making his 'foolish' body into an object for other boys, I suggest that Robert is attempting to construct a temporary space of masculine exclusion that simultaneously positions himself as subordinate, within the male hierarchy, but distinguishes him from the girls

Ian also constructs a particular embodiment in the context of physical education lessons, and for similar reasons. The masculine social imaginary impels the boys to position themselves in relation to the normative expanding body of muscular presence. This injunction cannot be escaped. Rather than the 'foolish' body invoked by Robert, Ian invokes an 'ailing' body. Almost as soon as the lesson begins Ian is doubled up on the floor, gripping his ankle and complaining that he has twisted it. In explaining his inability to perform under the masculine gaze, and in danger of writing himself into a narrative of the 'other', especially of being seen as a 'sissy' and therefore almost female, Ian uses the notion of injury to give some legitimacy to his lack of appropriate physical presence. As with Robert, masculinity imagined as muscular physical presence is not refused. It is still actively taken up, even if it works to locate them in a position of subordination in the male hierarchy. Normative masculinity is still held in place.

Robert and Ian's behaviours might have been inappropriate to the curriculum task at hand, but adequate to the demand placed upon them by the masculine social imaginary to produce coherent narratives of self and embodiment. In order to produce coherent stories of masculine selves Robert and Ian had to attend to their embodiment. Unable to position themselves in a relation of proximity to masculinity's normative centre, they worked to make sure their marginalisation did not position them beyond the semantic field of masculinity; make them feminine

# **Action Man in Perspective - The Socio-historic Context**

In the *Warp* I emphasised the importance of placing my readings of the boys' narrative constructions in a socio-historic context. This is more than situating the boys' practices in a cultural and historic context. The idea that masculinity emanates from a genetic or psychological centre can still have cogency within such a historiography. Indeed, such an approach can legitimate the view that masculinity possesses some kind of permanence and continuity. In this section I want to argue that the particular socio-historic context of the boys' masculine practices provided them with cultural resources with which to engage in a process of self-making. These resources themselves do not provide the necessary means for articulating masculinity as either continuous or unitary. But masculinity imagined as continuous and unitary is instituted in these cultural resources and constitutes masculinity as coherent and continuous. I will identify the cultural resources that give the boys' subjective moments of self-making their particular nuances.

## ***The Aspirant Pupil***

The boys' self-making took place at a time of radical reform of the English and Welsh education systems. Along with the theorising offered by Stephen Ball (1994) and Sharon Gerwitzt (1998) I argue that these reforms represent

something more than technical reformulations of the educational project or ideological effects of capitalism. They have entailed more than undermining the professional authority and autonomy of teachers in favour of more efficient management or the replacement of child centred pedagogy with assessment led learning. The reading I make of this 'policy hysteria' (Stronach & MacLure 1997) is that these policy practices have concerned the production of new educational narratives; the writing of new storylines for teachers, educational managers, students, parents and employers. In other words education was re-imagined, and that this social imaginary was instituted in and through the reforms and the degree to which different educational subjectivities re-imagined themselves. This imaginative recreation is also tied into the re-imagination of the economy. The post-Fordist restructuring of much of the British economy, in terms of a core/periphery labour division; labour casualisation; flexible production processes, the relative decline in manufacturing and the rise of service industries; market deregulation; and the move from national to global capitalist markets has provided a context within which we can see an increased participation of women in the British labour markets (see Lash & Urry 1987; Harvey 1992; Lipietz 1992). This post-Fordist shift has privileged notions of technical knowledge as a central plank of economic reorganisation and is instituted in the policy emphasis on the development of human capital, and so an increasing government focus on education and training.

Although child centred pedagogy was not as pervasive as Conservative

Party discourses of derision asserted, and it existed more as a rhetorical device than as a description of actual practice (see Galton 1989 for an analysis of the gap between teacher rhetoric and practice), the new educational narratives placed academic achievement centre stage. So, although a stress on academic achievement was always a factor of modern systems of schooling in the UK, the neo-liberal reforms drew all schools into this particular web of performativity under the panoptic gaze of public assessment, inspection and league tables. It is in this sense that I am arguing that the context of masculine enactment in the school was one where the educational subjectivity of the pupil was being re-imagined as the *aspirant achiever*. In this way the positioning of the boys in relation to the academic curriculum and the degree of insertion in masculine accomplishments is given new meaning.

Again, I want to initially focus on Stephen and Dean to convey the way this narrative of the aspirant achiever is imbricated in that of producing coherent stories of maleness.

Although my discussion of embodiment above illustrated the need for mutedness in the academic sensibilities of the middle class boys, Stephen displays an ability to get a 'feel for the game', reading the pedagogic structure of the classroom correctly. Stephen understands the stress I put upon co-operative styles of working as instituted through group working practices and my discursive privileging of co-operation. I am not saying that Stephen consciously and cynically played along with my expectations, though this is

obviously possible. My emphasis, whether Stephen was conscious of what he was doing or not, is on the way co-operation was habituated by Stephen in his daily interactions, particularly the way he made co-operation useful in his own interactions with others. His disengagement from a group task described above is important here. Despite correctly reading the pedagogic structure of the classroom, Stephen was also aware that the political economy of education instituted by the re-imagining of education positioned him as an individuated learner. This way of being a knowing and knowable pupil fits well into the masculine social imaginary's elaboration of maleness occupying a public space of achievement and of masculinity itself constituting an individuated sense of self. Therefore, contingent co-operation, in the form of withdrawing his group process and task skills from his table group's presentation was not an aberrant act but represented both the incorporation of individuation into his pedagogic habitus and the writing of himself into a narrative of aspirant achievement, all within the semantic logic of masculinity.

If for Stephen narratives of aspirant achievement can be said to be already part of his family's educational project, the same cannot be said of Dean. As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) has rightly pointed out, educational achievement is a key component of middle class cultural capital, it is an expectation that can be assumed, is just part of the habitus, even if these days it has to be worked at with a little more vigour. In my own extended family, stretched across three continents, only two of us (both male) have ever entered higher education, both in the past 15 years, and



I am the only one to go on to do a higher degree. I feel that, like Dean, I have involved myself in 'a break with class practices' (Connell et al 1982:98). So, Dean does not play the game of academic achievement in quite the same way as Stephen and the other *Princes of the Park* (see Mac an Ghaill 1994:62). There is a sense in which he cannot afford the casual embodiment of competition practised by the *Princes*. He is more obviously eager and writes himself into narratives of aspirant achievement in different ways. My argument is that academic achievement for Dean is a form of cultural capital that he has to 'work at' more consciously. In contrast to Stephen, Dean is more consciously focused on the objectifying discourses of the individuated learner; he by-passes the privileging of co-operation in my own pedagogic habitus; and adopts a strategy of 'solitary working', there is more at stake in this educational project. Although Dean and his family invest heavily in his physical capital, at least as long as a potential professional football career is on offer, this is not very different to other kinds of capital investment made in his family or community. But the socio-historic conditions have altered as a result of the rise of global capitalism and an emergent post-Fordism. Investment in physical capital cannot be relied upon in quite the same way. Hence, narratives of aspirant achievement gain new resonance and the re-imagined pupil becomes one newly available to Dean and his family.

## **Buying heroism**

In my discussion of 'narratives of presence' I invoked images of the masculine/heroic drawn from analysis of Imperial masculinities. This was not

done for purely ironic reasons, but to infer both the continuity and disruptions in the kinds of storyline available for boys to take up. I discussed the way the masculine/heroic was newly articulated, or re-imagined, as sporting and movie stars, and how boys could participate symbolically in these narratives through the purchase of football strips. The masculine/heroic, in the age of global capitalism and the dominance of the market is re-imagined as a consumer activity - 'you too can buy a piece of stardom' (see Hargreaves 1987; Featherstone 1991). This ties this important masculine narrative to economic capital and, therefore, with another marker of *difference*. At the beginning of each new football season the boys (and some girls) in and around the masculine constituency of football would discuss the new season's strips; whether they had bought them or not; whether they intended to get the away strip as well; and whether they were able to buy the strip with their favourite players number on the back. Who did or did not participate in these discussions was an indicator of who was rendered silent by these discursive acts. The reconfiguration of football as an individuated consumer activity was further underlined as a marker of difference in the casual discussions about who had watched particular matches on Sky TV. Silence can be rendered casually. Voice and silence could be invoked by the mere wearing of a pair of shorts or a shirt in PE. Dean's status would be further enhanced by his possession of the prized strip (and the best football boots). For Stephen football would have to compete with his martial arts equipment and expenses. Ian, Andrew and Robert were already rendered silent as uninitiates, already positioned in relations of subordination to the masculine constituency

of football.

## **Imagined Masculinity**

I have made reference to the masculine social imaginary throughout this final analysis. It is now time to pull these references together to provide a coherent story of the way the masculine social imaginary works to assert a physical masculine presence as an exemplary form of masculinity; place boys in relation to masculine nostalgia and anticipation; and requires boys to actively re-inscribe masculinity as ontologically present in each subjective moment of self-making. I want to conclude this section by suggesting how these processes of inscription, of constructing narratives of masculine presence, coherence and unity are also disrupted.

### ***Exemplary Boys***

#### **Centres of excellence**

The sample group boys' descriptions of normative gender were typical of the statements produced by both cohorts of children, invoking maleness as characterised by physical presence (sport); superiority (physically & cognitively); instrumental orientations towards their bodies (clothes & hair), located in public spaces (world of work & greater social licence); absence of affective relations of care and nurturance; and an antagonistic relation with authority/adults. These were not so much descriptions of themselves -

autobiographies, as stories of masculinity as an abstract ontological reality. Boys can therefore be distinguished in terms of their proximity or distance to this normative centre of identity.

My argument is that the way Dean and Stephen 'do' masculinity attest to the power of masculinity as a social imaginary. Of all the sample group boys, Dean's and Stephen's narratives of self most closely resemble the descriptions of normative masculinity offered by the children. I am suggesting that the masculine social imaginary, working through heroic narratives, mobilises material resources in order to institute itself in and through social interactions. The professional footballer and blockbuster movie star are not just objects of desire and deification, they have symbolic value. Their symbolic value rests upon the connections between masculinity and dominance, dominance and a muscular physicality and of this dominance being embodied. What distinguishes Dean and Stephen from the other boys is the degree of their investment in the masculine imaginary, and the shaping of their bodies as fundamental aspects of their identity work. The social imaginary is not sustained in the symbolic value of heroes, but requires that Dean and Stephen act upon their own bodies, provoke their bodies to be agentic in 'making' them the kinds of men they aspire to be.

Dean and Stephen's dominant positions in the masculine hierarchies of the class is largely achieved though their proximity to masculinity as a normative centre. Their investment in their bodies is more than the accruing of physical

and cultural capital. The training of their bodies is a performative practice, at once an inscription of self for oneself and for others. As such, masculinity is always self-referential whereby each act of self-making constantly refers back to an objective sense of masculinity. Such performativity requires the institution of public space as separate from the domestic and private, and of the public as a space of masculine exclusion. Not only does masculine physicality have to be embodied, of power being imminent in an expanding body, but it has to be recognised as such. It is this performative physicality that imbues exemplary masculine practice with a sense of instrumentality. The semantic logic of masculinity imagines the narcissistic focus on the body, typified by Dean and Stephen, as instrumental. In fact it is necessary for it to be imagined in this way for the semantic logic of masculinity to sustain its coherence and imaginative grasp. Masculine practice has to be imagined in terms of *difference*, of the narcissism of Dean and Stephen as being distinct from the narcissistic pleasures that girls are described as engaging in. Their narcissism is articulated as instrumental by articulating it with the public space of masculine exclusion.

## Relative others

Why do boys located in subordinate positions in the male hierarchy work so hard to maintain the boundaries of masculinity as coherent, continuous and unitary? As will be discussed later, the public space of masculine exclusion, whether that be football or the world of work, does not secure for boys the certainty and assuredness it appears to offer. Boys have to struggle over their

placing within the masculine spaces of exclusivity, struggling to position themselves in relations of proximity and distance to masculinity's normative centre.

The boys in the sample group positioned as subordinate in the male hierarchy did not refuse the semantic logic of masculinity. Andrew, while writing himself into a narrative of the 'other', continued to engage in boundary maintenance, and his deployment of adult discourses of sexuality worked to produce girls as objects of a masculine gaze. As marginal as Andrew was in relation to the dominant boys and the privileged networks, gender as *difference* was still instituted in and through his habituated practices. Ian and Robert appear to distance themselves the most from a muscular masculinity, invoking instead ailing or foolish bodies. But, this does not mean that they take on for themselves the forms of capital associated with femininity. They are still careful to shun interactions with girls and to mark out spaces of masculine exclusion. Although these subordinate boys have a problematic relationship with exemplary masculinity, they are still careful to invoke gender as *difference*. More importantly, even though they themselves might not be able to embody a muscular masculinity, they mark themselves through their proximity to exemplary masculinity and distance from femininity.

### ***Masculine Nostalgia and Anticipation***

For masculinity to be seen as anything other than fabricated, it must be projected as possessing continuity, there must be a past and an anticipation of

a future. It is this masculine nostalgia and anticipation that gives masculinity its sense of ontological givenness. Masculinity is imagined as nostalgia in the boys' dialogues with a *world* of men. All of the boys attempt to negotiate a relationship with this *world* of men in terms of their expectations of adult work. If masculinity projects itself into a public space of masculine exclusion, the boys imagine this in terms of being sports or media stars, or engaged in physical occupations - fireman, carpenter. There is little sense of the changing dynamics of work and of men's place within it. It is in every sense a nostalgic vision. Masculinity imagined as continuous is also found in the special kinds of dialogue that make up the masculine constituency of football. Football talk and the consumption of football culture provide some boys with the opportunity to enter into a national dialogue and therefore a negotiation with the *world* of men. Amongst the boys I studied this also involved embodying this dialogue through gesture and the moulding of the body into particular shapes.

Through these practices, all of the boys, including those located in subordinate positions in the male hierarchy were engaged in producing masculinity imagined as continuous. Therefore, if masculinity is already ontologically present, possessing a past and a future, the need for boys to construct narratives of self that invoke the semantic logic of the masculine social imaginary becomes even more compelling. Not to do so is to risk cutting oneself loose from notions of certainty and assuredness, to deny oneself a sense of past and to dispel the future

## ***Masculinity as Iterative***

The boys' stories of gender have invoked masculinity as 'real', as inhabiting a definite ontological space whose boundaries can be defined. The public spaces of masculine exclusion instituted by this invocation are not typified by certainty and assuredness, but by uncertainty, paradox and continuous boundary maintenance. When observing the sample group boys, as with the general observation, I found it best not to regard their behaviours as expressions of something else - a biological, psychological, or ideological self, but as iterative practices. Each interaction that involves the production of gender specific tacit groups; each act of derision directed at girls or other boys; each game of football in the playground; each time a boy marks out his marginality in relation to other boys through comic behaviour, are themselves occasions for bringing masculinity into being.

As stated above, it is not enough for the masculine social imaginary to be found in the symbolic value of football or media stars. The masculine social imaginary has to be put to work. When Ian asks me if he can sit with Stewart to do his curriculum work, he is seeking more than the support he can gain from his friend. In requesting this Ian is doing a number of things. This activity is part of a wider process of recognition. He is recognising himself within particular narratives of the 'other' - within educational discourses of need, within which he is constituted as having 'special needs', within academic discourses of aspirant achievement, which I have already said have a special



resonance in this school, by placing himself in a relation of subordination to more academically achieving boys; and within discourses of masculine presence by positioning himself in a relation of distance from masculinity's normative centre associated with football and the two dominant social groupings. But, he is also engaged in marking out a space of masculine exclusion. In requesting the support of Stewart he is engendering a radical distinction at the heart of the masculine social imaginary, that the world is constituted of dichotomous genders that are immutable and distinct and that he must recognise himself as one or the other. It is not enough for Ian to claim for himself the mantle of male, but he must be recognisable to others as such. My reading of Ian's simple request to sit with Stewart is that it is both an act of self-recognition and a desire to be recognised as male by others. The masculine social imaginary is engendered, brought forth, made real.

We can also see the masculine social imaginary as being engendered when Stephen engages in co-operative interactions with his table group. This example is more subtle than that of Dean moving girls out of the way in order to sit next to another boy, or his commandeering of the materials in the science lesson. But the subtlety of Stephen's practices is perhaps more useful in my analysis. Many studies of boys have focused on 'deviance' or the more obviously troubling natures of some behaviours. But this focus ignores the ways co-operation can also be enactment's of masculinity, or effaces the identity work of quiet boys such as Ian. The 'critical incident', as it were, that I want to focus on is not Stephen's disengagement from the co-operative

process, though my following discussion should be read in light of this, but the initial discussion to prepare the group presentation mentioned earlier.

What kinds of recognition were being engendered here? Although Stephen was the most high status person in the group by virtue of his academic and social class placings, and of his dominant positioning in the male hierarchy, it is my assertion that he still needed to re-inscribe this dominance in and through these co-operative interactions. As with Ian, the iterative imperative can be understood in terms of forms of recognition. The whole set of interactions were framed by an assumption of Stephen's dominant position within the group. In this sense the others were giving Stephen recognition in terms of particular narratives of 'presence' - academic discourses of aspirant achievement; masculine discourses of presence: his sporting achievements; aesthetic discourses: Stephen was known to be an active member of an amateur dramatic society and so perhaps offered a more expert approach to the presentation; and pedagogic discourses of co-operation: his skilled use of group process and maintenance skills enabled others to participate in group activities. I want to suggest that Stephen was also seeking a different kind of recognition, both of himself and from the others in the group. It is my reading of the above interactions that he desired co-operative group work to be recognised as a space of masculine dominance and for himself to be recognised as dominant within this. This gives his co-operative interactions a particular inflection, where good group process and maintenance skills become the very tools for securing masculine dominance

## **Disrupted Selves**

In this chapter I have argued that masculinity is not already ontologically present, but is constituted as such through the masculine social imaginary. In this section I want to explore the way the iterative character of masculine accomplishment is disruptive, even as it works to constitute masculinity as coherent, continuous and unitary. I will draw out three dimensions of this disruption concerning sexuality, the world of work and the contradictions of capital investment in the modern world.

### ***Kings and Queens***

Earlier, when discussing how masculine agency involves the negotiation of sexual constituencies, and particularly of an assumed heterosexuality, I focused on the body work of Dean and Stephen and referred to this as being a narcissistic enterprise. I had also referred earlier to this narcissism as entailing a focusing of their actions in on their bodies and out on to their objects of desire, of their body practices involving both self-pleasure and pleasure in male others. Although the masculine social imaginary presents masculinity as coterminous with heterosexuality, the construction of dominant narratives of self by Dean and Stephen resonates with homoeroticism. This homoeroticism does not simply resonate in the practices of self-pleasure and pleasure in their male symbolic heroes. In constructing narratives of self, recognition of one's own maleness is never enough. Boys require to be recognised as such by others, and particularly by other boys. Therefore, I want to suggest that as performative practices, this body work requires that Dean and Stephen's

bodies become objects of desire to other boys. While the recognition granted them by girls may be pleasurable, it is the recognition by boys that guarantees their entrance into the circle of legitimacy.

The paradox, of course, is that the most marginal boys - Ian, Robert and Andrew, are the ones least caught up in this homoerotic adventure, yet are the ones who have to work so hard to maintain the boundaries of masculinity and who have to guard against their expulsion from masculine legitimacy. The accomplishment of exalted forms of heterosexual masculinity becomes immediately disrupted by the need for this to evoke desirous relations with their own bodies, those of male others and be desirous to male others.

### ***Imagined Futures And Residual Pasts***

Part of the constitution of masculinity as coherent is the invocation of both masculine nostalgia and anticipation. This was most powerfully witnessed in the boys' statements on both the world of work and familial situations. The seeming continuity presented by the boys' statements, as part of their negotiation with a *world* of men, partly recognises the new forms of capital made available in the present socio-historic context, but is also bypassed by developments in the economic sphere. The centrality of sport and celebrity in the boys' imagined futures is recognition of the power of popular culture in fashioning the social imaginary and of the social imaginary being instituted in popular culture. There is no sense of expectation that boys will follow their fathers into particular occupations or that particular communities are

associated with particular industries. The boys appear to recognise that that world has gone. In this sense they give some recognition to the post-Fordist restructuring of the economy. However, there is no recognition of the new knowledge industries, nor even of the very real possibility, for working class boys at least, of long term unemployment. More particularly, though, there is no recognition of the changing (though by no means complete) reconfiguration of the male/female balance in the world of work. The masculine nostalgia seems to impel them to invoke a world of unchanging male dominance of work as a space of masculine exclusion. While this nostalgic vision of masculine continuity is certainly hegemonic in the thinking of these boys, in the wider context of an emergent post-Fordist economy this nostalgia takes on the character of the residual, an echo from the past.

While men continue to assert their dominance of public spaces, to produce women as objects of male desire and to distance themselves from affective relations of care and nurturance, authors such as Helen Wilkinson and Melanie Howard (see Wilkinson and Howard 1997) have pointed to important shifts in the way women are re-imagining femininity and imagined female presents and futures (see also Crompton & Sanderson 1990; DfEE 1997). In other words, there appears to be a shift in the configuration of the female social imaginary that makes available new ways of being. The boys in this sample seem ill-prepared for this changing world; unable to deal creatively with the disruptions to their imagined male futures; unable to re-imagine futures of affective relations of care and nurturance; and not engaged

in re-working the masculine social imaginary.

### ***Capital Punishment***

In my discussion of the socio-historic context of masculine accomplishment I argued that narratives of aspirant achievement were newly articulated in the context of a policy emphasis on the development of human capital. I argued that this brought academic achievement within the aspirational orbit of working class pupils in new ways, though recognising that this did not necessarily make it equally available to all. I also suggested that this new articulation of narratives of aspirant achievement meant that the social reproduction of educational advantage by middle class families could no longer be assumed, despite the market reforms of education that have worked to reinscribe such advantage. I want to argue that this has had at least two disrupting effects on masculine practice in the context of the classroom under study - aspirant achievement and critical masculine gaze; and the conflict of divergent capital accumulation.

### **Aspirant achievement and critical masculine gaze**

Dan, whose subjective moment of self-making is fragile, and seems caught up in making himself 'male' more than as a learner, is no less involved in constructing a coherent story of self, which, in the context of enactment that concerns me here, the classroom, necessarily involves struggling over his position in relation to the academic curriculum. One way this struggle manifests itself is in his adoption of a strategy of 'interaction by proxy' As

described above this involves Dan in maintaining his positive relation to task but mediated through other boys or me as the teacher. It is as if Dan is constructing a pedagogic space as a space of difference in much the same way that the masculine constituency of football does. Yet, he is not incapable of taking up the discourse of co-operation that I deployed, and doing so in such a way as to work co-operatively with a girl. This was seen in the example of the music lesson where he worked effectively with a girl in his group. However, another example showed Dan hiding his art work from the gaze of others.

What sense can I *make* of this? These seemingly dissimilar vignettes can be read as representative of Dan's appropriation of certain pedagogic stories and not others. The stories he writes himself into are drawn from my own pedagogic habitus, that of co-operation. Despite making much of his co-operation being contingent he does not disrupt the work of the groups; he is willing to invest in their collective achievements. While Dan appears able to take up stories of co-operation, he finds it more difficult to take up storylines drawn from the political economy of education. These storylines are instituted in the regular formative assessment in the school. These storylines would draw him into the panoptic gaze of assessment, make him more vulnerable and require him to struggle with Dean, Stephen and other *Princes* over this form of capital. At the time of the research Dan was clearly ill-prepared for such a struggle. The insertion of pedagogic discourses drawn from the political economy of education into processes of masculine

construction provide new spaces for category maintenance. This inscribes value upon certain forms of capital that can become part of constructing masculinity as a space of difference in relation to girls and other boys.

Aspirant achievement, then, becomes a principle of differentiation within the world of boys.

## **Divergent capital accumulation**

Dean's positive orientation towards curriculum work, as an element in Dean's narrative of self, produced a number of ambiguities. Dean was able to appropriate academic achievement as his own without marginalising himself from the other *Working Class Kings*. His positioning within an academic discourse did not produce Dean as an 'earole'. If anything, his attachment to academic achievement became another example of aspirant and externally oriented masculinity. Dean did, of course, possess a great deal of valued cultural capital that secured him high status within the masculine constituency of football. This position and his desire to be a professional footballer, resting as they did on his physical capital, appeared to have an ambiguous relationship with his academic aspiration. These different projects seemed destined to take him in different and contradictory directions. The time and energy required in a commitment to becoming a professional footballer could be undermined by the more sedentary demands of a highly competitive academic curriculum, as found in the 'better' schools in the area. And the demands of a potential professional career in football, the time and physical commitments this would entail, could undermine Dean's position in a



predominantly middle class academic milieu.

Although Stephen appeared to have a more secure relation to the academic curriculum, his differently constituted selves - sporting jock, aspirant actor and academic achiever, produced their own disrupting effects. I have already drawn attention to the powerful ways sport is differently embodied and made productive in the life trajectories of working and middle class boys. I have also argued for the importance given a muscular physical presence in the narratives of maleness offered by both boys and girls in the class. In certain spheres of practice, the embodiment of male power may have more resonance than academic achievement, but I want to suggest that the 'pedagogic self' is an increasingly powerful symbolic presence and attraction in school contexts. Despite the dangers inherent in potentially writing himself into a story of difference through his involvement in drama and dance, Stephen persists with these activities. His accomplishment is that he attempts to articulate these interests with and from within the new masculine/heroic narratives of popular culture, and especially the action hero movie star. The symbolic power of these culturally esteemed forms of masculinity seem to temporarily disengage Stephen's project of self-making from other stories of difference and the 'other'. But, the centrifugal pull of academic achievement, as actively taken up by his elder brother and his mother, could place great strain upon Stephen's ability to hold together his differently constituted selves in a story of coherent identity. Inadvertently, I would argue, the re-imagining of education, while reinscribing social and pedagogic difference, places even

more stress on middle class families educational projects. If the social reproduction of their relative advantage is no longer guaranteed simply by virtue of their social location, but has to be legitimised by the performative regime of assessment, a middle class stress on academic performance becomes heightened. This potentially conflicts with Stephen's own investment in a particular masculine presence framed by a narrative of the masculine/heroic and therefore sets Stephen's wish to go to a particular secondary school that offers opportunities in the arts in conflict with his mother's desire for a more 'traditional' academic environment.

## Summary

In this chapter I have sought to bring together the different strands of analysis explored in the *Weft* and the *Warp* within the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1. I have done this through a narrative construction, the production of an ethnography that seeks to render a theory of masculine practice focusing on the sample group of boys, but suggesting a more general application to the processes of masculine construction engaged in by all the boys in this study.

I have argued that when observing the boys in the classroom what I witnessed were not behaviours that were expressive of a masculinity that was already ontologically present. Rather my approach has entailed viewing these behaviours as iterative practices aimed at bringing to life masculinity *imagined* as already existing; as coherent; continuous; and unitary. This

engendering of a masculine social imaginary entails the boys in embodying masculinity *imagined* as physical presence; that this presence has to be found within social spaces of masculine exclusion which mark the distinction between maleness and femaleness; which involves the boys in forms of negotiation with a masculine nostalgia and anticipation in order to invoke masculinity as continuous and unitary; and, despite the invocation of masculine continuity, must draw upon powerful narratives current within the specific socio-historic context.

Masculinity as an iterative practice occurs within immediate contexts of enactment, in this case the classroom. I have argued that the specifics of the pedagogic habitus and structure of the classroom provided particular spaces and resources for the boys' subjective moments of self-making. The privileging of the individuated learner within the political economy of education resonated with the invoking of masculinity as identified with individuated notions of presence. I argued that this impelled the boys to construct pedagogic spaces of masculine exclusion, even where this was within co-operative settings. I also argued that narratives of aspirant achievement, defined in terms of academic performance, became resources in constructing a male hierarchy, working to position boys in relations of proximity to or distance from the normative centre of masculinity. The assessment regime instituted in the school helped to bring all boys within this masculine gaze.

As much as this identity work engaged in by the boys works at marking distinctions between maleness and femaleness, it also distinguishes between boys. So, the world of *difference* invoked by the masculine social imaginary institutes differences between boys as much as between boys and girls. Boys' placings within the male hierarchy of the classroom is determined upon the array of social, cultural, physical and economic capital that each boy is able to accumulate. It also depends upon the particular values that these different forms of capital are able to attract. The potential for particular forms of capital to attract high or low value is dependent upon the powerful narratives current within the wider culture and the specific configuration of powerful narratives within the local setting of masculine enactment.

While the masculine social imaginary impels the boys to construct narratives of self that produce them as possessing coherent masculine identities that institute a world of *difference* through the semantic logic of the social imaginary, the terms of this semantic logic are never fully settled. In fact, I argue that the very practices required to bring the social imaginary to life brings into it disruptions. To produce oneself as being in a relation of close proximity to the normative centre of imagined masculinity requires the participation in narcissistic endeavours that simultaneously call upon an assumed heterosexuality and depend upon homoerotic elements. Similarly, the invocation of masculine continuity and the articulation of masculine identity with the public world of work places these boys in a relation of discontinuity with the realm of economics

# CONCLUSION

## **Becoming Somebody**

The title of the last chapter, 'Biographies of Power', is important in that it draws attention to the notion of authorisation that runs throughout this study. In particular, it focuses on the duality of the term narrative as being simultaneously about writing a text as well as being written into a text. This duality is at the heart of the boys' subjective moments of self-making described above.

### ***Biography as Iteration***

The concept of iteration affords the boys a degree of agency or authority over their own narratives of self. Drawing on the humanist tradition in modernism, it speaks of the importance placed on the individual as the origin of their own identity. It places the responsibility for producing coherent and unitary identities on the boys themselves, not on some structural arrangement. It also gives gender identity its 'experiential' feel. Biography as iteration also directs attention to the way the boys' identities are not already given, but have to be worked at. More than this, in order to produce coherent identities, it seems the boys must mark distinctions between themselves and girls - concern over the length of one's hair; a discursive focus on reproductive difference; and the active construction of social spaces of masculine exclusion. The boys also work at marking distinctions between each other - access to privileged networks, e.g.; the masculine constituency of football; physical presence, aspirational achievement; social location. It is as if the boundaries of masculinity need to be continually defined, as if the categories involved in

identity work are not already settled. It is in this sense that identity work is boundary maintenance.

### ***Biography as Inscription***

In each iterative act the boys are also making reference to an objective sense of masculinity. This is not a referencing of the 'real', as if the 'real' resided in an ontological space separate from the boys' self-making, their iterative acts are reality. The engendering of male identities is concerned with the referencing of masculinity imagined as already ontologically present, of masculinity imagined as constituted in physical presence, in occupying public spaces of aspiration and action, as being bound by relations of individuation and instrumentality and as distinct from femininity.

While the boys' practices remain iterative, they are also involved in constituting the world in particular ways, of instituting a masculine social imaginary. The instituting of the masculine social imaginary involves the boys in various forms of negotiation and recognition that constitute masculinity as coherent, continuous and unitary; and which invests different values in the cultural resources the boys seek to use in their narratives of self. Not only must the boys recognise themselves as male within their narratives of self, but they must be recognised as such by others, particularly other boys. Consequently, even boys who are positioned as subordinate in the male hierarchy of the classroom engage in practices, such as producing themselves as 'ailing' or 'foolish' bodies which simultaneously re-inscribe physical

presence as the normative centre of masculinity, and produce girls as the 'other'.

The concept of the 'masculine social imaginary' is an answer to the question - if masculinity is not already ontologically present, if it is not determined by some law of biology or society, then how do we account for masculinity's seeming regularity? It is also an answer to the question - what logic holds together all of the different elements, found in the children's narratives, that make up masculinity? My argument is that masculinity presents itself as a coherent category of identity through the institution of masculine selves. Institution, borrowing from Cornelius Castoriadis, is used here to refer to both the establishment of masculine identities in particular forms, and to masculinity as structured, or punctuated by institutional forms. And institution, in this latter sense, refers to the network of norms, values, dispositions - the masculine habitus. I call this process of creation in instituted form 'imaginary' because the category masculine does not correspond directly to 'real' boys and men in totality. Yet, it does work as a totality, in that masculinity is imagined as a shared property of all males. It is this that impels the boys to engage in acts of self-making that constantly refer back to masculinity as already given.

## **Contextualising Biography**

In writing about masculinity as iterative, but also as a process of instituting a masculine social imaginary - which allows us to think of masculinity as a



unique category, I am attempting to move away from the tendency in much work on masculinity to accord it an ontological givenness. This involves foregrounding the contemporariness of masculine practices and how within this contemporariness is an invocation of masculine nostalgia and aspiration. That is why I have attended to the way certain cultural elements are made available in the present socio-historic moment. Aspirant achievement and the consumption of popular culture are two such examples explored in this thesis.

I have argued that aspirant achievement, defined as the articulation of academic achievement within an assessment driven curriculum with a new vocational emphasis in education, became a resource in constituting particular masculine identities and a particular masculine hierarchy. In the context of Park View Junior, aspirant achievement had to be demonstrable within the pedagogic gaze of the assessment regime and the degree to which the local selective secondary schools were within boys' aspirational orbits. I argued that the incorporation of aspirant achievement in family educational projects was crucial in this regard. The ability to make aspirant achievement a productive element in a narrative of self was enabled by a boys' social class position. I argued that Stephen's appropriation of this discourse of aspiration was an assumption within a collective social class and family educational project. However, I pointed out how this also created potential areas of conflict with his personal aspiration for an artistic career. I suggested that for Dean, his and his family's appropriation of this discourse of aspiration involved a break with class practices. However, Dean's embodiment of high value cultural

capital meant that this did not write him into a narrative of the 'other' in relation to other working class boys or the masculine constituency of football. For Andrew, however, the absence of a family educational project that could contain this discourse of aspiration, his marginalised position in relation to the dominant social class and male networks, meant that his attempts to appropriate aspirant achievement as part of his own narrative of self helped to produce him as subordinate.

In this thesis I have identified football as of key cultural importance in the lives of the boys, even where individual boys do not demonstrate a particular interest in it. In my analysis of the boys' social networks I argued that the masculine constituency of football constituted a privileged network identified with the dominant boys in the male hierarchy. While access to this privileged network entailed the performance of a certain degree of technical ability in the game, it also required being able to enter into specialised forms of discourse on football, and to some degree the wearing of football paraphernalia - shirts, bags, etc. Identity work, for these boys, then also involves a kind of extenuated form of consumer activity. To engage successfully in these discourses on football, boys, or rather their families, may well have to purchase access to specialised cable/digital sports programmes, football magazines, tickets for live Premier League football matches and the updating of football strips. This consumer activity contributes to the regulation of which boys have voice within the masculine constituency of football as well as policing the boundary of the constituency.

Another arena of the contemporariness of masculine practice is enunciated through the boys' imagined male futures. While the realm of work and familial relations have been subject to economic and social change, the boys continue to constitute the world of work as a space of masculine exclusion. Yet, an emergent post-Fordist economy has disrupted the certainty of male dominance in this realm, particularly in the low-skill sectors that many of these boys may well be inserted into. Similarly, an increased desire for more democratic social relations in the home, under the impact of feminism (though these were not particularly present in the girls' narratives of self), were missing from the boys' imagined futures. While imagined male futures based on 'traditional' occupations were partially replaced by icons of celebrity, the boys continue to produce stories of masculine presence largely devoid of relations of care and nurturance, and are certainly blind to these changes in social aspiration and economic possibility.

## **Dilemmas in Researching Masculinity**

### ***The Crisis Of 'Crisis'***

In the current climate framed by the discourse of the 'crisis of masculinity', it would be all too easy to accept the assumption of the problematic nature of boys' behaviours in school and wider society, to constitute boys as the 'other', and write their behaviours off as 'toxic'. Of course, this discourse of 'crisis' is differently articulated. At times it defines itself in terms of a backlash against

the excesses of feminism. Browsing much of the 'boys underachievement' debate it is not difficult to detect the claim that girls' (relative and limited) educational advantage is at the expense of boys (see BBC 1 1994; Klein 1995; Smith 1995; Hannan 1996; Pyke 1995). Attempts are therefore made to reign back innovative developments in pedagogy, curricular design and assessment which are said to disadvantage the 'natural' abilities of boys. However, this special pleading is argued in a context of an homogenising pedagogic structure (the political economy of education) which denies difference. Underlying this special pleading on behalf of boys is the claim that equality for women has more or less been achieved, and that boys (read all men) are now the 'disadvantaged' sex.

'Crisis' is also articulated in terms of the threat from society's margins. The behaviours of working class boys and young men, White and Black, are demonised as 'toxic'. As with the lack of specificity as to which girls are achieving and which boys underachieving, such 'toxic' demonisation can be similarly indiscriminate. This particular articulation of the 'crisis', working through discourses of the 'underclass' (Morris 1994) does cast the problem in terms of masculinity, hence the connection made between 'male' anti-school cultures and underachievement. But, it is not all masculinities that are implicated by this particular articulation of crisis. It is not the masculinity represented by Tony Blair, Norman Lamont or the Confederation of British Industry. No, it is the masculinity found in the depressed estates of Bristol, Glasgow and Tyneside. It is not the masculinity of the broadsheet journalists

and documentary makers - who are almost all white, male and middle class. Problematic masculinity is the property of the 'other', a working class masculinity fashioned through labour and now propelled to the periphery of the economy, where even physical capital does not attract great value. Jane Kenway and Lindsay Fitzclarence (1997), in attempting to account for the disproportionate appearance of violence amongst economically marginalised young men, argue that in a culture where working class masculinity has been intimately bound up with hard physical labour, where the metaphors of class have abounded with its embodiment, those denied legitimate access to the fruits of labour have nothing left but their fists.

### ***Trying To Be Sympathetic***

In this climate, it is difficult to engage in an analysis of masculinity that is sympathetic to its subjects, yet equally committed to problematising the very nature of masculinity itself. I face the danger of being accused of romanticising the boys' struggles to create coherent identities. This is related to the potential for male researchers of masculinity to be complicit in sustaining masculinity's normative readings. I also face the danger, that at a time of a sustained backlash against the gains of feminist struggle, my decentering of the masculine subject, especially in my claim that masculinity does not exist as an ontological given, further undermines the possibility of a feminist and pro-feminist politics.

## ***What Kind of Sociology?***

These charges go right to the heart of why I should bother to write this thesis at all, in short, what on earth is such a sociology of masculinity for?

Sociology, as Zygmunt Bauman (1996: 231) explains, can be regarded as an 'extended commentary on the daily experience of life'. For Zygmunt Bauman this means providing explanatory concepts and then undermining the rhetorical power of its interpretations. But reading the masculinity literature, and in particular the reification of the term 'masculinity', so that it becomes the focus of study and the foil against which an oppositional politics is founded (see Hearn 1996; Hearn & Morgan 1990); or reading Liz Stanley's evocative account of being a 'wild woman' of Sociology (Stanley 1997), one could be mistaken for believing that Sociology (and a sociology of masculinity) was engaged in a totalising project, of imposing the one true explanation. As I discussed in my exploration of methodology, the ghost of positivism lurks in the open spaces of post-positivist research.

I find it best to conceive of Sociology as an iterative practice, much like that of the boys' narratives of self. A sociology of masculinity is therefore concerned with the production of explanatory concepts, but, as Beverley Skeggs (1997: 166) points out, we need to ask in what ways our concepts tilt the 'explanatory balance of power'? As an iterative practice, a sociology of masculinity is involved in producing a world that can be known through its explanatory concepts. Therefore, Sociology is a political practice, though not one that is necessarily in the service of any particular interests. It is political,

as research is, in the sense of giving value to some interpretations over others, of valuing particular areas of experience rather than others, and of providing certain authorising narratives that make others illegitimate. My critique of different theoretical frameworks for understanding masculinity rested upon the degree to which they reified the concept and made this abstracted term into the *real*. I think this is what Pierre Bourdieu (1987) and Beverley Skeggs (1997) mean when they explain how the real lives of research subjects constantly escape the semantic boundaries of our theoretical concepts. That is why I have attempted to reintroduce the notion of an objective moment of identity into my poststructuralist framework. In doing this I have sought to make a distinction between the work of objectifying discourses - masculinity imagined as already ontologically present, as coherent, and as unitary, and 'daily experiences' - the boys' subjective moments of self-making, but also how they work on each other, each imbricated with the other so that they are almost indistinguishable.

### ***A Strategic Intervention***

In the various articulations of the 'crisis of masculinity' I outlined above, boys are produced as the *objects* of the political gaze. In identifying feminism as the cause of boys' educational underachievement and the demonisation of 'toxic' working class masculinity, masculinity itself is reified and rendered unproblematic. Female primary school teachers are denied gender agency while men are accorded it, and dangerous (or not) working class youth are made subject to more intrusive forms of surveillance and regulation (curfews,

etc.). These hegemonic discourses reinscribe gender *as difference*; they are iterative acts of re-instituting the masculine social imaginary. My decentering of masculinity has therefore become a strategic intervention. In conceptualising the character of this intervention I have two things in mind. The first is a concern raised by Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (1990) about the emergence of critical studies of masculinity. They address the concern expressed by many feminists that much theorising of masculinity conducted by male academics can unintentionally end up legitimising men's behaviours. Jeff Hearn and David Morgan draw attention to the overly abstract orientation of the theorisation, and the lack of an experiential dimension. This is particularly directed at the apparent lack of reflexivity and a grounding of theory in the lived experiences of men. The second thing I have in mind is Bronwyn Davies' (1989) concern that in denying the possibility of taking up narratives of self configured around a masculine/feminine dualism, and of authorising an abstract androgenousness, as she claims some feminist inspired gender work in schools does, children are left with nothing around which to construct meaningful selves.

While the concept of the masculine social imaginary is central to my theoretical framework, its importance lies in a decentering of masculinity so as to focus on the subjective moments of self-making. That is that the proper focus of critical research into masculinity is on the 'daily experiences' of boys and men as they attempt to make themselves male, as I said above, on the mundane practices. Similarly, in focusing on the mundane - Stephen's



concern about the length of ones hair, practical entry points for a critical masculinity work are opened up. This is not about imposing a new normative (anti)gender identity. It is about grounding masculinity work in the decentering of masculinity as an objective reality, of foregrounding the actual diversity of male behaviours rather than the masculine social imaginary's objectifications (its sense of regularity).

This is also about according both boys and their teachers the agency to authorise different narratives of self that don't necessitate constituting a world *of difference*, but rather a world *with difference*.

## **According the boys agency**

I have tried to demonstrate above that the boys did not live their daily lives as 'masculinity', but as physical presence, public projection, dreams of celebrity, self-desire, football talk, the length of ones hair and feigned injury. The masculine social imaginary therefore acts as Beverley Skeggs' 'dialogic other' that comments on the suitability of boys' narratives of self, since the masculine social imaginary provides the legitimating logic of the boys' attempts to authorise their own lives. It is the 'other' that is always present, regulating their behaviours even when real others are not there.

In focusing on the boys' experiences of producing themselves as male, my own narrative accords them a certain agency. This is what I mean by conducting a sympathetic reading of their practices. It is aimed at creating a

rhetorical space within which we can understand the mundane ways in which masculinity is produced, how it is instituted in and through the very process of exchanging information about a football match, choosing who you sit next to in the classroom or who you invite to laugh at your 'lack' of muscular presence. This immediately offers boys themselves entry points into their own subjective moments of self-making. Supported by sympathetic teachers, boys might be able engage reflexively with their own narratives of self; begin to explore the narrative elements available to them, and therefore examine the structural arrangements (including the pedagogic structures) that means there is a differential distribution of capital; and perhaps even begin to write themselves into other narratives. These other narratives might entail the recognition that Dean's assertion of dominance partly rests on other boys giving him recognition as such. Refusal, then becomes another possible response. This might also include the valuing of the other narratives boys are already engaged in, such as Stephen's dance and drama, or the examples of Flexible Co-operation. This kind of rhetorical space also offers teachers entry points into the process of masculine construction. It makes available to teachers such practices as Bronwyn Davies' (1989 & 1993) critical literacy work or Becky Francis' (1999) use of role play to explore gender discourses.

Specific targeted work with boys may be part of this. But, since the production of male hierarchies, social spaces of male exclusion and the differential deployment of capital involves all children, work in these entry points lend themselves to what Bob Connell (1996) has termed 'gender-

relevant programmes'. I am aware of the difficulties entailed and specifically the refusal boys (and girls) may offer to such attempts to re-imagine gender. But I believe that the kind of conceptualisation of gender I outline in this study; the agency I feel it accords the boys; and the entry points it opens up, offers practical, productive and achievable objectives for critical masculinity work.

## **The interstice of practice**

My review of Andrew Pollard's reflections on his research practice drew attention to his identification of 'ambiguous' spaces in the school day where he could construct a different relationship with the children in his class. I want to argue that there are such spaces within the official curriculum found in many primary schools. Although the Literacy Hour is, to some degree, prescribed, it is partly aimed at encouraging amongst children an examination of texts. This is an entry point for developing a critical literacy. Also, 'circle time' has been instituted in many British primary schools as a context for exploring 'issues'. At Park View Junior I used this space in the curriculum to explore the children's notions of gender and to challenge these notions by drawing their attention to the gaps between the way they spoke to an objective sense of gender and their daily experiences.

## **Reflections**

I have already outlined what I see as the contributions this thesis makes to

both the theoretical development of work on masculinity, the politically strategic character of my work and the possibilities it offers for critical masculinity work in schools. In Chapter 2, I also discussed the limitations and many of the difficulties in the research practice and how I might go about producing an ethnographic account. There, I emphasised the importance of the concept 'reflexive relativity' in constructing an ethical approach to my research that allowed me to understand how differently constituted research selves were produced by the interpretative frameworks I used, and of conceptualising the research as a series of narrative constructions. I have also reflected upon the research process, the problematic nature of analysis and the process of writing, within the text. Therefore, I want to conclude now with a brief reflection on the process of undertaking a PhD., and areas for future research.

### ***The Long Road***

In 1993 I decided that I needed something that both engaged me intellectually and opened up new spaces for meeting people. Beginning my M.Ed. was, in this sense, a highly personal venture. I had no thoughts as to whether it would be useful to me professionally, other than in terms of informing my approach to dealing with the boys in my class. There was no career path in mind which a higher degree fed into. Soon, though, I was encouraged to consider concentrating on the research element of my Masters and register for an M.Phil. As I have already mentioned only two members of my extended family have ever gone to university, and I was now to become the only one to

undertake a higher degree. I had no reference points with which to plot this new course, no older siblings or cousins to refer to, I was on my own. I was not to know, though, how alone I would be.

I have received tremendous support from my family and friends. My partner and children have never known me other than when doing this research. They have put up with a great deal. Too many visits to their grandparents have been orchestrated in order to give me space to write, think and read. Too many evenings have entailed me disappearing into the study, meaning that the precious little time my partner and I have for each other always has to compete with this other presence. All too often she has shared with me her own problems, hopes and expectations, only to realise that I have not heard her. Her disappointment has sometimes been too much to bare. Yet, she has proof-read most of this thesis, provided important critical comment and taken up the slack in my childcare responsibilities - ironic when this thesis involves a critical study of masculinity. But, maybe because I have always been aware of this irony, the precious memory of my mother, images of my father's sadness at having neglected both my mother and myself because of his work and union commitments, I have always sought to minimise the negative impact on my family. I have attempted to make sure that I play my equal part in the care of my children, who are the most precious thing in my life. This I have learned from many great women who have had to juggle work, family and education. But, it has a price. My reading is, perhaps, not as extensive as it could have been, my analysis not as rigorous, my writing not

as coherent and edited. When this is handed over to my examiners. I still have my children (who are only young for such a little time), my partner, my friends, my wider family, the memory of my parents, my garden and my politics. So, I have tried to put it in perspective.

I cannot get to this point in my writing and not turn my deconstructive gaze upon the matter of PhDs. What is the normative subject of this structure and set of processes? Some one remarked to me recently that although they were impressed with my perseverance, doing a PhD was a bit of an 'anorak activity'. It had none of the romance of the loneliness of the long distance runner, more the loneliness of the end of platform train spotter. Like train spotters, PhD students are almost always male, and although they might not usually have children and partners, there will probably be a whole bank of women supporting this intellectual edifice - mothers, friends, canteen staff, cleaners, supervisors. It is a strangely myopic activity. How many women have given up on their doctoral research because, as women, they had to do all the cleaning, cooking and loving as well as the PhD? We cannot extricate the PhD from its history of male, middle class privilege. The notions of academic training and intellectual rigour associated with the PhD presume, I feel, a normative young, middle class, financially supported, male, full-time student. Is it any wonder, then, that this model reproduces itself in a patriarchal social order. Had life's trajectory not taken me into the professional middle class, had my partner not been a middle class professional, it is highly unlikely that I would ever have undertaken and

finished this thesis. The gender ordering of society is written all the way through my research, and the possibility of its production. The real irony is that any critical gender work is accomplished in such circumstances. Maybe it is time that the PhD. was re-thought, that academic training and intellectual rigour were dis-articulated from this normative masculine model, and stopped being a male academic virility test. Is it any surprise that professional doctorates are proliferating at such a pace?

Yet, I am proud of what I have achieved. This has been the most sustained activity in my life. Also, as a working class boy, I can say I did this.

## ***Next Steps***

### **Sociology of the mundane**

I have argued that this thesis attempts to answer the concerns raised by feminists and other critical masculinity researchers about the overly abstract nature of much of the work in this area. I hope, then, that this thesis, in foregrounding the mundane moments of masculinity's enactment, is a contribution to ongoing attempts to undertake such grounded and experiential research. But, this area and mode of research needs to be broadened and deepened. More especially, the relationship between the objective and subjective moments of identity needs to be further theorised

In this thesis I have pointed to the way many aspects of the boys' narratives of self produced them in relations of distance and discontinuity with economic

and political/social developments. My descriptions of the boys' imagined adult futures, however, contrasts with those provided by Becky Francis (1998). The locality of masculine enactment appears, then, to be important. A 'sociology of the mundane' needs to develop stories that bring to life the way the locale produces masculinity in particular forms and through certain narratives, if we are not to fall back upon over-generalised and overly abstract ideas of masculinity. This must also include a more thorough analysis of the importance of schools as organisations - the pedagogic structures and habitus, in amplifying and dampening particular productions of masculinity.

## **A post-realist research**

In Chapter 2 I outlined my concept of reflexive relativity as my way of dealing creatively with the crisis in representation in research - Denzin's 'fifth moment', and of moving towards a 'sixth moment'. While I find such discourses of the 'post' problematic, especially in their invocation of linear and successive time, my theoretical orientation leads me towards a radical critique of realism in contemporary research. While conceptualising research as a process of narrative production; of bringing a reality into being; of being dialogic; and of all research constituting boundaries around itself and differentiations within it; the question remains as to what a post-realist research might look like. What can be counted as research, and what would the objectives of research be if we explore the implications of epistemological and ontological plurality?



## **For class**

I have given social class some importance in this thesis. I have also sought to explore how contemporary discourses of boys' underachievement have simultaneously rendered social class neutral and located a 'toxic' masculinity as a specifically working class problem. Unlike my decentering of masculinity, class has tended to be considered as a 'given' in this work. This is similar to the referencing of social class in much critical gender research. The concept of the 'social imaginary' can, I believe, prove useful in re-theorising social class, and of research focusing on social class as an iterative set of practices that brings to life an objective sense of social class. Such research should also focus on the specific articulations of class and especially the degree to which social class continues to be produced as synonymous with particular economic locations, or whether the emergent post-Fordist economy has opened up the possibility of producing new articulations of class and masculinity.

## **For practice**

While there is a growing debate on the relationship between boys and schooling, and a burgeoning 'masculinities' literature, this has not been matched by a corresponding development of policy and practice based upon feminist and pro-feminist theory. Programmes need to be developed that firstly evaluate present education policy as it relates to the relationship between boys and schooling, which secondly reviews existing practice, and thirdly works with teachers and children in the construction of robust critical

gender work.

# APPENDICES

# **Appendix 1**

## ***Pupil Observation Record***

Grp Type: S W Co-op Coll	
Grp Composition MS SS	
Task R W LL Coll Con PH D/P	
PUPIL -PUPIL INTERACTION	
Co-opTskVerb	
Co-opTskCntc	
Verb	
Cntc	
Nint	
InitInt	
IntfSS IntfSev IntfOS	
IntMal	
IntfPl	

<b>PUPIL-TEACHER INTERACTION</b>	
Wait Tch	
Init Tch	
Tch Init	
Av Int	
Dis Tch	
Int Tch Own/Grp - L Tch  - Tks Tch	
<b>PUPIL - TASK RELATIONSHIP</b>	
Tsk Own/ Sev/SS	
Dstr Own/Sev/SS	

## **Appendix 2**

### ***Girls' Narratives of Gender***

Girls' Conceptions of 'Maleness': Comparison of Cohorts 1 & 2:

Cohort 1 - 1994/5		Cohort 2 - 1995/6	
Attribute	Description	Attribute	Description
<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'more sporty'; 'have more sports'; 'fix cars'; 'can be more physical, e.g. boxing'; 'can be heavier'; 'can be faster'; 'can be fitter'.	<i>Superiority - cognitive/physical</i>	<i>cognitive:</i> 'draw better than girls'; 'have better ideas than girls'; 'can be very educated'.  <i>physical:</i> 'run faster than girls'; 'play football better'; 'get to be stronger'.
<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	'more sports for boys'; 'more games for boys'; 'don't play with dolls'.	<i>Life Trajectories</i>	'can be famous'; 'can become a pop-star'; 'can have more beer'; 'get to play football on t.v.'.
<i>Biological Difference</i>	'don't have babies'; 'don't have periods'.	<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'have got a bigger opportunity to play football'; 'boys can do lots of sports'.
		<i>Personality</i>	'are nice'.



## Girls' Conceptions of 'Femaleness': Comparison of Cohorts 1 &

2:

Cohort 1 - 1994/5		Cohort 2 - 1995/6	
Attribute	Description	Attribute	Description
<i>Appearance</i>	'look better than boys'; 'more fashionable clothes'; 'wider range of clothes'.	<i>Appearance (Fashion)</i>	'there are more clothes for girls'; 'get to wear more jewelry'; 'get to wear make-up'; 'get to wear braids'; 'have high shoes'; 'don't have to have boxer shorts'; 'have long hair'; 'are pretty'; 'got a nice laugh'.
<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	'go shopping more than boys (boys want to do active things)'; 'gossiping'; 'dance more than boys'.	<i>Physicality &amp; Action</i>	'can do lots more activities e.g. brownies, Guides, Rainbow, keep-fit'.
<i>Public/Private Realm (Domestic Arrangements)</i>	'good at cooking'; 'tidier around the house'; 'do more housework'.	<i>Life Trajectories</i>	'girls don't have to go to work'; 'can have an easier life'; 'don't have to pay the bills'; 'can have babies'.
<i>Superiority - empathy</i>	'better imagination'; 'kinder and more helpful'.	<i>Social Networks &amp; Pursuits</i>	'talk about girly things'; 'can go out with boys'.
<i>Biological Difference</i>	'can have babies'.		
<i>Relation to school</i>	'better behaved'; 'told off less'.		
<i>Life Trajectories</i>	'have to tidy up after husband'; 'do more housework'.		

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